

The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes

Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth
in Late Antique Georgian Literature



Stephen H. Rapp Jr

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For John and Gena Fine

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This project drew its first breath in spring 2009 when Rika Gyselen asked me to catalogue the sporadic Georgian references to the Sasanian Empire for *Res Orientales*. The material's complexity became rapidly apparent and the anticipated article grew into this book-length investigation. Extended coverage has made possible a panoramic examination of the images of Sasanian Iran in Georgian literary and epigraphical monuments. It has also provided an opportunity to interrogate narrative imagery as it pertains to kingship, social structure and religion, and to consider in more depth the close linguistic ties of Iran and Caucasia. On its largest analytical scale this volume exposes both the fundamental cohesiveness of late antique Caucasia and its *active participation* in the Iranian world even centuries after the Christianisation of the Armenians, eastern Georgians and Caucasian Albanians.

This cross-cultural study probes two categories of Georgian texts, each of which is encoded with distinctive perceptions of Iran and Caucasia's relationship to it. The first comprises the oldest surviving literary compositions in Georgian, three hagiographical works written between the late fifth and the early seventh century. These passions and *vitae*, popularly termed "saints' lives", were written with the express purpose of defining, consolidating and enlarging Christianity. As we would expect, their ecclesiastical authors, contemporaries of the Sasanians, sometimes envisioned Iran and Zoroastrianism as imminent dangers.¹ But in many cases the hagiographers' attitude towards Iran is ambivalent. When it is expressed, scorn is reserved for particular Sasanian officials active on Caucasian soil.² The historiographical³ sources ("histories") of the second classification attained their received state around the year 800, well after the final collapse of the Sasanian Empire in 651 but just prior to the ascendancy of the Georgian branches of the Bagratid dynasty in 813. Remarkably, their three authors – and

¹ One of these *vitae*, the generic *Passion of the Children of Kolay*, is devoid of allusions to the three Caucasian monarchies and the Sasanian and Roman Empires. For the terminology used in this study, including the distinction between Mazdaism and Zoroastrianism, see Appendix I.

² For antagonism, see Kekelize 1955a. Anti-Sasanian sentiment is more common in early Armenian literature.

³ Though sometimes awkward, this term is a reminder of the multilayered roles of authors, editors and scribes over long periods of time. The *production* of historical images and narratives is central to this investigation.

the sources upon which they rely – openly acknowledge and often positively evaluate Caucasia's long-term integration into the Iranian world.⁴

While a thematic approach has its virtues, the intricacies of our sources, shrouded in unfamiliarity and misconception, require an examination predicated chiefly upon individual texts. Distortions of the historical picture are the steep wages of the extraction of specific information without a thorough understanding of the origin, purpose, transmission and reception of the narrative host. At the same time, broader literary contexts – especially the neglected pan-Caucasian one – must be taken into account.⁵ Two medieval corpora, *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, have been particularly prone to decontextualisation and structural homogenisation.⁶ Their discrete components are frequently lumped together without adequate regard for authorships, target audiences, internal structures and functions. Yet they are monuments whose distinctiveness must be handled, first, in tandem with the medieval literary collections in which they are now exclusively preserved and, second, within the regional sphere of Caucasian literature. As a consequence, this volume proceeds from holistic treatments of individual sources and keeps an eye locked on the cross-cultural conditions of their composition, the perspectives and agendas of their authors, and their place within the Caucasian literary canon.⁷

In light of Caucasia's organic and durable connections to Iran, I argue for the extension of the term “Sasanian”, in a strict sense designating the Iranian core of the Sasanian Empire (Ērān, Ērānšahr)⁸ including what has been dubbed the Sasanian-Parthian “confederacy”.⁹ But as it is deployed in the following pages, “Sasanian” also intends the Sasanian phase of the Iranian Commonwealth,¹⁰ a diverse and cosmopolitan network of cross-cultural exchange and shared social structures, conventions and language. Iranians and non-Iranians actively contributed to this enduring enterprise that stretched from Anatolia and Caucasia to Central Asia. Like the Armenians, whose bonds to Iran have been more extensively studied, eastern Georgians were long-standing members of the

⁴ This nexus persisted into the Christian period of Caucasian history for more than 500 years. As I define it, the Iranian Commonwealth first came into existence under the Achaemenids. See Frye 1963, 120, and the epigraph of the Introduction below.

⁵ See also Garsoïan and Martin-Hisard 1996, esp. 327.

⁶ For the rendering of Georgian titles, see the Note on Transliteration.

⁷ This approach entails a certain amount of duplication. The separate examinations of the two literary categories are incongruous owing to the quantity and divergent nature of surviving sources. In Part I minute shreds of Iranian and Iranic material are identified and analysed. In Part II, however, there is a relative abundance of evidence, especially as it pertains to kingship and epic imagery.

⁸ On Ērānšahr, see now: Daryaei 2009; and Payne 2013.

⁹ Pourshariati 2008.

¹⁰ I have rejected the term “civilisation” because of its inherent diffusionism, imperialist implications and Eurocentric background. See Lewis and Wigen 1997, esp. 126–135. Cf. Sanderson 1995.

Iranian socio-cultural world who simultaneously possessed a language, literary tradition and religion that could set them apart.¹¹ Early Georgian literature and the larger Caucasian experience reveal the Iranian Commonwealth to be far more dynamic and heterogeneous than is commonly thought.¹²

Through a critical reading and contextualisation of literary sources, textual monuments having their own histories, this study seeks to examine the past “on its own terms” so far as possible.¹³ It strives to recover cross-cultural, regional and transregional ties that have been forgotten, tossed aside or never consciously realised. While this interdisciplinary exploration is projected through wide geographical, temporal and thematic lenses, it does not attempt to elaborate a comprehensive treatment of Georgian let alone Caucasian, Iranian or Romano-Byzantine history. It engages specific multifaceted and interconnected problems and sets them within cosmopolitan milieux. But it neither articulates an elegant, chronologically-arranged political narrative of “what really happened” nor tackles every historical issue in the period. This volume seeks consistency, transparency and accuracy, though some errors undoubtedly remain. When a particular line of evidence does not live up to its promise, the preponderance of contemporaneous materials and the interwoven threads of interpretation will, I hope, still validate the central arguments.

The principal research and fieldwork for this book was carried out in the three republics of southern Caucasia. Materials collected in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were supplemented by manuscripts and printed matter consulted in the Russian Federation, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Switzerland’s Röstigraben, my home from 2009 until 2012. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to have worked with the unique collections of the National Centre of Manuscripts (formerly the Korneli Kekelize Institute of Manuscripts) in T’bilisi, the Matenadaran in Erevan, the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Museum in London. Numerous academic institutions kindly provided access to their libraries, including Indiana University (Bloomington), the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), UCLA, the University of California at Berkeley, Emory University, the Oriental Institute of Oxford University, the University of Bern and the American Academy in Rome. The patient interlibrary loan staff at the University of Oklahoma (Norman) and Sam Houston State University exceeded my wildest expectations. I wish to thank the Historisches Institut at the University of Bern and the Centre for the Exploration of Georgian

¹¹ The religious distinction did not begin with the introduction of Christianity. As we shall see, the peoples of Caucasia had their own hybrid polytheistic faiths which, by the advent of Late Antiquity, featured localised strains of Mazdaism.

¹² Similarly, early Christian Caucasia is a microcosm of the tremendously diverse Eastern Christian/Byzantine and Islamic Commonwealths. Central and Inner Asia also expand our understanding of the heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism of the Iranian world under the Sasanians. See, e.g., Cribb and Herrmann 2007.

¹³ This study accordingly prioritises late antique toponyms and ethnonyms.

Antiquities at the Georgian University of St Andrew the First-Called in T'bilisi and their directors, Stefan Rebenich and T'amila Mgaloblišvili respectively, for providing academic affiliations at a vulnerable moment in my career. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the financial support of the Department of History at Sam Houston State University (Brian Domitrovic, chair).

Cross-disciplinary work is exciting and perilous: the practitioner must wade and sometimes swim far into unfamiliar waters. At the same time, no academic undertaking is a solo venture regardless of the thousands of hours one might pass in monastic isolation or in near-hypnosis before the flickering light of a computer screen. I am fortunate to have been buoyed by many outstanding colleagues and friends who were unfailingly generous with their expertise. Numerous scholars across a constellation of fields provided comments, suggestions and criticisms, sometimes with little advance notice. Regretfully, it is not possible to acknowledge all of them here. But I should like to single out the titanic efforts of Touraj Daryaee (who graciously read the manuscript in its infancy and again as I was submitting it to my copy-editor at Ashgate), Robert Thomson, John Fine, Rika Gyselen, James Russell, Tim Greenwood, Joel Walker, Geoffrey Greatrex, Giorgi Kavtaraze, Robert Hewsens, T'amila Mgaloblišvili, Giorgi Čeišvili, Kevin Tuite, Antony Eastmond and Hirotake Maeda. Philippe Gignoux greatly assisted with the transliteration of Middle Iranian. During the three years I lived in Bern, Roland Bielmeier exponentially widened my linguistic horizons, particularly with regards to Parthian and Middle Persian. My understanding of Caucasia's relationship to the Achaemenid Empire was sharpened by a long conversation with Bruno Jacobs on a brisk spring day in 2011 at the University of Basel and through correspondence with Antonio Sagona and Lori Khatchadourian. Scott McDonough, Mary Whitby, Anthony Kaldellis, Tom Schmidt, Alison Vacca and Paul Crego rescued me from the metaphorical Sarlaac Pit by answering specific questions and by helping me track down elusive critical editions and printed materials. Parvaneh Pourshariati, Jost Gippert, Mixeil Abramišvili, Werner Seibt, Gocha Tsetskhladze, Aram T'op'č'yan, Gohar Muradyan, Alessandro Bruni, Farshid Delshad, Sophia Vashalomidze, Zaza Sxirtlaže, Darejan Kldiašvili, Jefferson Sauter, Helen Giunašvili, Mariam Gvelesiani and others made available their publications, assisted with bibliographical queries, and/or provided feedback on specific sections of this volume. The family of the late Giorgi Melik'išvili supplied me with a copy of that great scholar's rare anthology of journal articles. Ian Colvin (Nok'alak'evi/C'ixegoji/Archaeopolis), Nodar Baxtaže (Nekresi) and Vaxtang Nikolaišvili (Baginet'i/Armazis-c'ixe) generously shared their archaeological sites in summer 2013. My photographs are supplemented by images kindly provided by the Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (Buba Kudava, director), the Georgian National Museum (Davit' Lort'k'ip'anize, director), the Matenadaran (Hrač'ya T'amrazyan, director), the British Museum, the American Numismatic Society, Andreas Furtwängler and Florian Knauss. I wish to thank Šušanik Xač'ikyan, Chris Sutherns, T'amuna Gegia, Amiran Makaraze and Elena Stolyarik for their valuable assistance with these images.

Ian Mladjov produced the beautiful maps. The transformation of this project from manuscript to finished book owes much to the diligence and enthusiasm of Ashgate, including John Smedley, Kirsten Weissenberg, Etty Payne and Katie McDonald.

Throughout this project's journey I leaned upon the expertise, wisdom and encouragement of Nina Garsoïan, Ronald Suny, Rudi Lindner, Kevork Bardakjian, John Graham, Michael Christopher Low, Devin DeWeese, Sebouh Aslanian, Dean Sakel and my recently departed friends Traianos Gagos, Jerry Bentley and Armena Maderosian. I am grateful to patient audiences in T'bilisi, Erevan, Istanbul, Bern, Mainz, Konstanz, St Andrews, Ann Arbor, Seattle, Los Angeles, Irvine and New Haven for their thoughtful feedback on ideas featured in the pages below.

The hyper-politicisation of Caucasian history is the stuff of Promethean legend. Therefore, I must stress that all the views expressed in this study are mine and mine alone. Errors in fact, interpretation and presentation are entirely my responsibility and in no way should reflect negatively on the expert advice from which I have so handsomely benefitted.

Last but not least, this undertaking would not have been possible without the abiding support of my family and friends. Humanistic and emotional feats worthy of the *bumberazis* of old were performed by my resplendent companions Julie and Finn Nelson as well as Gwen and Stephen Rapp Sr, Gena Fine, Andrew Lawler, Kenneth Levy-Church, Helen Whiting, the Doleshal trio, Jeff Crane and family, Andrew and Suzanne Orr, Marina Diamandis, the Baileys and a fuzzy four-legged ex-Muscovite affectionately named Gorby.

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Bern, Switzerland, and Huntsville, Texas, USA

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Note on Transliteration

There is no entirely consistent or universally accepted solution to the quandary of transliterating Caucasian languages. Consider Georgian ზ, Armenian շ and Russian ш, which represent three languages, three scripts and two linguistic families. The most literal and immediately recognisable transcription of these characters into English is *sh*, but Georgian and Armenian have separate letters *s* and *h*. Single-character *š* is the most precise rendering, but it is rarely encountered in works about Georgians and Russians outside the linguistic realm. It is, however, far more common in scholarship about Armenians.

Although this book is concerned chiefly with Georgian texts, it deploys a connective, regional methodology in which Georgian and Armenian sources are handled as a single – but diverse – body of Christian Caucasian literature. Therefore, the transcriptions of Georgian and Armenian have been correlated so far as possible. The most conspicuous exceptions are the near-equivalents Georgian ჳ and Armenian ղ, transliterated *y* and *l* respectively (*gh* is more commonly encountered). Aspirated Georgian and Armenian consonants are suffixed ‘.

Russian is a relatively recent import to the Caucasian arena. In order to distinguish it from Georgian and Armenian (especially for the benefit of those unfamiliar with these tongues), Russian is transcribed according to a simplified version of the system used by the Library of Congress (USA). No attempt has been made to standardise Russian transliteration with that of Georgian and Armenian, e.g., Georgian and Armenian *š* but Russian *sh*. Likewise, Georgian and Armenian *č/ć* (ჩ/ჭ, *ṣ/ṣ̣*) are roughly equivalent to Russian *ch* (ч); *x* (ხ, *ḫ*) – to Russian *kh* (х); *ž* (ჯ, *ḏ*) – to Russian *zh* (ж); and *j/ĵ* (ჯ, *ȝ*) – to Russian *dzh* (дж).

When authors hailing from Caucasia have published in multiple languages, their names may be rendered in a variety of ways. Thus, the Georgian surname Javaxiṣvili (ჯავახიშვილი) is transcribed into Russian as Dzhavakhishvili (Джавахишвили) and less commonly – in imperial Russian and early Soviet times – as Russified Dzhavakhov (Джавахов); it is sometimes anglicised as Javakhishvili and even Djavakhishvili. In many Western languages, Georgian suffixes *-ṣvili* (-შვილი) and *-že* (-ძე), both meaning “son of”, are transcribed *-shvili* and *-dze* respectively. As a rule, names of specialists from Caucasia who write principally in one of the indigenous languages are transliterated from their native tongues with variants enumerated in the Bibliography.

Many of the narratives investigated below have come down to us exclusively within medieval corpora or, in the case of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*, suites of texts within corpora. Because such collections are customarily named after their core components, titles of corpora and their suites (when they exist) are *transliterated* and those of constituent texts are *translated into English*. Thus, *Mok’c’evay k’art’lisay*

is a medieval corpus whereas *The Conversion of K'art'li*, its core component, is a discrete text.

Georgian

Since the early fifth century, three dedicated scripts have been used to write Georgian: *asomt'avruli*, *nusxuri* and *mxedruli*, the last of which remains in use today. None of the Georgian scripts distinguishes between miniscule and majuscule characters. It should be noted that linguists tend to mark glottal instead of aspirated consonants.

-I-	-II-	-III-	-IV-	-V-
ⴀ	ⵇ	Ⴀ	a	1
ⵇ	ⵈ	Ⴁ	b	2
ⵈ	ⵉ	Ⴂ	g	3
ⵉ	ⵊ	Ⴃ	d	4
ⵊ	ⵋ	Ⴄ	e	5
ⵋ	ⵌ	Ⴅ	v	6
ⵌ	ⵍ	Ⴆ	z	7
ⵍ	ⵎ	Ⴇ	ē	8
ⵎ	ⵏ	Ⴈ	t'	9
ⵏ	ⵐ	Ⴉ	i	10
ⵐ	ⵑ	Ⴊ	k	20
ⵑ	ⵒ	Ⴋ	l	30
ⵒ	ⵓ	Ⴌ	m	40
ⵓ	ⵔ	Ⴍ	n	50
ⵔ	ⵕ	Ⴎ	y	60
ⵕ	ⵖ	Ⴏ	o	70
ⵖ	ⵗ	Ⴐ	p	80
ⵗ	ⵘ	Ⴑ	ž [zh]	90
ⵘ	ⵙ	Ⴒ	r	100

-I-	-II-	-III-	-IV-	-V-
ⴁ	ⴂ	ⴃ	s	200
ⴄ	ⴅ	ⴆ	t	300
ⴆ	ⴇ	ⴈ	w	—
ⴇ	ⴈ	ⴉ, ⴊ	u	400
ⴈ	ⴉ	ⴋ	p'	500
ⴉ	ⴊ	ⴌ	k'	600
ⴊ	ⴋ	ⴍ	γ [gh]	700
ⴋ	ⴌ	ⴎ	q	800
ⴌ	ⴍ	ⴏ	š [sh]	900
ⴍ	ⴎ	ⴐ	č' [ch']	1,000
ⴎ	ⴏ	ⴑ	c' [ts']	2,000
ⴏ	ⴐ	ⴒ	ž [dz]	3,000
ⴐ	ⴑ	ⴓ	c [ts]	4,000
ⴑ	ⴒ	ⴔ	č [ch]	5,000
ⴒ	ⴓ	ⴕ	x [kh]	6,000
ⴓ	ⴔ	ⴖ	q'	7,000
ⴔ	ⴕ	ⴗ	j [dzh]	8,000
ⴕ	ⴖ	ⴘ	h	9,000
ⴖ	—	ⴙ	ō	10,000

- I – *mxedruli* script
- II – *nusxuri* script
- III – *asomt'avruli* script
- IV – transliteration, with common variants in brackets
- V – numerical value

Armenian

Armenian is transliterated according to the Hübschmann-Meillet-Benveniste system.

Ա, ւ	Բ, ք	Գ, ց	Դ, դ	Ե, հ	Զ, զ	Է, է	Ը, ք	Թ, թ	Ժ, ձ	Ի, ի	Լ, լ
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	ə	tʰ	ž	i	l
Խ, ք	Շ, ծ	Կ, կ	Հ, հ	Ջ, ձ	Ղ, ղ	Ճ, ճ	Մ, մ	Յ, չ	Ն, ն	Տ, տ	Օ, օ
x	c	k	h	j	ł	č	m	y	n	š	o
Չ, չ	Պ, պ	Ջ, ձ	Ռ, ռ	Ս, ս	Վ, վ	Տ, տ	Ր, ր	Կ, կ	Լ, լ	Փ, փ	Ք, ք
čʰ	p	ǰ	ṛ	s	v	t	r	cʰ	w	pʰ	kʰ
Օ, օ	Ու, ու										
ō	u										

Parthian, Middle Persian and Other Iranian Languages

The transliteration of Middle Persian normally observes the scheme employed by MacKenzie 1986. The nuances of transliterating Middle Iranian languages have made it impractical to impose absolute consistency.

Greek

Besides cases when a Latin and/or anglicised version has become *especially* commonplace across academic fields, Greek words are transliterated directly from the original, matching the convention used for other languages. Thus, Prokopios and not Procopius; Herakleios, not Heraclius; but Constantinople, not Kōstantinoupolis. The diacritical mark indicating rough breathing is transcribed by the prefix *h-*, e.g., Ἀρμοζική = Harmozikē. Common variants are given in brackets.

Αα	Ββ	Γγ	Δδ	Εε	Ζζ	Ηη	Θθ	Ιι	Κκ	Λλ	Μμ
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	th	i	k	l	m
	[v]								[c]		
Νν	Ξξ	Οο	Ππ	Ρρ	Σσς	Ττ	Υυ	Φφ	Χχ	Ψψ	Ωω
n	x	o	p	r	s	t	y, u*	ph	ch	ps	ō
	[ks]							[f]	[kh]		

* u in diphthongs

Russian

Russian is transliterated according to a simplified version of the Library of Congress (USA) system. Common variants are given in brackets.

Аа	Бб	Вв	Гг	Дд	Ее	Ёё	Жж	Зз	Ии	Йй	Кк
a	b	v	g	d	e	yo/ io	zh	z	i	i	k
							[ž]			[j]	
Лл	Мм	Нн	Оо	Пп	Рр	Сс	Тт	Уу	Фф	Хх	Цц
l	m	n	o	p	r	s	t	u	f	kh	ts
										[x]	[c]
Чч	Шш	Щщ	Ъъ	Ыы	Ьь	Ээ	Юю	Яя			
ch	sh	shch	”	y	’	e	iu	ia			
[č]	[š]	[šč]					[yu]	[ya]			

Arabic

Arabic is normally transliterated according to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*².

Abbreviations

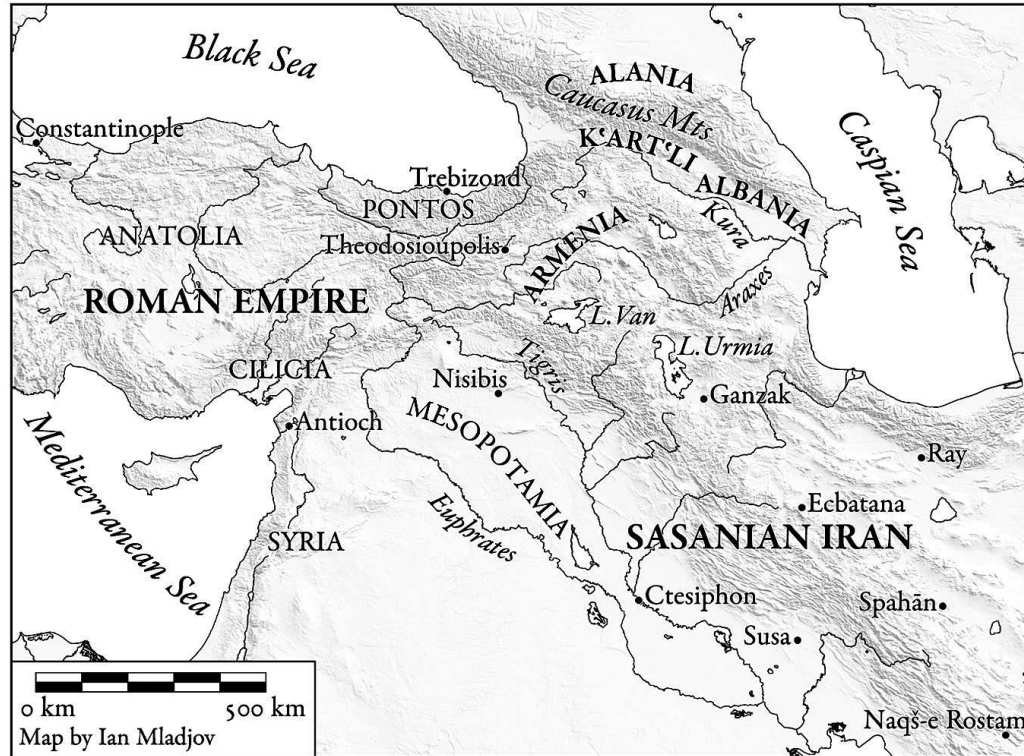
For abbreviated titles, journals, series and other publications, see the Bibliography.

Abkh.	Abkhaz
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
Arm.	Armenian
Av.	Avestan
Azer.	Azerbaijani
Bact.	Bactrian
ca.	<i>circa</i>
cent.	century
comm.	commentary
d.	date of death
diss.	dissertation
ed.	editor, edited, edition
esp.	especially
fl.	<i>floruit</i>
fn.	footnote
frag.	fragment

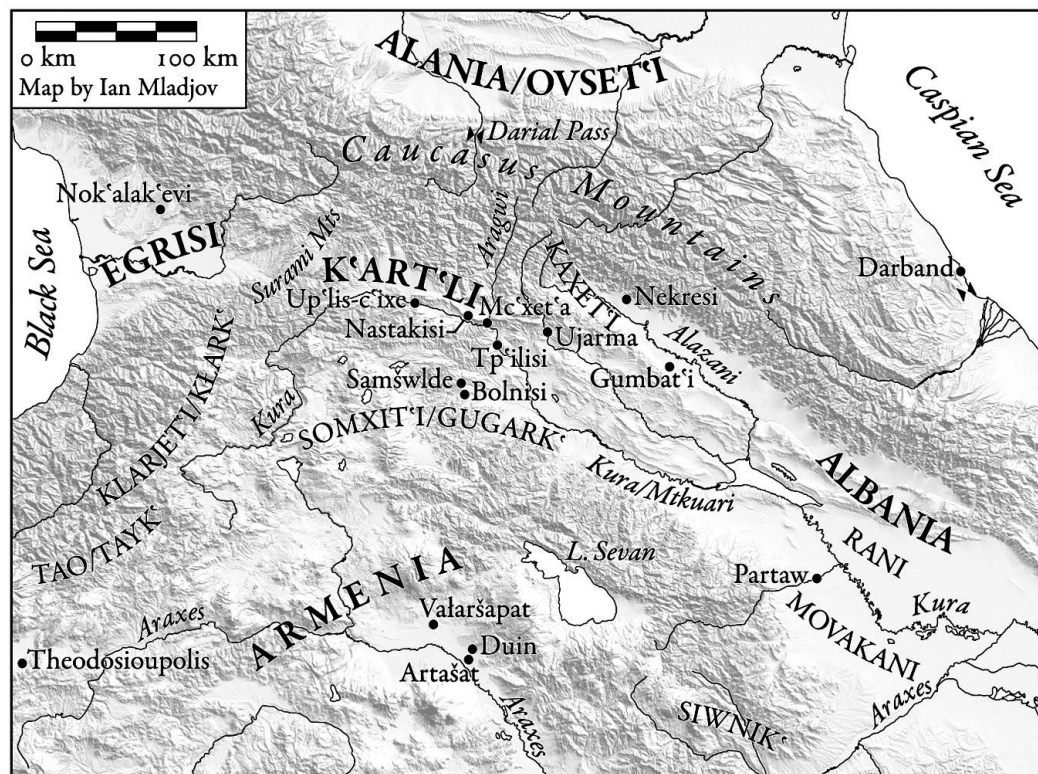
gen. ed.	general editor
Geo.	Georgian
Ger.	German
Gk.	Greek
Elr.	East Iranian
Eng.	English
Fr.	French
Ir.	Iranian
Khot.	Khotanese
l.	leaf (of a manuscript), line (of printed text)
Lat.	Latin
lit.	literally
ll.	leaves (of a manuscript), lines (of printed text)
MIr.	Middle Iranian
mod.	modern orthography or term
MPers.	Middle Persian
n.	note, endnote
NPers.	New Persian
n.s.	new series (of a journal)
NWIr.	Northwest Iranian
OIr.	Old Iranian
OPers.	Old Persian

Os.	Ossetian
Parth.	Parthian
Pers.	Persian
Phl.	Pahlavī
pl.	plural, plate
prob.	probably
pt.	part
pub.	published
quatr.	quatrain(s)
r.	reigned, regnal dates
repr.	reprint(ed)
rev.	revised, revision
Rus.	Russian
Sarm.	Sarmatian
Scy.	Scythian
sing.	singular
Skt.	Sanskrit
Sogd.	Sogdian
SPB	St Petersburg
sum.	summary
Syr.	Syriac
trans.	translator, translation

Turk.	Turkish, Turkic
unpub.	unpublished
var.	variant(s)
vol.	volume



Map 1. Caucasia, Iran and Anatolia.



Map 2. Caucasasia.

Introduction: Contexts

If one were to assess the achievements of the Achaemenid Persians, surely the concept of ‘One World’, the fusion of peoples and cultures in one ‘*oecumene*’, was one of the important legacies to Alexander and the Romans. The Achaemenid monarch thought of himself as a king of kings over many peoples with their various rulers. Hand in hand with the idea of empire went the process of mixture and syncretism; members of distant tribes and nations were brought into contact with each other under the umbrella of the Persian peace and there must have been much give and take.

– Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (1963), 120

It would be hard to place such peoples as Georgians and Armenians unequivocally within any one major ‘civilization’. In any case, it cannot be clear in advance what sorts of life patterns will in fact be found to be shared among the peoples forming what can be called a ‘civilization’. Each civilization defines its own scope, just as does each religion. There may even be several sorts of basic continuity which may overlap in range.

– Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (1974), 33

Throughout Late Antiquity¹ the eastern Georgian kingdom of K’art’li and the wider Caucasian² world constituted one of Eurasia’s most energetic and cosmopolitan zones of cross-cultural encounter. Occupying a strategic position coveted by great imperial powers, the isthmus between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea was a crucible of negotiation and accommodation where cultural,

¹ Brown 1971 and 1978, for the heroic historiographical rescue of this vibrant, cross-cultural epoch. See also *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, including Greenwood 2012 for Armenia.

² This study uses “Caucasian” not in any racial or ethnic sense but as an adjective for the lands (and peoples) between the Black and Caspian Seas dominated by the Caucasus Mountains. “Transcaucasia” and the Russian equivalent *Zakavkaz’e* (Закавказье), “across the Caucasus”, embody a distinctly Russian perspective and are grossly anachronistic for the period under review. Precedence is therefore given to “Caucasia”. For “Cis-Caucasia”, see Toumanoff 1963, 33–34. Bais 2006 proposes the awkward “Subcaucasia”. As we shall see, in medieval Georgian and Armenian sources “Caucasia” tends to denote the highlands of the main chain of the Caucasus Mountains and the territory emptying into the steppe of what is now Ukraine and southern Russia. On this volume’s geographical and technical terminology, see Appendix I.

political, religious and economic networks overlapped and commingled.³ Even centuries after the Christianisation of its southern flank, the Caucasian crossroads simultaneously belonged to – and was one of the principal points of contact between – two great commonwealths, the Iranian and the Eastern Christian or Byzantine.⁴ But there were other large-scale affiliations. From the second half of the seventh century, Arab colonisation and Islamisation delivered a significant part of Caucasia to the Islamic Commonwealth. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Caucasia was drawn into the Mongol enterprise, which integrated peoples from the Korean Peninsula to the Hungarian Plain. The administrative core of the Mongol Ilkhānate consisted not only of Iran but also of southeastern Caucasia.⁵ Still other large-scale affiliations, opportunities and perils materialised under the Timurids, Ottomans, Safavids, Russians and Soviets.

Caucasia's sedentary landscape, like that of Iran (Sparset'i, სპარსეთი), was dominated by confederations of dynastic aristocratic houses of varying size and power. Towards the end of antiquity these coalesced into three kingdoms: Albania,⁶ concentrated in what are now the northwestern and north-central territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan;⁷ Armenia Major,⁸ Mec Hayk' (*Մեծ Հայք*),

³ Interactions between Sasanian and Roman élites have been freshly investigated in the superb interdisciplinary studies of Matthew Canepa, including Canepa 2009 and 2010a. See Canepa 2009, 21, for the notion of “agonistic exchange”: “The Romans and Sasanian kings interacted with each other, exchanged ideas and images in a competitive and violently hostile atmosphere, even in circumstances where they substantially adopted and integrated their opponent's cultural material”. While the peoples of Caucasia might also be said to have participated in this agonistic exchange, I shall demonstrate that they were cultural insiders who were contributing members of the diverse Iranian world. This state of affairs continued for centuries after Caucasia's Christianisation.

⁴ Commonwealths were spheres of encounter, communication and exchange extending far beyond their imperial nuclei. Commonwealths anchored in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East are explored in Obolensky 1971 and Fowden 1993. See also Shepard 2006. For the negotiation of the porous Romano-Iranian frontier, see especially the publications of Canepa. See also: Walker 2006; and Andrade 2009.

⁵ For which see: Morgan 1988; and Allsen 2001.

⁶ The indigenous name of the homeland in Caucasian Albanian, an extinct language related to Udi, has not come down to us. Toumanoff 1984, 87 (fn. 1), speculates that it was “something like Aṛan”. The customary designation for Albania in Armenian is Ałuank' (*Աղուանք*); in Georgian – Movakani (მოვაკანი), Rani (რანი) and sometimes Heret'i (ჰერეთი); in Greek – Albania (Ἀλβανία); in Middle Persian – Ar[r]ān; and in Arabic – Arrān. Caucasian Albania should not be confused with the later Albania in the Balkans. See Malcolm 2002, 73ff., for the Renaissance-era hypothesis making the Albanians of southeastern Europe descendants of the Caucasian Albanians. The “Illyrians” may be the ancestors of modern-day Albanians, but see Fine 1983, 9–12.

⁷ The territory of Albania has been greatly extended by Azeri nationalists.

⁸ Gk. Megalē Armenia (Μεγάλη Ἀρμενία), the kingdom of Arsacid (Aršakuni, *Արշակունի*) Armenia as opposed to Armenia Minor (“Lesser Armenia”, P'ok'r Hayk', *Փոքր*

anchored on the Armenian Plateau; and the eastern Georgian realm based in K'art'li (ქართლი)⁹ whose heartland straddled the Kura River, called Mtkuari (mod. Mtkvari) in Georgian.¹⁰ The experience of K'art'li, the Asiatic Iberia¹¹ of Graeco-Roman authors, exemplifies the historical trends and external influences at play in late antique Caucasia. The baptism of King Mirian III in the 320s or 330s¹² – an episode ostensibly achieved by the intercession of the holy woman Nino – and the eruption of overt Christianisation encouraged eastern Georgia's closer association with the Roman and then Byzantine Empires.¹³ Nevertheless, half a millennium passed before the fledgling Georgian “national” church and the “Byzantinising” monarchs of the medieval Bagratid dynasty pushed Georgian

Հայք; Gk. Mikra Armenia, Μικρά Ἀρμενία) and the satrapies of southern Armenia. Cf. MPers. Armin. In Georgian the Armenian territories were called Somxet'i (სომხეთი). This study avoids “Greater Armenia” because of its modern political overtones amplified by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. For the various Armenias, see Adontz/Garsoïan 1970 and the meticulous researches of Nina Garsoïan.

⁹ It is widely assumed that the K'art's were a “proto-Georgian” tribe. The eastern Georgian lands were called Virk' (Վիրք) in Armenian and Wiržān/Wirčān/Wiračān (and related variants) in Middle Persian. The root Vir-, replicated in Gk. Ibēria (for which see further, pp. 21–22), is probably a remnant of another old tribal designation. Alternate explanations have been advanced, including an association with Arm. *ver* (վեր), “above”, i.e., north of Armenia. Cf. the similarity of Somxet'i, the Georgian designation for Armenia, and Geo. *samxret'i* (სამხრეთი), “south”. Cf. Russell 1987b, 31. Precisely how and if K'art'- and Vir- || Bēr- are related has not been resolved. On Virk', see also Č'agareišvili 1993.

¹⁰ Arm. Kur (Կուր), Gk. Kyros (Κύρος or Κύρος), Lat. Cyrus and mod. Azer. Kür. For the importance of the Kura/Mtkuari, see Strabōn (Strabo), XI.1.5 and XI.3.2. For the Aragwi (Gk. Aragos, Ἀραγός), a river converging with the Kura/Mtkuari at Mc'xet'a, see *ibid.*, XI.11.5. See also Lort'k'ip'anize O. 1996, 110–113.

¹¹ The old concept of *Ibēriai dyo* (Ἰβηρίαὶ δύο), two Iberias, is attested in Hecataeus' *Circuit of the Earth* (*Periōgēsis Gēs*). The relevant fragment is preserved in Stephanos of Byzantium's *Ethnika* compiled between 528 and 539, for which see Braun 2004, 290–293. On Strabōn's conception of Iberia and Iberians, see Lort'k'ip'anize O. 1996, 135–141. See also Boltunova 1947.

¹² The date 337 was popularised by Ivane Javaxišvili (e.g., Javaxišvili 1979, 216–274) and was independently calculated by Toumanoff 1963, 374–377. For 326, see Patarize 2000, a date already hinted by Mgaloblišvili in her superb edition of the Klarjet'ian *mravalt'avi*, 150–154 and 482.

¹³ Braund 1994, 5: “Its extensive Christianization made alliance with Rome more comfortable than alliance with Persia, but geography and military commitment brought it closer to Persia through the fourth century. By the end of that century Iberia was largely a Persian possession. Meanwhile, in western Transcaucasia, Colchis had become Lazica. Persia claimed to control neighbouring territories, but Lazica remained in alliance with Rome, although Rome found it difficult to control the region, not least in the face of incursions from the north”. In the present volume, Herakleios' reign marks the fundamental transformation of the Roman into the Byzantine Empire.

élite culture more firmly – but neither completely nor subserviently – into the Byzantine orbit.

As this book demonstrates, a sustained and deep connection with the Romano-Byzantine Empire was neither inevitable nor concurrent with the intense Christianisation of the fourth and fifth centuries. And once a durable bond with the empire crystallised, it was by no means exclusive.¹⁴ In the case of K'art'li, the deliberate reorientation towards Constantinople coincides with the collapse of the Sasanian Empire in the mid-seventh century. Thereafter, eastern Georgia's selective and creative Byzantinisation was nourished in three ways: first, by the Islamic-era cultural and religious blossoming of Tao-Klarjet'i, a heterogeneous area at the juncture of Byzantine Anatolia, Armenia Major and eastern Georgia (now located in northeastern Turkey);¹⁵ second, through the restoration of dynastic kingship by a local branch of the Armeno-K'art'velian¹⁶ Bagratid house in 888; and, finally, by the Bagratids' political unification of territories on either side of the Surami Mountains, a landform traditionally demarcating eastern and western Georgia. This last development, which belongs to the turn of the tenth/eleventh century, is widely regarded as the start of the "Golden Age" of the medieval Georgian kingdom.

For a thousand years almost everything of importance in late antique and medieval Georgia has been ascribed an origin from or a close association with the Bagratids.¹⁷ Bagratid rule enjoyed remarkable longevity: it stretched across an entire millennium and is coterminous with the better part of the medieval epoch. Among the Bagratids' supreme achievements are the first sustained political integration of lands on either side of the Surami ridge and the creation of the only medieval pan-Caucasian empire to be governed indigenously. Because this house dominated the upper echelon of Georgian politics and society for a thousand years, from Ašot I's seizure of the presiding principate in 813 down to the Russian conquest, the Bagratid-era provenance of the vast majority of *surviving* texts, manuscripts, inscriptions, frescoes and other objects of material culture is not surprising. The long-lived Bagratid regime encouraged the production of a wide range of sources, and those prone to filtering and manipulation were often sculpted to favour the ruling family.

¹⁴ But eastern Georgia's – and Caucasia's – Christianisation was one of the formative processes leading to the establishment of the Eastern Christian/First Byzantine Commonwealth.

¹⁵ This study uses "Tao-Klarjet'i" in a broad sense. Throughout Late Antiquity and the early medieval era, this extensive region was inhabited by K'art'velian-, Armenian-, and it would seem, to a considerably lesser extent, Greek-speaking communities. In the period investigated here, Tao (ტაო) and Klarjet'i (კლარჯეთი) might just as well be called by their Armenian names Tayk' (Տայք) and Klarjk' (Կլարձք). Cf. Gk. Cholarzēnē (Χολαρχηνή).

¹⁶ Although "K'art'velian" has a fairly precise meaning in linguistics, this book's usage replicates the ethnonym/adjective used in contemporary sources, hence someone (*k'art'veli*, ქართველი) or something (*k'art'uli*, ქართული) associated with K'art'li.

¹⁷ For a celebration of the Bagratid achievement, see the essays in Metreveli 2003.

No other family in Georgian and perhaps Caucasian history ever accomplished so much – but none ruled for so long. The legacy of the Bagratids also rests upon an efficacious strategy that continues to bear fruit today:¹⁸ the family's self-image as the unrivalled pinnacle of Georgian politics, culture and society. This insurmountable status – commemorated textually in royal historiography and visually in frescoes, sculpture and the like – proceeded from the Bagratids' assertion to be the direct descendants of the King-Prophet David.¹⁹ The *locus classicus* of the Davidic claim is Sumbat Davit'is-že's eleventh-century *Life and Tale of the Bagratids*. Davit'is-že's concise but potent tract, a mixture of history and propaganda, commences with a manipulated biblical genealogy directly linking the Georgian Bagratids to King David and through him to Solomon and Joseph, husband of Mary.²⁰

Embedded in this ideological scheme is an adverse attitude towards pre-Bagratid kingship that ranges from indifference to contempt.²¹ In most cases, Bagratid historians simply ignored pre-Bagratid rule in the Georgian domains. Once upon the throne, members of the Georgian branches of the Bagratunianis²² – subsequently known by the (de-Armenised?) appellation Bagrato[a]nis/Bagrationis²³ – narrowly converged Georgian historical memory upon their house and their times. In this way, the Bagratids represented themselves as the embodiment of Georgia's past, present and future. The conspicuous exceptions to the Bagratid monopolisation of history are two late antique Christian monarchs whose importance and popularity could not be easily brushed aside: Mirian III

¹⁸ And this more than two hundred years after the Bagratids' removal from the K'art'velian/Georgian throne by the Russian Empire, for which see Suny 1988, 55–95.

¹⁹ Eastmond 1998, for visual sources.

²⁰ Sumbat Davit'is-že, cap. 1.

²¹ Cf. the Armenian Movsēs Xorenac'i, Bagratid partisan and historian, who intentionally rejected – yet unintentionally preserved many aspects of – Armenia's Iranic past: Garsoïan 1996b, 14.

²² This would seem to be the oldest Georgian designation for the family. Bagratuniani (ბაგრატუნის) is attested in a tenth-century manuscript from St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai: Sin.Geo.N.50, facsimile ed., 254 (composed in the *nusxuri* script). This form is also found elsewhere, e.g., in the Georgian Sinai Synodikon, Kldiašvili ed. and trans., 162 and 214. In the principal manuscripts of Ps.-Juanšer's ca. 800 history (the first component of K'art'lis c'xovreba to mention the family explicitly), we encounter Bagratoniani (ბაგრატონის): Qauxč'išvili ed., 161 (*apparatus criticus*, ll. 6–7) and 243₁₁. There are several related variants. *Nusxuri* characters *u* (u) and *o* (o) are easily confused. In the early *asomt'avruli* script, both *o* and *u* could be rendered Q, o.

²³ Despite confident patriotic interpretations, the Bagratuni (Arm. *Պաղատունի*) family probably began as a hybrid Irano-Armenian *naxarar* house and then established itself in multiple waves in the K'art'velian theatre, for which see especially the painstaking research of Cyril Toumanoff, e.g., Toumanoff 1963. The family's Armenian ties in no way diminish its achievements among the Georgians. Indeed, the history of the Bagratids exemplifies the intense cross-cultural condition of pre-national Caucasia: Rapp 2006, 38–41.

(r. 284–361), the first Christian king of K'art'li, and the intrepid warrior Vaxtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522). Of all pre-Bagratid K'art'velian rulers, only Mirian and Vaxtang are encountered with any regularity in the medieval literature of the Bagratid era.²⁴ For example, about Bagrat III (r. 1008–1014), the first king of a politically unified Georgia, the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li* declares: "... after the great king Vaxtang Gorgasali no one else appeared like him in glory [*didebay*] and power [*zalay*] and whole intelligence [*gonebay*]"'.²⁵ Another allusion to the celebrated Vaxtang is found in Davit'is-ze's narrative.²⁶ Vaxtang is mentioned three more times in the thirteenth-century *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, a celebration of the Bagratid Queen T'amar (r. 1184–1213).²⁷ Unusual for historiographical compositions of its era, this source occasionally deploys aspects of pre-Bagratid heroic imagery.²⁸

Investigations of Georgian historiographical literature have been heavily conditioned by the triumphalist monopoly of the Bagratid millennium.²⁹ To take one example: Bagratid Georgia's unprecedented Byzantine orientation³⁰ is altogether obvious in literature and art, yet underneath the ubiquitous ideological veneer are unmistakable signs of enduring bonds to the Near and Middle East. Economic ties were especially robust, a circumstance attested by Arabic legends featured on coins minted at the apex of Bagratid rule.³¹ In the same vein, for the past century most scholars have followed the lead of

²⁴ The popularity of the pre-Christian P'arnavaz, the first K'art'velian monarch (according to the tradition preserved in *The Life of the Kings*), never achieved the levels of Mirian and Vaxtang. More attention was devoted to P'arnavaz in the national period, from the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries. A few other heroes of Christian antiquity have remained popular to the present day, particularly the illuminatrix Nino.

²⁵ *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 282₄₋₅. Thomson trans., 281: "... შემდგომად ღიფისა მეფისა ვახტანგ გორგასლისა არავინ გამოჩენილ არს სხუა მსგავსი მისი ღიფებითა და ძაღლითა, და ყოვლითა გონებითა ..."

²⁶ Sumbat Davit'is-ze, cap. 4.

²⁷ *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 4₁₃, 5₁ (in a poem) and 17₂₀.

²⁸ E.g., *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 9₁₂ and 40₈ (for *bumberazi*), 3₁₆ and 5₁₄ (for *goliat'i*, the former of which is followed by allusions to Socrates and Plato!), and 3₁₅ (for *gmiri*).

²⁹ Real, imagined and competing memories of the Bagratids have become a central element of Armenian and Georgian master historical narratives of the national age.

³⁰ Byzantinisation and a Byzantine orientation should not be mistaken for blind subordination to and imitation of Constantinople. In fact, the Byzantinising Georgian Bagratids selectively adapted – and sometimes misapplied, intentionally and unintentionally – aspects of Byzantine imperial authority so as to integrate themselves more fully into the Byzantine Commonwealth. Meanwhile, they insisted upon full political and ecclesiastical autonomy. The process culminated under King Davit' II/IV Aymāšenebeli "the Builder" (r. 1089–1125), who successively styled himself *panhypersebastos* and *basileus* ("emperor") before jettisoning Byzantine titles and honorifics altogether: Rapp 2001, 113–114.

³¹ One of the important exceptions to this trend is the popularity of translated, adapted and original Iranian and Iranic epics at the "Golden Age" Bagratid court.

the gifted Ivane Javaxišvili in ascribing the oldest Georgian historiographical narratives to the Bagratid “Golden Age”.³² (Javaxišvili was a pioneer of Georgian studies, Kartvelology, and one of Caucasia’s most brilliant intellectual stars.) The consolidation of the family and its unprecedented political unification of lands on both sides of the Surami Mountains at the turn of the tenth/eleventh century fuelled a fundamental transformation of Georgian and Caucasian society, to be sure. But modern scholarship has tended not to locate the accomplishments of Bagrat III and his contemporaries within historically-constituted, long-term regional and Eurasian contexts. And this scholarship has been inclined not to give full credit to the personalities, events and accomplishments of the pre-Bagratid age.

Fortunately, close scrutiny of Georgian historiographical literature has led to some rather different conclusions. Employing an assortment of methodologies, Cyril Toumanoff, Michael Tarchnishvili (T’arxnišvili), Pavle Ingoroqva, Edišer Xoštaria-Brose, Davit’ Musxelišvili, Lela Patariže and a few others have relegated certain historiographical works to earlier times.³³ Building upon the meticulous analysis of Toumanoff, I have confirmed elsewhere that *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* and the latter’s untitled continuation by Pseudo-Juanšer Juanšeriani attained their received forms just before Bagratid rule.³⁴ All three texts proceed from the short interval between the establishment of the kingdom of Ap’xazet’i³⁵ sometime in the last decade of the eighth century and the accession in 813 of the Bagratid Ašot I to the presiding principate, the foremost political institution of the K’art’velian *interregnum* (which began ca. 580).³⁶

Like almost all other medieval Georgian historiographies, these “pre-Bagratid” texts are preserved exclusively in *K’art’lis c’xovreba*, “The Life of Georgia”, the so-called Georgian Royal Annals or Georgian Chronicles.³⁷ As

³² Recently, e.g., Lerner 2004, 27: “The novel-chronicle [sic!] (*K’C*) was drafted as an ideological justification for the unified Georgian monarchy founded by the new dynasty of [the] Bagratids. Respectively, all prior sources were modified as well”. Javaxišvili devotes considerable space to the pre-Bagratid period in his publications. See especially his outstanding *K’art’veli eris istoria* (*A History of the Georgian People*).

³³ Dates preceding the eleventh century are now gaining traction among scholars in the Georgian Republic. Ignored here are nationalistic and pseudo-scientific interpretations assigning impossibly early origins to the Georgian script and historiographical literature.

³⁴ Summarised in Rapp 2003, 163–164 (and fn. 242). See also: Musxelišvili 1999; and Xoštaria-Brose 1996.

³⁵ Gk. Abasgia (Ἀβασγία). Cf.: Abkhazia < Rus. Abkhaziia (Абхазия); and mod. Abkh. Apsny.

³⁶ Under Sasanian pressure K’art’velian kingship fell into abeyance ca. 580 and was not restored until 888 by the Bagratid Adarnase IV (r. 888–923). Toumanoff proposed the phrase “presiding principate” (cf. Geo. *erismt’avrobay*, “rule of *erismt’avaris*”), for which see especially Toumanoff 1963, 357–416.

³⁷ “Chronicles” is a misnomer since only one or two texts of the medieval section of *K’art’lis c’xovreba* (i.e., *The Chronicle of K’art’li* and Sumbat Davit’is-že) are organised around explicit chronological markers of any kind.

we know it today, the original iteration of the corpus was probably compiled under the direction of Archbishop Leonti Mroveli (Leontius of Ruisi) in the mid-eleventh century. This occurred during the zenith of medieval Bagratid power.³⁸ Surviving manuscripts of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* are relatively late:³⁹ the oldest Georgian-language variant was copied towards the end of the fifteenth century. However, the oldest manuscript of its medieval Armenian adaptation, *Patmut'iwn Vrac'* ("The History of the Georgians"),⁴⁰ belongs to the end of the thirteenth or start of the fourteenth century, a cosmopolitan period under Īlkhānīd hegemony.⁴¹ An Armenian-language witness therefore constitutes the most direct proof of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*'s age.

The trend of texts being exclusively preserved in later manuscripts also prevails among early Armenian historiographical works. For instance, fragments of the fifth-century "Aa" redaction of Agat'angelos (Agathangelus) are known only from the tenth century whereas the oldest complete manuscripts were created in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; complete renditions of the fifth-century *Epic Histories* (*Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'*, formerly attributed to P'awstos Buzandac'i) are transmitted in manuscripts from 1599 and later; the full text of the fifth-century history of Łazar P'arpec'i is contained in manuscripts from 1672 and later;⁴² and manuscripts preserving the history of Movsēs Xorenac'i (Moses Khorenats'i, Moses of Chorene), which pretends to be a fifth-century composition but in reality belongs to the eighth century, derive from the fourteenth and are especially plentiful from the seventeenth century.⁴³ This pattern is by no means unique to Caucasia. Ancient and Classical texts, too, are typically preserved in manuscripts many centuries removed from their lost autographs. Consider Xenophōn's *Anabasis*, an extremely valuable source for the Achaemenid satrapies written around 400 BC. Its principal manuscripts – Parisinus 1640, Vaticanus 1335 and the Venetian Marcianus 590 – belong to the

³⁸ On the identity of Mroveli, see Rapp 2003, "The Enigma of Leonti Mroveli", 157–163.

³⁹ This circumstance plagues most historiographical works composed in late antique and medieval Caucasia.

⁴⁰ *Patmut'iwn Vrac'* and the corresponding Georgian text are translated in Thomson 1996a.

⁴¹ More specifically, 1274–1311, for which see Thomson 1996a, xl. The autograph of *Patmut'iwn Vrac'* is lost. On the Anaseuli redaction of 1479–1495, see: Lort'k'ip'anize 1989, 10; and Toumanoff 1947.

⁴² A fragment copied before 1200 "has a form of the text quite divergent from that known later": Thomson in Łazar P'arpec'i, 3. See also Dowsett 1976.

⁴³ Heated controversy surrounds the date of Xorenac'i. Most scholars in the Republic of Armenia insist on a fifth-century date. I am persuaded by the diligent and historically-grounded arguments presented by Robert W. Thomson in the introduction to his translation of Xorenac'i. Although an argument might be made for a date anywhere between the seventh and ninth century, I have opted to identify Xorenac'i's history as an eighth-century source.

ninth to thirteenth centuries AD.⁴⁴ Xenophōn's testimony raises another critical issue. Insofar as Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian history is concerned, the problems posed by later manuscripts are compounded by sources written in and filtered through a host of other languages,⁴⁵ most famously Greek, Latin and Arabic but others as well including Armenian and Georgian. These external narratives often display considerable hostility towards Iran and its peoples.

Despite the comparatively late manuscripts transmitting *K'art'lis c'xovreba*'s oldest components, careful analysis of their contents suggests relatively minimal alteration in terms of basic narrative.⁴⁶ The pre-Bagratid historiographies have therefore reached us in *fundamentally* the same condition in which they were originally written at the turn of the eighth/ninth century. As a consequence, the three pre-Bagratid narratives provide an exceptional window onto contemporaneous K'art'velian understandings of history, society and kingship. They not only allow us to see beyond the bright glare of the Bagratids but they are also important albeit largely untapped sources for the Iranian world, especially in its Sasanian phase.

⁴⁴ Dillery in Xenophōn, *Anabasis*, Brownson and Dillery trans., 35.

⁴⁵ E.g., Daryaei 2009.

⁴⁶ Rapp 2003, 101–168 and 197–242; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1. This is not the case for the so-called Vaxtangiseuli recension of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. In the early eighteenth century, Bagratid King Vaxtang VI (r. 1711–1714, 1719–1723) appointed a commission to re-edit and expand the corpus. Some changes were substantial: whole passages from outside texts were “interpolated” into the received medieval components. Therefore, for specialists of Late Antiquity and the medieval era, the authoritative pre-Vaxtangiseuli manuscripts must take precedence. For the later Vaxtangiseuli recension, see: Rapp 2003, 17–32; and especially Grigolia 1954. Vaxtang's erudite son, Vaxušti (Vakhushti), wrote a famous historical-geographical tract called *Aycera samep'osa sak'art'velosa* (*A Description of the Kingdom of Georgia*), which was probably completed in 1745. Its historical data for the earliest periods is highly derivative from *K'art'lis c'xovreba*: Grigolia 1954; and Rapp 2003, 36–38.

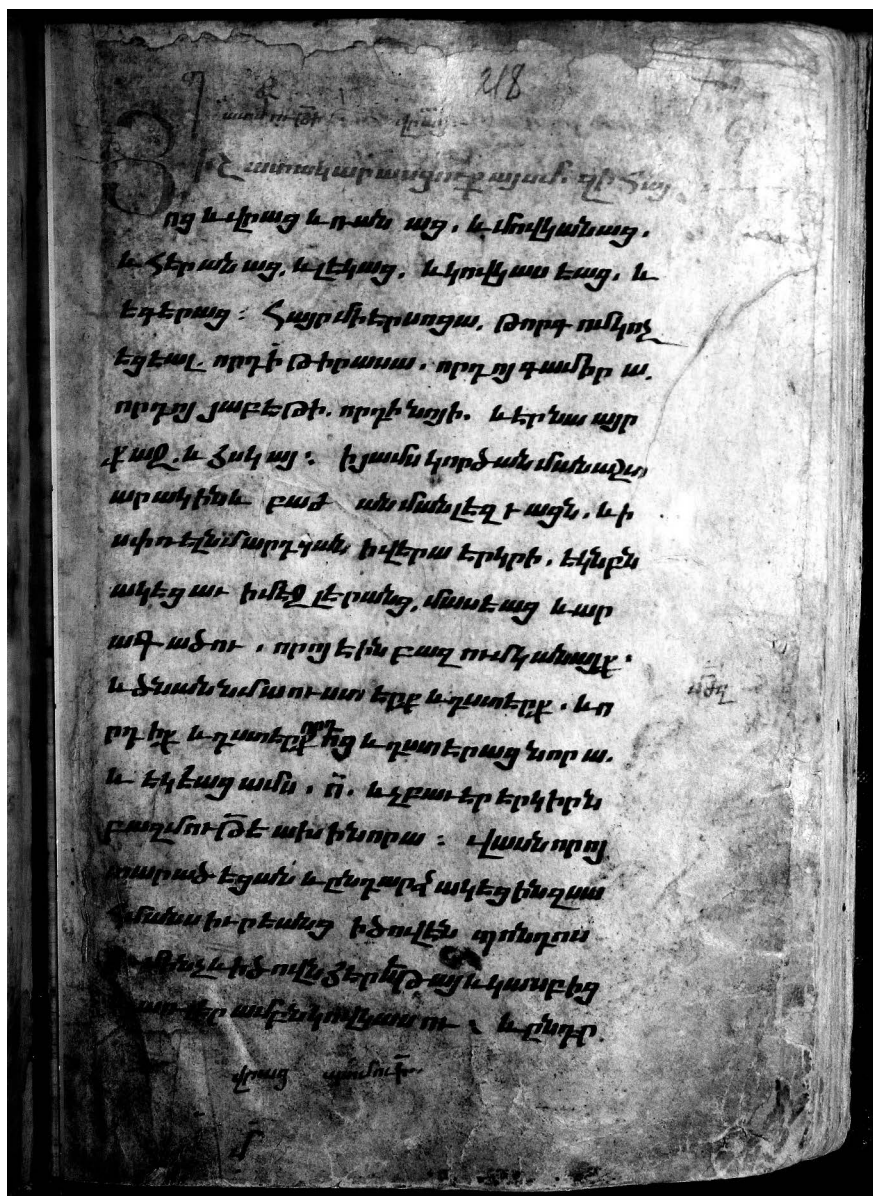


Figure I.1. Opening of *The Life of the Kings in Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, the medieval Armenian-language adaptation of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, "a" or "Arm/A" redaction, 1274–1311. Matenadaran 1902, 218.

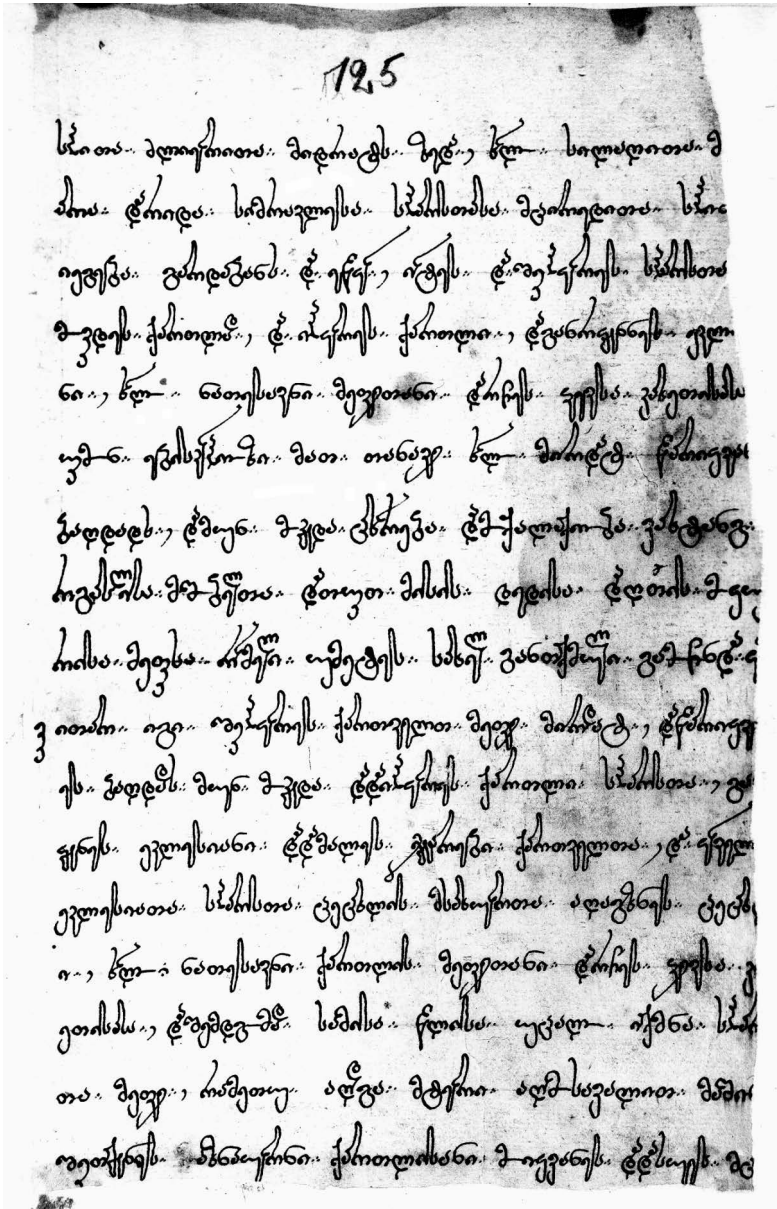


Figure I.2. Closing of *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* and beginning of *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* in the oldest Georgian-language variant of K'art'lis c'xovreba, Anaseuli ("A") or "Queen Anne" redaction, 1479–1495. Written in mxedruli script. Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts Q-795, 125.

Components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* through the Eleventh Century⁴⁷

(Components marked ★ are “pre-Bagratid”, i.e., their original compositions anticipate the permanent coming to power of the Bagratids among the K'art'velians in 813)

C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a

(three-part suite traditionally ascribed to Leonti Mroveli)

1 ★ *The Life of the K'art'velian Kings*,⁴⁸ ca. 790–813

2 *The Life of Nino*, ninth/tenth century⁴⁹

3 [*The Life of the Successors of Mirian*], after 813, perhaps by Mroveli in the mid-eleventh century

C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa

(two-part suite traditionally ascribed to Juanšer Juanšeriani)

4 ★ *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*, ca. 790–813

5 ★ [Continuation by Ps.-Juanšer], ca. 790–813

6 *The Martyrdom of Arč'il*, 786–eleventh century, perhaps ninth century

7 Sumbat Davit'is-ze, *The Life and Tale of the Bagratids*, ca. 1030

8 *The Chronicle of K'art'li*, eleventh century

The pre-Bagratid origin of *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer's untitled continuation obliges us to re-evaluate their ubiquitous Iranian and especially Iranic⁵⁰ imagery. Such imagery has customarily been seen as a reflection of the Bagratid court's thirst for the Iranian epic from the eleventh century.⁵¹ Epics associated with this later, Bagratid-era patronage include

⁴⁷ The first eight (and especially the first five) components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* are the most pertinent for the Sasanian era. Bracketed titles are scholarly inventions for untitled texts. *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* and *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa* are suites, “mini-corpora”, incorporated wholesale into the larger *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. Because medieval Georgian corpora are traditionally named after one of their components, their titles are *transliterated* whereas those of individual/component texts are *translated*. For more information on these and other relevant Georgian and Armenian texts, see Appendix II.

⁴⁸ Hereafter abbreviated *The Life of the Kings*.

⁴⁹ Also incorporated into *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*.

⁵⁰ “Iranian-like” but not necessarily in imitation – consciously or unconsciously – of Iranian models. In many cases, we observe parallel responses to similar socio-cultural challenges and environments.

⁵¹ E.g.: Blake 1933, 31–35; and Rayfield 1994, 55–86. The fascination with Iranian/Iranic epic literature at the Georgian Bagratid court in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries represents a different phase of the Irano-Georgian linguistic and literary interface. These epic sources are tangentially useful for Sasanian history, especially with

Visramiani (the Georgian adaptation of Faḵr al-Din Gorgānī's New Persian romance *Vis o Rāmin*),⁵² *Amirandarejaniani* widely attributed to Mose Xoneli (Moses Khoneli), and Šot'a Rust'aveli's *Vep'xistqaosani* (i.e., Shota Rustaveli's *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*), the most celebrated work of Georgian literature.⁵³ The fascination with the Iranian epic under the Georgian Bagratids was stimulated in part by nostalgia for the Iranic pre-Bagratid K'art'velian past. As remembered in three surviving pre-Bagratid historiographies, this bygone age was characterised by Iranic institutions and heroism⁵⁴ and a strong Iranian socio-cultural orientation. Because the later fictional epics were separated in space and time from Bagratid Georgia, their exotic settings made them ideologically less objectionable in a Byzantinising élite society whose monarchs prioritised the monopolisation of history.

Pre-Bagratid historiography's forthright and usually positive portrayal of K'art'li's Iranic social features compels us to search for real and imagined ties drawing together eastern Georgia and Sasanian Iran, "the last great empire of the Ancient Near East".⁵⁵ Collectively, *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang* and its continuation are the most direct and thorough eyewitnesses to eastern Georgia's active participation in the Iranian Commonwealth,⁵⁶ a relationship forged in the Iron Age and flourishing under the Parthian Arsacids and Sasanians.⁵⁷ Pre-

regards to Iranian loans, but many of the same words are encountered in the earlier literature surveyed in this study.

⁵² Later authorities attribute *Visramiani* to Sargis T'mogveli. About the Georgian translation, see Kalāze 2009.

⁵³ Another period of intense interest in Iranian epic literature began in the fifteenth-sixteenth century under the Safavid regime, in which Georgian aristocratic families played a central role (see the publications of Hirotake Maeda and now, for a broader context, Aslanian 2011; see also Morgan 1988, 101–151). To this later stage belong several adaptations of Ferdowsi's eleventh-century *Šāhnāma*, including *Rostomiani*. An earlier Georgian rendition of at least part of the *Šāhnāma* may have existed, but references to the Iranian epic in pre-Bagratid historiographical sources show no signs of having been appropriated from such a translation/adaptation.

⁵⁴ With regards to Iranian epics circulating at the Bagratid court, Robert Blake observes: "Persian literature at this period is marked by a strong predilection for the hero Titan type of Iranian epic, by the development of the cult of women, by romantic literature in general, and by a profusion of panegyric odes. All three of these literary genera are faithfully reflected in Georgian counterparts" (Blake 1933, 28).

⁵⁵ McDonough 2011, 290.

⁵⁶ What remains of contemporaneous Sasanian sources and material culture – especially inscriptions and sumptuous diplomatic gifts – confirms eastern Georgia's membership in the Iranian Commonwealth during its Sasanian phase: Rapp 2009, 657–658; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 169–172.

⁵⁷ While still an undergraduate student at Indiana University, my interest in Caucasia's connection to Iran was sparked by the research of two extraordinary scholars: Cyril Toumanoff and Nina Garsoïan. For the Irano-Caucasian nexus, see Toumanoff 1963. For an overview of Armenia's intimate bonds with Iran in Late Antiquity, see Garsoïan,

Bagratid texts demonstrate the persistence of Iranic patterns in K'art'velian and wider Caucasian society during their prolonged Christianisation as well as the durability of these patterns hundreds of years after the Arab capture of Ctesiphon. As we shall see in the Epilogue, two pre-Bagratid historiographies show tantalising signs of having been based upon a yet earlier but lost K'art'velian written tradition that took shape in the late Sasanian era.

The pre-Bagratid components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* are crucial witnesses to the socio-cultural nexus of eastern Georgia and Iran in Late Antiquity. Fortunately, there are other Georgian literary sources contributing to the subject. The oldest surviving specimens of original Georgian literature, hagiographical treatments of the martyrdoms of Šušanik (Shushanik), Evstat'i (Eustathios, Eustathius) and the nine children of Kolay (mod. Kola; Arm. Koł), were originally composed in the Sasanian period. Local minions of the Sasanian government are the chief antagonists in the *vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i, whereas the tale set in the Kola Valley in what is now northeastern Turkey – in the vicinity of Göle (Merdenik),⁵⁸ south of Ardahan and northwest of Kars – is devoid of references to any central authority, Sasanian or otherwise.⁵⁹ Internal criteria, including vocabulary, syntax and historical contexts, leave no doubt that these narratives were initially composed sometime between the late fifth and early seventh century. Their autographs are lost; all three have reached us in manuscripts from the tenth/eleventh century and later. We possess additional Georgian hagiographies set in this time that may have been produced during the Sasanian regime, including *vitae* devoted to Peter the Iberian and the Thirteen Syrian Fathers. But these exhibit symptoms of extensive revision, alteration and, in some cases, comprehensive rewriting. Such texts are more useful as later Georgian imaginations of the Sasanian age than as recollections of the time itself. Notwithstanding, their interest shows the importance of Late Antiquity in the historical visions of subsequent generations.

“Les éléments iraniens dans l'Arménie paléochrétienne”, in Garsoïan and Mahé 1997, 9–37.

⁵⁸ Edwards 1988, esp. 119–121, an important publication misattributed to Vazken Parsegian in Horn 2007, 279 (fn. 43). For Kolay's administration by a K'art'velian *erist'avi*, see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 24^{18–19}.

⁵⁹ The *vita* refers only to a local *m'avari* (მთავარი), “prince”: *Vita Children of Kolay*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 185¹²⁺¹³.

Valuable Georgian evidence is preserved in another medieval corpus: *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, “The Conversion of K'art'li”. (See Figure p. 18) Named after its core component, this hybrid collection consists of six anonymous historiographical and ecclesiastical texts written at various times between the seventh and ninth/tenth century.⁶⁰

Components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*

- 1 [*The Primary History of K'art'li*], possibly seventh century, no later than ninth/tenth century
- 2 [*Royal List I*], ninth/tenth century
- 3 *The Conversion of K'art'li*, first half of the seventh century
- 4 [*Royal List II*], ninth/tenth century
- 5 [*Royal List III*], ninth/tenth century
- 6 *Vita Nino* = *The Life of Nino*, ninth/tenth century⁶¹

As a corpus, *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* was assembled no later than the first half of the tenth century and has come down to us in four closely related but not identical witnesses. Three derive from the tenth century (Šatberdi, Sin.Geo.N.48 and Sin.Geo.N.50) and the other was copied in the thirteenth/fourteenth century (Čeliši). Only the version in the Šatberdi Codex is more or less complete. In their extant forms, the remaining three have been entirely stripped of the background texts addressing pre-Christian times (#1, 2, 4 and 5 above).⁶² The intentional removal of the pre-Christian historiographical section of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* from three-quarters of the manuscripts is vandalism pure and simple, a premeditated effort to excise the “pagan” past from the received memory of eastern Georgia’s conversion.

Also extant are a few written sources, contemporaneous with the Sasanian Empire, that were not so easily manipulated because they were literally set in stone. The first Georgian script, alphabetic uncial letters called *asomt'avruli*, had been invented by Christians around the year 400 to provide the K'art'velians with direct access to biblical and other basic religious texts.⁶³ Inscriptions carved in the fifth and sixth centuries, produced and displayed within ecclesiastical

⁶⁰ The number and identification of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*’s components are disputed. Cf.: Melik'išvili 1959, 23–28 *et sqq.*; and Tarchnishvili 1955, 406. My division into chapters of this corpus’s historiographical works (#1–2 and 4–5) and of *The Conversion* proper (#3) differs from Abulaže’s critical edition.

⁶¹ Also incorporated into *K'art'lis c'xovreba*.

⁶² Consisting of fourteen folios, Sin.Geo.N.48 is the shortest and most incomplete of the witnesses.

⁶³ The invention of *asomt'avruli* is one expression of the pan-Caucasian process also endowing Armenians and Albanians with scripts. Literature on this topic is voluminous,

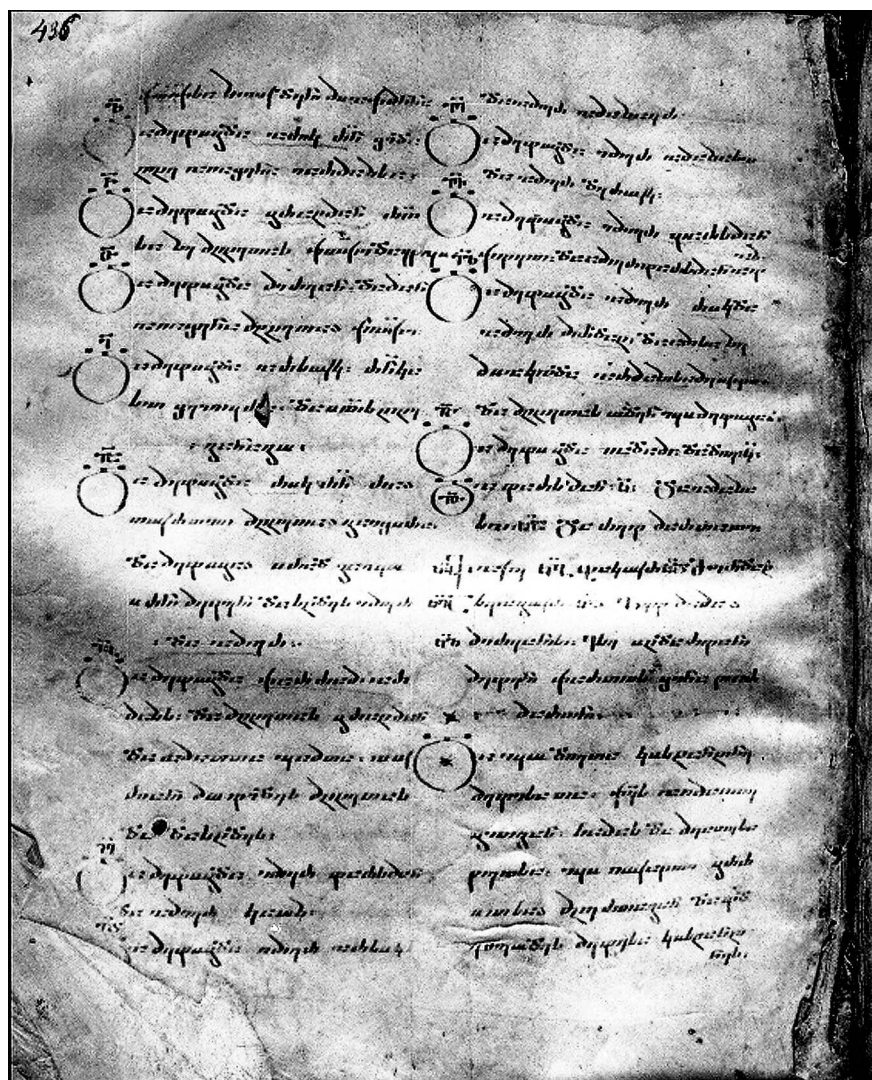


Figure 1.5. Closing of Royal List I and beginning of The Conversion of K'art'li in the Šatberdi variant of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay, tenth century. Written in nuxuri script. Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts S-1141, 216v.

contexts, are among the oldest specimens of *asomt'avruli*.⁶⁴ The majority of these, like the fifth-century foundational inscription of the Urnisi basilica in K'art'li and the longest of four early inscriptions preserved at the Georgian monastery in Bir el-Qutt situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Palestine, make no mention of the Sasanians.⁶⁵ However, the oldest *dated* specimen of the Georgian script, the late fifth-century foundational inscription of the Bolnisi Sioni (Zion) basilica in southern K'art'li, explicitly refers to a Sasanian “king of kings”, called *šāhan šāh* in Middle Persian. Precious few pre-Bagratid visual sources have come down to us,⁶⁶ so it is a hazardous affair to coax patterns from the fragmentary record. However, Iranic elements in the iconography of the stone carvings of Bolnisi Sioni and other early Caucasian churches evince a close Irano-Caucasian connection. Although they fall beyond the purview of this investigation, Sasanian sumptuous goods including silver bowls and utensils are yet other tangible manifestations of the bond.⁶⁷ Owing to their concise Georgian inscriptions, modified sixth-century Sasanian drachms struck in K'art'li will be afforded some consideration below.

The Bagratid bias in historiography is accompanied by an incisive privileging of K'art'li and K'art'velians, an attitude inherited from pre-Bagratid times.⁶⁸ This

contentious and ethnocentric. For a regional, cross-cultural perspective, see Rapp 2006, 36–38.

⁶⁴ Šošiašvili 1980, 62–72. We also possess *asomt'avruli* palimpsests of translated ecclesiastical texts whose lowest layers go back to the fifth/sixth century. See, e.g., Gippert 2007a.

⁶⁵ Bir el-Qutt: Ceret'eli 1960a; Braund 1994, 285, with Eng. trans.; Horn 2006, 204–206, with Eng. trans. See also: <http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/armazi/armazijm.htm> (last accessed 19 May 2013); and Xint'ibize 1996, 78.

⁶⁶ For subsequent Bagratid materials, see: Eastmond 1998; and Alibegashvili 1979.

⁶⁷ Harper 1981, 24–31, 36–39, 124–127, and pls. 1–2; Mač'abeli 1972; and Javaxišvili A. 1986, for Roman and Sasanian bowls. For a third-century Sasanian silver bowl found in a grave at the Armazis-q'evi necropolis not far from Mc'xet'a, see: Harper 1974, 68–69; Lukonin 1961, 61; Henning 1961; and Soltes 1999, #105, 204. It bears a damaged Middle Persian inscription, part of which identifies its owner: “[The property of] Pāpag, *bidaxš*, son of Ardaxšīr, son of ... Ardaxšīr, *bidaxš*”. For an image of the bowl, see Figure 3.1. A “Pāpag *bidaxš*” is attested in the Sasanian Paikūlī inscription: NPi, §§16 and 32, Skjærvø ed., 33 and 42.

⁶⁸ The K'art'velians were not monolithic. Strabōn makes a distinction between “Iberians” inhabiting riverine basins and those residing in the Caucasian highlands: “Now the plain of the Iberians is inhabited by people who are rather inclined to farming and to peace, and they dress after both the Armenian and the Median fashion; but the major, or warlike, portion occupy the mountainous territory, living like the Scythians and the Sarmatians, of whom they are both neighbours and kinsmen; however, they engage also in farming ...”, “Τὸ μὲν οὖν πεδίων τῶν Ἰβήρων οἱ γεωργικώτεροι καὶ πρὸς εἰρήνην νενευκότες οἰκοῦσιν, Ἀρμενιστὶ τε καὶ Μηδιστὶ ἐσκευασμένοι, τὴν δ' ὀρεινὴν οἱ πλείους καὶ μάχιμοι κατέχουσι, Σκυθῶν δίκην ζῶντες καὶ Σαρματῶν, ὧν περ καὶ ὅμοροι καὶ συγγενεῖς εἰσὶν· ἄπτονται δ' ὅμως καὶ γεωργίας ...” (XI.3.3, Jones ed. and trans., 218–



Figure I.6. Mc'xet'a (right) and the hillside Armazis-c'ixe (left, above the far bank, today called Baginet'i), at the confluence of the Kura/Mtkuari and Aragwi Rivers. The Aragwi enters from the right. View from Juari (mod. Jvari) monastery.

circumstance is a literary expression of the central role K'art'li and the royal cities Mc'xet'a and then Tp'ilisi (mod. T'bilisi) have played throughout Georgian history.⁶⁹ Since the advent of *asomt'avruli* and surely before, the principal language of eastern Georgia has been called *k'art'uli* (ქართული), “K'art'velian”, the idiom of the language English-speakers today call Georgian. “Georgia” and “Georgian” are exonyms. Considerably later, during the apogée of Bagratid power, the medieval all-Georgian kingdom was designated Sak'art'velo (საქართველო), “[the place] where K'art'velians [dwell]”. Significantly, this term was first used in the late seventh/early eighth century just before Bagratid rule. At the time it was restricted to the frontier of Byzantine Anatolia and Tao-Klarjet'i where a new K'art'li had been created by K'art'velian exiles during Arab occupation.⁷⁰ Consisting of *k'art'vel-* and the geographical circumfix *sa- ... -o*, Sak'art'velo has been used in modern times as the official name of the country. By the eleventh century, certain historiographical texts were gathered into the corpus *K'art'lis c'xovreba* (ქართლის ცხოვრება), whose title might be rendered “The Life of

219). See also Braund 1994, 208–209, who gives precedence to the Classical designation “Iberians”. Braund emphasises, quite rightly, K'art'li's location at the junction of highlands and lowlands and its role as an intermediary between sedentary communities and the pastoralists of northern Caucasia (*ibid.*, 210–211).

⁶⁹ On Mc'xet'a, see Ap'ak'ize 1959. For cities in late antique and early medieval Armenia, see: Garsoïan 1984–1985; Manandian 1965; and Eremian 1939.

⁷⁰ Rapp 2003, 413–440.

K'art'li".⁷¹ But the ethnonym *k'art'veli* (ქართველი) acquired a double meaning during the Bagratid "Golden Age":⁷² first, its earliest sense, the dominant population of K'art'li proper, often encompassing adjacent peoples and lands in eastern Georgia; and second, the medieval Bagratid crown's "Georgian" subjects distributed from the Black Sea littoral to the far eastern regions of Kaxet'i (კახეთი; var. Kakheti) and Heret'i (ჰერეთი), bordering and overlapping with Albania. The toponym K'art'li underwent a similar transformation, its "all-Georgian" reach being extended by the Bagratids and their contemporaries. Considering its origin and historical context, the title *K'art'lis c'xovreba* must be translated "The Life of Georgia", that is to say, "The History of Georgia".

The Greek toponym Ἰβηρία,⁷³ popularly transcribed Iberia, was likewise deployed in a variety of ways.⁷⁴ It could designate not only K'art'li proper, especially the kingdom of K'art'li, but also the whole of inland Georgia east of the Surami Mountains. The meaning of the Greek term was highly variable across authors and time. Thus, in the eleventh century, following Byzantium's annexation of territories belonging to the *kouropalatēs* Davit' of Tao/Tayk' (r. 966–1000), Byzantine writers could subsume all Chalcedonian Christians of southern Caucasia, even Armenians, under the label "Iberian". This is evident in the newly-created Byzantine Theme of Iberia, *thema Ibērias* (θέμα Ἰβηρίας), consisting primarily of Davit' *kouropalatēs*'s possessions in Tao-Klarjet'i and parts of the western Armenian frontier but not K'art'li itself.⁷⁵ The fluid definition

⁷¹ This translated title is used in Garsoïan and Martin-Hisard 1996.

⁷² For a more detailed discussion, see Musxelišvili 1993. On the variability of the indigenous terms for "Georgia"/"Georgian" and "Armenia"/"Armenian", see Garsoïan and Martin-Hisard 1996, 303–307.

⁷³ Lat. Iberia and Hiberia. Bielmeier 1988 derives Gk. Ibēria from Arm. Virk', the respective roots of which are Bēr- and Vir-. In addition, Bielmeier proposes the derivation of Parthian Wiračān (usually rendered Wirčān in scholarship) from an undocumented "pre-Armenian" *Vir-ac' with the Iranian geographical suffix -ān (cf. Ērān). Thus, according to Bielmeier, the received Greek and Parthian (and dependent Middle Persian) designations for eastern Georgia have their bases in a lost predecessor of Armenian Virk'. For her part, Č'xeiže 1993 derives "Warūčān" from "warūč < i.e., wlk, 'wolf', + the suffix for geographical names -ān", hence "country of wolves" (p. 118). Cf. the eastern Caspian Gurgān (part of Hyrcania), "the land of wolves". For foreign-derived Virk' and Ibēria, see: Sarjvelaže A. 1989a; and Vašakīze 1993, 65–72. See also: Deeters 1956; Xint'ibiže 1998, 80–85 et sqq.; and Thiessen 2005, 214. For the Iberian Guard (Wērōy-pahr), see *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, #18. Related to the Parthian and Middle Persian forms are Syr. Gurzān, Arab. Jurzān and NPers. Gurjān, the last of which probably forms the basis of Rus. Gruzia (Грузия) and designations for "Georgia" in Western European languages.

⁷⁴ Cf. Xint'ibiže 1998, 71: "A collation of Georgian and Greek sources shows that in Greek the ethnonym *Iber* was used as a synonym of the Georgian-language ethnonym *Kartveli* ('Georgian')". For "Iberia" in Graeco-Roman literature, see Vašakīze 1993.

⁷⁵ Arutiunova-Fidanian 1994. The theme collapsed owing to fierce battles fought against the Seljuqs (especially after the Battle of Manzikert in 1071) and the metamorphosis of the unified Georgian kingdom into a pan-Caucasian empire.

of “Iberian” has led to some confusion as to what Romano-Byzantine sources actually mean by the term. The later example of Gregory Pakourianos, the famous eleventh-century Byzantine *megas domestikos* of the West, is illustrative. The “Iberian” Pakourianos founded an important monastery at Petritzos near Bachkovo (Bačkovo) in Bulgaria for which a *typikon* was drawn up in Georgian and Greek. He reportedly signed the *typikon* in Armenian characters,⁷⁶ and this has fuelled speculation, much of it patriotic, that he might have been a Chalcedonian Armenian. In light of the challenges posed by available evidence, Nina Garsoïan sensibly characterises the Pakourianos (Πακουριανός) family as having belonged to “the mixed Armeno-Iberian [i.e., K’art’velian/Georgian] aristocracy, which dwelt in the border district of Tayk’/Tao”.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in this period Greek “Iberian” could refer specifically to K’art’velians/Georgians as we see in the case of the famous Ivērōn monastery on Mt Athos. Founded in the late tenth century, Ἰβήρων unquestionably means “of the Georgians” and not “of the Chalcedonian Caucasians/Armenians”. All this shows the pitfalls of applying foreign terms, especially “Iberia” and the exonym “Georgia”, to pre-modern K’art’li and its neighbours. Accordingly, this volume gives priority to contemporaneous toponyms and ethnonyms in the original language.⁷⁸

Because of their sharp predilection for the K’art’velian experience,⁷⁹ the texts investigated below say remarkably little about the territories west of the Surami Mountains and stretching to the Black Sea. About this landform, widely regarded as the boundary between eastern and western Georgia, David Braund observes:

Although it was an important obstacle, the Surami Ridge was by no means insurmountable. It marked the edge of an economic system in that it coincided with the limit of easy communication, especially riverine, with the coast of the Black Sea. It was less reliable as a political boundary, for the kings of Iberia often sought and sometimes with success, like the Persians in the sixth century AD, to extend their authority westwards beyond Surami.⁸⁰

The area west of the Surami Mountains was broadly known to late antique and early medieval K’art’velians as Egrisi (ეგრისი) and to the Greeks, Romans and early

⁷⁶ *Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos* (Gk.), Jordan trans., 557.

⁷⁷ Garsoïan 1991, 1553. Numerous publications are devoted to Pakourianos and especially his *typikon*, but see the overview of his activities in Šanize 1971a. On the mixed Armeno-Georgian families of western Caucasia and eastern Anatolia, see Kazhdan 1975. Cf. Lomouri 1981. For the hybridity of the Pakourianos clan, see now Seibt 2014.

⁷⁸ But there are noteworthy exceptions, e.g., Armenia.

⁷⁹ Including the K’art’li-in-exile that was established in Tao-Klarjet’i during the Arab occupation of K’art’li proper: Rapp 1997.

⁸⁰ See Braund 1994, 40–45, quotation from pp. 43–45.

Byzantines as Colchis (Κολχίς).⁸¹ From antiquity and throughout the Sasanian era, the various peoples in what would become western Georgia lacked their own literary tradition, even one composed in another tongue and/or script.⁸² This is true even of Greek, a language with which they had been in sustained contact since the establishment of Greek colonies along the eastern shore of the Black Sea. But Egrisi-Colchis was not devoid of cultural sophistication as is evidenced by the rich archaeological record, including well-documented discoveries at the inland site of Vani (probably Gk. Sourion, Σούριον; Lat. Surium) extensively studied by the late Ot'ar Lort'k'ip'anize.⁸³ In many respects the depth of cross-cultural exchange and the extent and nature of the integration of the indigenous population and Greek colonists remain unresolved despite the important strides made by Lort'k'ip'anize, Gocha Tsetskhladze and others.⁸⁴



Beginning in the 1960s and accelerating as the twentieth century came to a close, our understanding of Irano-Georgian relations was radically transformed. In 1966 appeared the first and most substantial instalment of Mzia Andronikašvili's extensive catalogue of Irano-Georgian linguistic connections, *Narkvevebi iranul-k'art'uli enobrivi urt'iert'obidan* (*Studies in Irano-Georgian Linguistic Contacts*). It is a testament to Andronikašvili's capabilities and tenacity that *Narkvevebi* remains an indispensable work regardless of its shortcomings, some of which stem from her lack of access to Western scholarship.⁸⁵ Thirteen years later, Iulon Gagošize lobbied a shot across the archaeological bow with his study of Samadlo, a then-obscure site opposite the better-known settlement of Nastakisi/Nastagisi.⁸⁶ For all intents and purposes, these were twin cities separated by the Kura/Mtkuari River, the lifeblood of K'art'li; Samadlo served as Nastakisi's necropolis. Excavations of Samadlo's central hill uncovered an early habitation layer from the seventh and sixth centuries BC. Sometime in the second century BC,

⁸¹ Geo. Kolxet'i (კოლხეთი) is an early-modern invention mimicking ancient Gk. Kolchis. In the eighteenth century, Vaxuṣṭi once uses the transcribed Kolxida (კოლხიდა < Gk. Κολχίδα): Qauxč'iṣvili ed., 775₂₅. Vaxuṣṭi frequently refers to eastern Georgia as Iveria (ივერია). Other Greek terms applied to western Georgia include Lazika (Lazikē, Λαζική) and Abasgia (Ἀβασγία).

⁸² As noted, not only is “Georgia” a later exonym but it is imbued with a sense of political and cultural unity/conformity that did not exist in this period.

⁸³ Lort'k'ip'anize O. 1991; and more generally Lort'k'ip'anize O. 1989.

⁸⁴ See, e.g., the essays in Tsetskhladze 2011 and 2012.

⁸⁵ Andronikašvili often hypothesises Old Persian (Achaemenid-era) bonds when Parthian and Middle Persian ones are more likely. For correctives, see the works of Biemeier and Gippert. I wish to thank Dr Biemeier for sharing his unpublished paper on the earliest period of Irano-Georgian language contacts.

⁸⁶ Gagošize 1979.

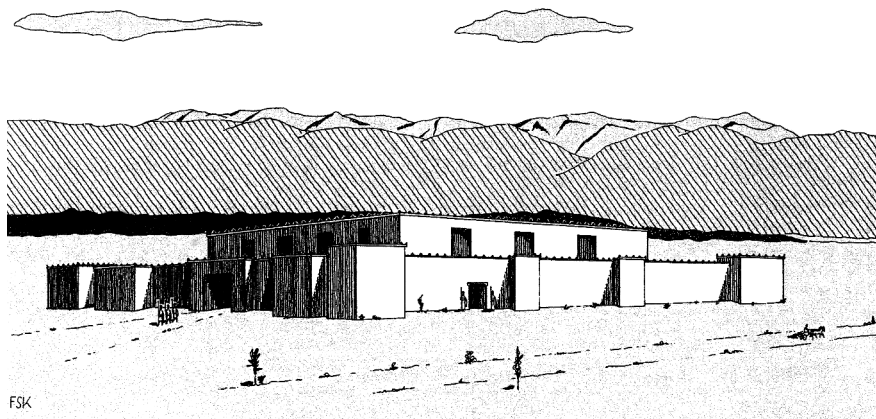


Figure 1.7. The Achaemenid-like building at Gumbat'i, after Knauss 2001, 129.

Samadlo was destroyed and abandoned, the precise circumstances of which remain shrouded in mystery. Samadlo's most outstanding architectural feature is a mud-brick and ashlar-block tower, approximately 14 m², which was raised in the fifth or fourth century. Gagošize identified this edifice as an Achaemenid-style⁸⁷ tower, probably Mazdean in this case, and structurally reminiscent of the Zendān-e Solaymān in Pasargadae and the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam near Persepolis.⁸⁸

In the intervening years, new archaeological material has illuminated a spectacular assortment of bonds drawing together eastern Georgia and Achaemenid Persia.⁸⁹ Particularly revealing are the remains of an extensive

⁸⁷ As used in this study, "Achaemenid" – like "Sasanian" – describes prevalent cultural patterns throughout the Iranian Commonwealth and does not necessarily entail a direct tie to the ruling dynasty in Iran itself.

⁸⁸ See also: Gagošize 1996, 133; Knauss 2006, 89; and Ličeli 2001, 249–251. Considering the context, the direct inspiration is not Urartian, although the indebtedness of Achaemenid to Urartian architecture is well known. For Urartu and southern Caucasia, see Smith A.T. 2005: 229–279.

⁸⁹ Opinions diverge about whether any part of Georgia, especially eastern Georgia, was formally integrated into the Achaemenid Empire. Arguments in favour of such integration hinge on the problematic testimony of Herodotus, esp. III.89–97. Speaking about Colchis, Herodotus observes that the Caucasus Mountains "... is as far as Persian rule reaches, the land north of the Caucasus paying no regard to the Persians ...", "... ἐς τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ ὄρος ὑπὸ Πέρσῃσι ἄρχεται, τὰ δὲ πρὸς βορρῇν ἄνεμον τοῦ Καυκάσιος Περσέων οὐδὲν ἔτι φροντίζει ..." (III.97, Godley ed. and trans., vol. 2, 124–125). Recent archaeological findings

building (palace? great hall?) excavated by a German-Georgian expedition at Gumbat'i in Kaxet'i's Alazani Valley.⁹⁰ The 40 m² complex in far eastern Georgia was probably constructed in the fifth or early fourth century BC. In basic plan and execution it resembles the monumental architecture of Persepolis. Gumbat'i is not alone: it belongs to a diffused regional ensemble of large buildings that has striking affinities with imperial Achaemenid architecture. Comparable grand structures, which surely served an administrative purpose, have been identified across the modern border in Azerbaijan at Qaracamırlı Köyi (including the mound dubbed İdeal Təpə), at Sarıtəpə (Sari Tepe) north of Ganja (Az. Gəncə) near Qazax in northwestern Azerbaijan, and at Beniamin in northern Armenia.⁹¹ There are yet other candidates, including an intriguing hilltop site to the south at Oğlanqala just above the town of Şərur in the Azerbaijani exclave of Naxçıvan (Arm. Naxčawan; Rus. Nakhichevan). However, the Azerbaijani-American team excavating Oğlanqala currently suspects it belonged to a local polity predating the Achaemenids and autonomous of Urartu.⁹² At any rate, the unusual density of imperial-like monumental architecture in the lowlands, the analogous structure at Beniamin approximately 100 km west of Lake Sevan, and the construction of Achaemenid "council halls" within old Urartian fortresses at Altıntepe in the Erzincan Plain of eastern Anatolia and at Erebus on the outskirts of Erevan

leave little doubt of the region's incorporation into the Achaemenid satrapies: Jacobs 1994; Jacobs 2000; Gagoşize 1996; Knauss 2001, esp. 133; Knauss 2006; and Tsetskhladze 1994, 96–100. A dissenting view is presented in Lort'k'ip'anize O. 2000.

⁹⁰ Furtwängler 1995; Furtwängler and Knauss 1996 and 1997; and Furtwängler, Knauss and Motzenbäcker 1998.

⁹¹ Knauss 2001; and Babaev, Gagoşize and Knauss 2006 and 2007.

⁹² Baxşəliyev 1994; and Schachner 2001. For current work, see: Parker 2011; Ristvet, Baxşəliyev and Aşurov 2011; and the website of the Naxçıvan Archaeological Project, http://www.oglanqala.net/homepage_en.html (last accessed 25 January 2013). Ristvet *et al.* 2012 appeared too late to be incorporated here. Oğlanqala's possible connection with Urartu would carry heavy modern political implications since the latter has been appropriated by the Armenian master historical narrative as an early *Armenian* state. This is, quite obviously, both patriotic and proleptic. For its part, the rival Azerbaijani master narrative has been shifting in recent years from an emphasis upon Albania (which attained newfound popularity because of the troubles in Nagorno-Karabakh) to an amorphous "Atropatena", cf. Atropatēnē, for which see: Aliyev I. 1989; and Kasumova 2005. At least one Azerbaijani archaeologist has attempted to link Oğlanqala with "Atropatena": "Senior Researcher Denies Reports about Media and Urartu Findings in Oglangala", 14 August 2010, <http://en.apa.az/print.php?id=127795> (last accessed 21 June 2012). According to Səfər Aşurov, "The Urartu ceramics found [at Oğlanqala] were brought to the fortress. 99% of the findings are local. According to [our] researches, Oglangala was a center of a large tribal unity in [the] Sharur steppe. They could resist [t] Urartu and Oglangala prevented ... Urart[ian] movement to Nakhchivan. There are no facts that [the] Urart[ian] people were Armenians ... Oglangala had [a] connection with the state of Atropatena in its last period ..." (emphasis added).

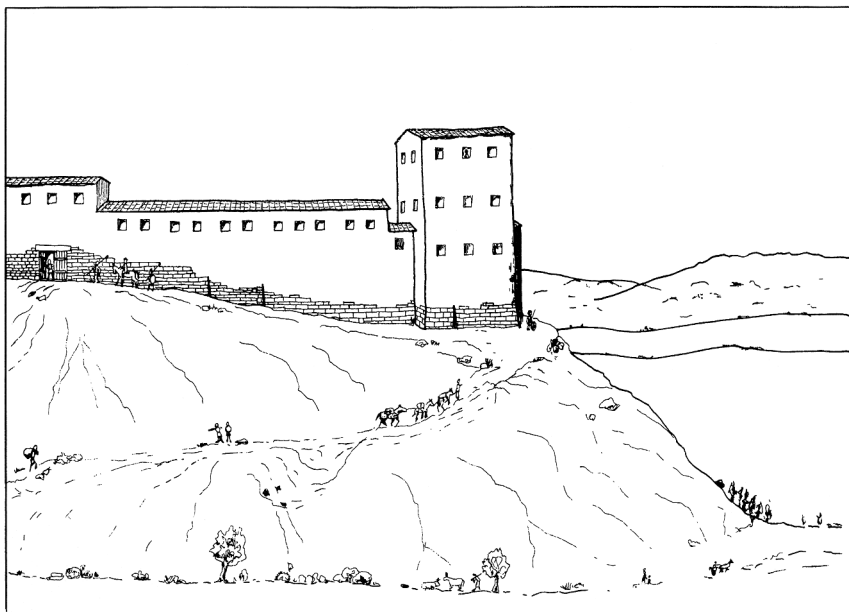


Figure I.8. The palace at Dedop'lis Gora, after Furtwängler *et al.* 2008, pl. 6 (#8).

attest to the extension of the Achaemenid satrapal network across a wide swathe of southern Caucasia.⁹³

The Achaemenids designated the entire area “Armina”, the coalescing Armenian element lending its name to the whole.⁹⁴ In Bruno Jacob’s painstaking reconstruction of the Achaemenid administrative system, the Great Satrapy of Media (Māda) included the Main Satrapy Armina or, as I would also term it, Achaemenid Caucasia.⁹⁵ In light of eastern Georgia’s geographical distance from the imperial nucleus, its insulation from Alexander’s invasions, and the high regard in which its élites held Iranian culture (as is evidenced, for example, through Achaemenid luxury goods found in hoards and burials),⁹⁶ it is not

⁹³ See also Knauss 2006, 103. On Altintepe and Erebusi, see Khatchadourian 2008, 401–422.

⁹⁴ Rapp *forthcoming A*. This is not unlike Armīniya, the name applied by the Arabs to their conquests in southern Caucasia.

⁹⁵ Jacobs 1994.

⁹⁶ E.g., the well-known Axalgori (Akhalgori) and Qazbegi (Kazbeg) hoards. See Lort’k’ip’anize O. 2001, for the identification of the Axalgori discovery as an extravagant burial. Eastern Georgia is “one of the richest sources for Achaemenid metal vessels” (Gagošize 1996, 127). See also: Ličeli 2007; Javaxišvili K’. 2007 (for seals); and Knauss 2006,

surprising that Achaemenid and Achaemenid-like patterns long outlived the empire in this region.⁹⁷ Architectural and artistic traditions primarily rooted in Achaemenid Persia thrived in eastern Georgia until the first century BC if not beyond.⁹⁸ But whether they were Caucasians, Persian immigrants or a combination of the two, with few exceptions local élites did not slavishly duplicate the built environment, art and material culture of Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa. We observe this architecturally in the temples and buildings of the sprawling post-Achaemenid site at Dedop'lis Mindori situated on a 25 km² plateau in western K'art'li's K'areli district.⁹⁹ Inside the palace grounds on the nearby hill called Dedop'lis Gora, Gagošize identified what he understands to be a Mazdean chapel used by members of the K'art'velian royal family and visiting dignitaries.¹⁰⁰ The plans of several temples, likely Mazdean, suggest the existence of a local school of stone carving that drew heavily – but neither exclusively nor blindly – upon Achaemenid techniques and designs. All this demonstrates a far more immediate connection between Iron Age Iran and southern Caucasia than has previously been acknowledged. Caucasia's active participation in the Iranian Commonwealth is a very old one and the consequences of this relationship were profound and long-lasting. In the words of Gagošize: “[t]hanks to the Achaemenids, the Georgian people appeared on the international scene and became an organic part of the ancient civilized world”.¹⁰¹

Fresh investigations of eastern Georgia's bonds to Sasanian Iran would have been a logical extension of this scholarly arc. After all, many crucial events unfolded in the period from the accession of Ardaxšīr (Ardashir) in 224 until the murder of Yazdgird III in 651, including:

- the rise of a new K'art'velian dynasty, the Xosroianis (Chosroids), an acculturated Parthian house biologically linked to the Sasanians;¹⁰²

81. Achaemenid objects have also been found in some élite burials in western Georgia, in Egrisi-Colchis: Tsatskheladze 1994, 97–100.

⁹⁷ The same is true for Sasanian art and architecture, as we shall see below.

⁹⁸ Knauss 2006, 114. Kipiani 2004, 169, for eastern Georgia as a direct successor of the Achaemenid tradition.

⁹⁹ Dedop'lis Gora is extensively studied in Gagošize 1981, 1996, 2000, and 2001. See now: the essays in Furtwängler *et al.* 2008; and Knauss 2006, 110–113. The complex was destroyed by catastrophic fire in the late first century AD: Braund 1994, 227. For an Aramaic inscription from the site dated to the first century BC, see Ceret'eli K. 1993b.

¹⁰⁰ Knauss 2006, 113: “Dedoplis Gora must have been the fortified residence of a high official of the Iberian [i.e., K'art'velian] king. It even may have served as a royal residence when the Iberian king and his entourage visited the sanctuary of Dedoplis Mindori”.

¹⁰¹ Gagošize 1996, 126. Daryaee 2009, 1, reminds us that “[t]he Achaemenid Empire had made the Persians the dominant power in the known world from the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE”.

¹⁰² The seven great aristocratic houses of Sasanian Iran traced their ancestry to the Parthians: Pourshariati 2008, 48–49.

- the Christianisation of Caucasia;
- the invention of the first Georgian script;
- the brutal conflict embroiling the Sasanian and Romano-Byzantine Empires;
- the suppression of the K'art'velian monarchy by the Sasanians in the late sixth century;
- the Armeno-K'art'velian schism declared by Armenian prelates at their Third Council of Duin in 607;
- and the K'art'velian Church's official adoption of the dyophysite christology pronounced orthodox at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon back in 451.

What survives of Sasanian-era written sources produced in Iran itself does not get us very far. But several Sasanian epigraphical monuments of the third century explicitly mention eastern Georgia, thus diverging from their Achaemenid, Seleucid and Parthian analogues.¹⁰³ The earliest is the Great Inscription of Šāpūr I (ŠKZ) carved on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam around the year 262.¹⁰⁴ This well-known trilingual monument enumerates the lands under direct Sasanian control. Several Caucasian territories, including K'art'li, are specified in the parallel Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek texts.¹⁰⁵ The relevant Middle Persian passage reads:

...[I] am ruler of Ērānšahr,¹⁰⁶ [and I hold?] the lands: Pārs, Parthia ... Ādurbāyagān [ʔwɾpʔtkn], Armenia [Armin, ʔlmny, i.e., Armenia], Wiruzān/Wručān [wɾwcʔn, i.e., K'art'li], Sīgān, Ar[r]ān [ʔdʔn, i.e., Caucasian Albania], Balāsagān¹⁰⁷ up to the Caucasus Mountains [Kaf kōf] and the Gates of Albania [or: the Alans] ...¹⁰⁸

These toponyms are rendered similarly in Parthian: Ādu[r]bādegān (ʔʔrʔwptkn), Armin (ʔlmny, i.e., Armenia), Wiržān/Wirčān/Wiračān (wyršn, i.e., K'art'li)¹⁰⁹ and

¹⁰³ Č'xeiže 1993. Armina is attested in several Achaemenid inscriptions, including Darius' Behistūn (DB-I) and Persepolis (DPe) inscriptions as well as that of Xerxēs at Persepolis (XPh). For the term's broader context, see van Lint 2009, esp. 255–256. Armina is normally read "Armenia", but see *supra* for its extension to the whole of Achaemenid Caucasia.

¹⁰⁴ The inscription is also called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*.

¹⁰⁵ Garsoïan 1981, 32, for *The Letter of Tansar's* extension of Ērān into Caucasia.

¹⁰⁶ "The land of Ērān/Iran", i.e., "of the Aryans". ŠKZ, §1, Huyse ed. and trans., 22, for Šāpūr as *šāhan šāh ī Ērān ud Anērān*, "*šāhan šāh* of Ērān and non-Ērān". See also Canepa 2009, 54–57.

¹⁰⁷ Probably the Mūghān Steppe: Alizadeh 2011, 73–74.

¹⁰⁸ ŠKZ, §2, Huyse ed. and trans., 22–23, Frye trans., 371. See also: Maricq ed., 47–49; and Sprengling trans., 14 and 21–22.

¹⁰⁹ The exact readings of MPers. *wɾwcʔn* and Parth. *wyršn* are debated. For the proposed Parth. *Wiračān* and its derivation from the pre-Armenian **vir-ac'*, see Bielmeier 1988, 99. Cf. Huyse in ŠKZ, vol. 2, 22–23.

Ardān (*ʾrd'n*, i.e., Albania). In the slightly later KKZ inscription of Kerdīr also found on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt (one of four companion inscriptions), the high priest boasts about his efforts to propagate Sasanian Zoroastrianism beyond the borders of Iran proper:

And many fires and magi[ans] in the empire of Ērān – Pārs, Parthia, Khuzestan [Xūzestān], Asurestan [Asūrestān, i.e., Mesopotamia], Mēšān, Nōdšīragān, Ādurbādagān, Spāhān, Ray, Kermān, Sagestān, Gurgān, Marv [Marw], Herat [Harēw], Abaršahr, Tūrestān, Makurān, the Kušān country [Kušānšahr] up to Paškabūr [Pešawar] – I have made prosperous.

And also in the land of Anērān [i.e., non-Iran] where the horses and men of the *šāhan šāh* reached – the city of Antioch and the land of Syria and what is attached to the province of Syria, the city of Tarsos and the land of Cilicia and what is attached to the province of Cilicia, the city of Caesarea and the land of Cappadocia and what is attached to the province of Cappadocia, up to the land of Greece [=Pontos?] and the land of Armenia and Wrwčān/Wiruzān [i.e., K'art'li]¹¹⁰ and Albania and Balāsagān up to the Gate of the Alans ... there too, at the command of the *šāhan šāh*, I made arrangements for the magi[ans] and the fires which were in those lands, I did not allow them to be harmed or taken as booty ...¹¹¹

In the ca. 295 Paikūlī inscription (NPi), an unnamed king of K'art'li – *ʾbyr'n MLKA* – is one of the rulers recognising the authority of Narseh (r. 293–302). Chronologically, the allusion must be to Mirian III (r. 284–361), but prior to his conversion to Christianity in the 320s–330s. NPi supplies no further details about eastern Georgia.¹¹²

These inscriptions certify the strategic importance of K'art'li and its neighbours to the early Sasanians. Some Iranian élites, including members of Šāpūr's inner circle, even regarded southern Caucasia, including K'art'li, as an organic component of Ērān.¹¹³ Without a doubt, these epigraphical sources open a valuable albeit small window on Sasanian perceptions of Caucasia and Irano-K'art'velian relations. Simultaneously, however, they leave many

¹¹⁰ Wrōčān in the companion Middle Persian KNR, §39, Brunner ed. and trans., 107.

¹¹¹ KKZ, V.14–15, MacKenzie trans., 58 (slightly modified), Gignoux trans., 71. See also Sprengling trans., 46–53.

¹¹² NPi, III.16, Skjærvø ed., §92. NPi also mentions Trdat, king of Arsacid Armenia: Kettenhofen 1995; and Shapira 1999–2000b, 143.

¹¹³ A similar situation applies to neighbouring Armenia, for which see Garsoïan 1981, esp. 29–37. Garsoïan writes: "Whatever the specific position of Armenia in its relationship to the Persian empire at any given time, there seems to be little doubt that it was invariably viewed as close and honorable by the Persians" (*ibid.*, 35). For the development of the idea of Ērān in the third century, see Gnoli 1989, 177–178. See also Jullien and Jullien 2002, esp. 332–335.

questions unresolved owing to their narrow perspectives, stark information and compressed temporal coverage.

A chorus of eastern Georgian voices has come to the rescue. In the Sasanian epoch, shortly after the Christianisation of their monarchy in the fourth century, K'art'velians began to produce original literature. As this study will demonstrate, these early narratives are replete with signatures of Caucasia's long-standing membership in the Iranian world. The challenges posed by Georgian narrative sources may seem overwhelming, but the effort will be rewarded by the rich linguistic, social, cultural and political evidence for Caucasia's integration into the Iranian Commonwealth.

Finally, it is worth remembering that the allure of the oldest materials has proven difficult to resist. On the whole, archaeologists have shown markedly less interest in the Parthian Arsacid and Sasanian periods than earlier ones. Even Achaemenid vestiges have frequently been bypassed for Bronze Age assemblages of Kura-Araxes or "Early Transcaucasian" cultures. Over the last fifty years, historical linguistics has been the one discipline to push aggressively forward our knowledge of K'art'velo-Sasanian interplay.¹¹⁴ The time has come for historians to follow the linguistic lead.

¹¹⁴ Garsoïan 1976, 11–14, for the comparable situation in Armenian Studies.

PART I
Hagiographical Texts

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Chapter 1

The *Vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i

The Dawn of Georgian Literature

Serious scholarship has long abandoned “all or nothing” models in which Paul of Tarsos’ conversion on the road to Damascus – the story of sudden and total transformation – is applied to whole communities and peoples. Social conversion is, in fact, a dynamic, long-term process often transcending conventional cultural, political and economic boundaries.¹ Conversion necessarily entails change, but change is rarely a one-way street: both the receptors and the faith are altered, though rarely equally. At one end of the spectrum, a group embraces or is coerced to accept new ideas and practices that replace older ones or that remedy an inadequacy, real or perceived. At the other end, the religion, which itself may be heterogeneous, is adapted to the social matrix of the host. Conversion thus involves considerable give and take. While observers are frequently drawn to dramatic introductions of the new and innovative, it is the middle ground² – the site of vigorous cross-cultural adaptation, synthesis and syncretism – that tends to be the best predictor of success and longevity. The middle ground is one of the dynamos driving regional, Eurasian and even world and global history.³ Within Eurasia, the Caucasian crossroads was an especially energetic middle ground throughout pre-modern times.

Talk of conversion elicits religion, and religion is central to any examination of late antique Caucasia. This is particularly true for Christianity, whose various sects and confessions predominated in southern Caucasia for all but the first century of the Sasanian regime. But Christianity had made earlier inroads. When the faith began to penetrate Caucasia in the second century, the region’s diverse but interconnected peoples already possessed sophisticated religious ideas, rich

¹ A massive literature is devoted to the subject of conversion. Nock 1933 is a groundbreaking study still demanding attention. My cross-cultural approach has been profoundly influenced by: Bartol’d 1977; Hasluck 1929; Lattimore 1940; and Fletcher 1995.

² A phrase popularised by Richard White’s inquiry into the encounters of indigenous peoples and Europeans in North America: White 1991.

³ Cross-cultural encounters are central to the so-called New World History. See, e.g.: McNeill 1977; Hodgson 1993; Bentley 1993 and 2002; Manning 2003; and McNeill J. and McNeill 2003. For the approach applied to the Armenian trade diaspora, see Aslanian 2011. World historians have yet to elaborate widely-accepted metageographical schemes prioritising cross-cultural communication and exchange. For the possibilities, see Lewis and Wigen 1997.

cultural traditions and ancient cosmopolitan histories.⁴ As the Parthian Arsacids consolidated their control over the fractured Near East and as the Roman Republic and then Empire attempted to cast its hegemony over the Black Sea world, indigenous kingdoms already thrived in Armenia Major, eastern Georgia and Caucasian Albania. Collectively and over the long haul these polities, their hinterlands and the highlands of the Caucasus Mountains constituted a northern theatre where imperial antagonisms frequently deteriorated into open conflict and protracted warfare.⁵ Imperial competition and the potential benefits to be reaped by playing one great power against the other contributed mightily to the Christianisation of Caucasia's dynastic monarchies in the first half of the fourth century.⁶ This phenomenon went hand-in-hand with the conversion of the Partho-Caucasian aristocratic houses at the heart of Caucasian society, a process about which we know disappointingly little. The conversion of these political élites made overt, regime-supported proselytisation possible.⁷

Caucasia's conversion to Christianity was a centuries-long, cross-cultural process. The notion of discrete "once-and-forever" ethnocentric conversions having incidental connections, or ones that were strictly ethno-hierarchical, is not borne out by a critical reading of the regional evidence. With impressive speed the new religion and existing local cultures reached a condominium. Not only was the unifying potential of Christianity quickly realised within particular *ethnies*⁸ – the case of the various Armenians has been investigated by Nicholas

⁴ Complex societies have existed in Caucasia since remote antiquity, including the Bronze Age Maikop and Kura-Araxes cultures, the last of which for a time spread as far south as Syria and Palestine: Kushnareva 1997. See also: Sagona 1984; and Edens 1995. Humanity's presence in Caucasia is yet more ancient: the region was inhabited by some of the earliest hominids to migrate from East Africa. Fossils of *Homo georgicus* preserved in the lava beds at Dmanisi in southern Georgia have been reliably dated to about 1.8 million years ago: Lordkipanidze D. *et al.* 2007.

⁵ The kingdoms of Colchis and Lazika in what would become western Georgia were geographically separated from K'art'li by the Surami ridge. These western lands and their peoples fall largely beyond the purview of this study. Given the area's closer relationship to Graeco-Roman culture, Classical texts and archaeological remains are particularly important. See: Lort'k'ip'anizé O. 1989; Braund 1994; and the publications of Tsetschladze.

⁶ The conversion of the Albanian King Urnayr occurred towards the end of this period.

⁷ "The hostility of the Armenian Aršakuni [i.e., Arsacids] to the Persian [i.e., Sasanian] usurpers drove Armenia closer to Rome, breaking the Compromise of Rhandaia and subjecting the country to Sasanian attacks and at times to outright conquest": Garsoïan 1997a, 71–72. But before the three royal conversions, Christianity had made significant inroads into southern Caucasia, not unlike the situation in the Roman Empire. We must wonder about the possibility of some of the local aristocratic houses having Christianised before the royal families.

⁸ On this term, see Smith 1986.

Adontz (Adonc')⁹ and others – but Christianity also transcended them on a regional scale, as Cyril Toumanoff so expertly revealed.¹⁰

One of the genuinely revolutionary consequences of Caucasia's royal and aristocratic conversions was the invention of distinctive scripts for the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian languages. Through a multifaceted pan-Caucasian effort at the turn of the fourth/fifth century, alphabetic scripts were devised by Christians with the goal of strengthening and propagating the faith through translated ecclesiastical literature.¹¹ The immediate stimulus was Christianisation. There were other factors, too, including the creation of scripts for several Aramaic languages under the later Parthian Arsacids. Writing systems for Elymaic, Characenean and Mandaic were based upon the Parthian chancery script.¹² Non-clerical groups soon profited from Caucasia's embryonic literary cultures. Over time the cosmopolitan spirit of early Christian Caucasia was undercut by élites – armed with their own literatures – who gave priority to their particular, mutually-reinforcing political, confessional and cultural-linguistic affiliations. In the long run these were appropriated by modern patriots who enlisted them at the cores of their master ethno-national narratives.

The purpose of the oldest original Georgian texts was to facilitate the consolidation and expansion of Christianity among the K'art'velians and their eastern Georgian neighbours.¹³ The Georgian literary sources in closest temporal proximity to Sasanian Iran are therefore Christian in function, structure and interest. Several Georgian hagiographies purport to derive from Sasanian times, but only three have reached us in *substantially* the same form as initially written:

⁹ See especially Adontz/Garsoïan 1970.

¹⁰ E.g. *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, the *magnum opus* of Toumanoff (1963), who recast the Armenian and Georgian interests of Adontz and Ivane Javakhišvili respectively, for example, into an integrated southern Caucasian vision. Although their methods differ, Toumanoff's regional, cross-cultural *approach* is broadly reminiscent of the philological researches of Nikolai Marr, e.g., the essays collected in Marr 1995.

¹¹ The degree of coordination has yet to be established. About the Silk Roads, Richard Foltz writes, "In general, there would appear to be a connection between the success of a religion in winning converts and the readiness with which the substance of that religion was translated into local vernaculars. It should be noted that successful translation is not merely linguistic; meaningful analogs must be found for symbols and concepts. In many cases such analogs between one cultural vocabulary and another simply do not exist and must be invented" (Foltz 1999, 17).

¹² For the fashioning of the Mandaic script in the second century AD, see Häberl 2006.

¹³ It also served to create a more or less standardised literary language for the disparate Georgian peoples. The same phenomenon is evident among Armenians and Albanians. All are manifestations of a broader cross-cultural project to Christianise the whole of southern Caucasia.

Iakob C'urtaveli's *Passion of St Šušanik*, late fifth century;

the anonymous *Passion of the Nine Children of Kolay*, fifth/sixth century; and,

the anonymous *Martyrdom of St Evstat'i Mc'xet'eli*, very beginning of the seventh century, although almost universally ascribed to the sixth century.

These *vitae*¹⁴ are conveyed in later manuscripts, the autographs and early copies having been lost.¹⁵ The gaping temporal chasm between the original authors and the oldest surviving redactions has led to intense scrutiny of narrative structure, syntax, morphology and vocabulary for clues about the texts' provenance and transmission. While none of these sources survives in a pristine state, internal criteria demonstrate that down to the tenth/eleventh century the *vitae* of Šušanik, Evstat'i and the children of Kolay were subject to *relatively* few alterations – accidental and intentional – affecting *overall* content and organisation.¹⁶ This having been said, there are indications of manipulation. For example, Georgian manuscripts produced before the seventh century were composed in a dialect scholars call *xanmeti* (ხანმეტი) in which the prefix *x-* (ხ-) indicates agreement in the second person subject and third person object.¹⁷ The three earliest Georgian *vitae* must have originally been composed in *xanmeti*, yet their extant witnesses are stripped of ancient *xanmeti* grammatical markers. Additionally, these texts show no traces of the subsequent *haemeti* (ჰამეტი) dialect similarly employing the prefix *h-* (ჰ-). *Haemeti* was sometimes used in the seventh through ninth century.¹⁸

Most significantly, all three narratives, particularly the more detailed *vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i, may have been adjusted by scribes to bring them into accord with later theological positions. On the basis of biblical phrases put into

¹⁴ Following the convention in medieval Western Europe, specialists refer to Christian hagiographical works, especially biographical ones, by the Latin *vitae*, “lives”. (Technically, martyrdom tales are *passiones*.) From their inception in the seventh-ninth century, and under the influence of hagiography, it was customary to name Georgian historiographical texts “lives” (sing. *c'xorebay*, ცხოვრებაჲ, mod. *c'xovreba*, ცხოვრება) after their principal characters, e.g., *The Life of the K'art'velian Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*. So as to clearly differentiate between hagiographical and historiographical sources, in the footnotes “*vita*” is employed for the former and English “*life*” – for the latter.

¹⁵ Oldest manuscript witnesses: Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, eleventh century (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts A-95); *Vita Children of Kolay*, tenth century (Ivērōn-57); and *Vita Evstat'i*, late tenth/early eleventh century (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts H-341). I wish to thank Alessandro Bruni for his insights into Ivērōn-57.

¹⁶ This does not preclude the possibility of early divergent traditions that have been lost or suppressed.

¹⁷ The fundamental publication is K'ajaia 1984. For an accessible discussion of *xanmeti*, see Tuite 1990. See also: Danelia and Sarjvelaže 1997, 104–127; and Gippert 2007a.

¹⁸ See: Šaniže 1957; and Danelia and Sarjvelaže 1997, 127–130.

the mouth of Šušanik, J. Neville Birdsall suggests that her extant Georgian *vita* might have been recalibrated to the Chalcedonian orientation of the K'art'velian Church following the schism with its Armenian counterpart in the early seventh century.¹⁹ Birdsall acknowledges, however, that a late fifth-century date is not impossible. Paul Peeters goes further by placing the original composition of the same *vita* after the Armeno-K'art'velian schism.²⁰ As documents contained in the Armenian *Girk' T'lt'oc'* (*Book of Letters*) make clear, Šušanik's memory was a bone of contention between feuding Armenian and K'art'velian hierarchs at the turn of the sixth/seventh century.²¹ Even if Šušanik's extant Georgian *vita* attained its received state shortly after the Third Council of Duin in 607 and was meant, in part, to assert a Chalcedonian position in the post-schism milieu, the text was firmly based on oral and perhaps written traditions deriving from the second half of the fifth century.²²

Like most surveys of Georgian literature, Korneli Kekelize's indispensable *K'art'uli literaturis istoria – A History of Georgian Literature* – commences with Iakob C'urtaveli's *Passion of Šušanik*, the text widely recognised as the oldest surviving original Georgian narrative.²³ But this place of honour potentially belongs to the anonymous *Passion of the Children of Kolay*. Judging from its language and syntax, this succinct *vita* (technically a *passio*) could have been written as early as the first half of the fifth century though it may belong to the sixth.²⁴ *The Passion of the Children of Kolay* contains no dates, no synchronisms and no explicit acknowledgement of its author or the circumstances of its composition.²⁵ We find reference neither to Iran and Mazdaism nor to any monarchs and polities, whether K'art'velian, Armenian, Albanian, Sasanian or Roman. Instead, the

¹⁹ Birdsall 2006b, 193–194. See also Thomson 1996b, 33–34.

²⁰ Peeters 1935, esp. 245ff.

²¹ *Girk' T'lt'oc'*, Polarean ed., #71, 78 and 81, 316–317, 336–338 and 363, Garsoïan trans., 548, 562–563 and 581. *Girk' T'lt'oc'*'s valuable evidence for Armeno-K'art'velian ecclesiastical relations must be treated with caution since it is an official compilation of *the Armenian Church* intended to bolster its positions.

²² On firmer ground, the Georgian-language *vita* may survive precisely because of the schism, its aftermath and renewed interest in Šušanik. The surviving Armenian version of Šušanik's *vita* postdates the Georgian. On the Armenian witness, cf. Muradyan 1996. For the Chalcedonian tailoring of *The Conversion of K'art'li*, see van Esbroeck 1998. Cf. the sanitisation of the surviving Georgian *vita* of the anti-Chalcedonian champion Peter the Iberian, but for a different interpretation, see Mgaloblišvili *forthcoming*.

²³ Kekelize 1960, "Iakob C'urtaveli", 113–122. Scholarly surveys of Georgian literature include: Kekelize 1960; the adaption of an earlier edition of Kekelize by Tarnishvili 1955; Outtier 1993; Blake 1924 and 1933; Karst 1934; and Rayfield 1994. For Georgian hagiography, see now Martin-Hisard 2011, and for its Armenian counterpart, Cowe 2011.

²⁴ Horn and Phenix Jr 2008, xxvi–xxvii, for the late fourth/early fifth century. See also Horn 2007, 278–281. Cf. Martin-Hisard 2011, 290, fn. 23: "The account of the martyrdom of the Children of Kola, which involves unidentified pagans, cannot possibly be dated".

²⁵ For this text, see Tarnishvili 1955, 401–403.

vita narrowly concentrates upon nine children who, having been attracted to Christianity, were slaughtered by their “pagan” (*carmart’uli*, წარმართული) parents. As presented, the generic story could have taken place almost anywhere cohabited by Christians and polytheists in Late Antiquity. Whatever its age, the value of *The Passion of the Children of Kolay* for Sasanian history is nominal.

By contrast, *The Passion of Šušānik* and *The Martyrdom of Evstat’i* are rich sources for the Sasanian world. They articulate a contemporaneous view from within the Iranian Commonwealth, though from the perspective of a non-Iranian and an increasingly non-Mazdean people. Considering the explicit religious purpose of the hagiographical genre and the escalating discord between Roman Christianity and Sasanian Zoroastrianism, the occasional enmity these two *vitae* display towards Iran is expected. But in their pages we do not find sweeping denunciations of Iran and Iranians. Instead, these texts identify local agents of the Sasanians as the immediate threat to early Christian Caucasia.²⁶

Sasanian Synchronisms

Although the *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat’i lack concrete temporal references, their initial passages are built around synchronisms that allow us to calculate approximate dates of composition, so long as we accept the prevailing view of these sources having been put into writing shortly after the events they describe. Iakob C’urtaveli (Jacob of Tsuravi), Šušānik’s confessor and the priestly author credited with her *vita*, begins:

It was in the eighth year of the reign of the king of the Iranians [that] the *bidaxš* [Geo. *pitiaxši*] Varsk’en, son of Aršūšay, traveled to the [Sasanian] royal court, for he too had been a Christian at first, born of a Christian father and mother.²⁷

The initial passage of the anonymous *Martyrdom of Evstat’i* is structured in a comparable way:

In the tenth year of [the reign of] King Xusrō, when Arvand Gušnasp was *marzbān* [Geo. *marzapani*] of K’art’li, a certain man, the son of a *mowbed* [Geo.

²⁶ One of the remarkable characteristics of these two sources is their non-ethnocentric vision of Christianity in southern Caucasia. Both texts were composed before the establishment of *ethnie*-privileging “national” churches, a development belonging to the seventh century and later.

²⁷ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11₅₋₇: “იყო მერვესა წელსა [მრ...] სპარსთა მეფისასა კარად სამეფოდ წარემართა ვარსკენ პიტიახში, ძმ არშუშაისი, რამეთუ პირველ იგიცა იყო ქრისტიანე, ნაშობი მამისა და დედისა ქრისტიანეთაჲ”. Aršūšay is the Old Georgian variant of Aššūšā[y].



Figure 1.1. Bolnisi Sioni.



Figure 1.2. Foundational inscription, Bolnisi Sioni. Georgian National Museum, T'bilisi.



Figure 1.3. Foundational inscription, Bolnisi Sioni. Detail of precise *in situ* copy. The last legible characters of the upper line are ႁႁႁႁ[ႁ], *PERO*[*Z*].

Late antique Georgian literary and epigraphical sources thus fixed chronology by the reigning Sasanian *šāhan šāh* and not by the monarch of eastern Georgia and certainly not by the Roman emperor.³² The Bolnisi inscription yields the most explicit reference: it specifies Pērōz (𐭯𐭮𐭥𐭭𐭮, პეროზ; r. 459–484), the only Sasanian ruler of this name.³³ And it places the start of the construction of Bolnisi Sioni exactly two decades into his reign, which corresponds to 478/479.³⁴ The late Valeri Silogava speculated that Kavād I (r. 488–496, 498–531) was once mentioned in the damaged portion of the inscription. But any such reading remains provisional.³⁵ If for the sake of argument we presume the original inscription's reporting of the completion of the basilica in the fifteenth year of Kavād's tenure, then the edifice would have been finished around 503, counting from 488 and ignoring Kavād's captivity in the infamous "Prison of Oblivion".³⁶ Otherwise, the date of completion must be 493/494, which in the absence of other evidence I accept.

Evstat'i's *vita* refers to a Sasanian king called Xuasro (ხუასრო), the Old Georgian rendering of Xusrō, a name created from Middle Iranian *husraw*, "famous, of good repute" (var. *Khusrau*; Gk. *Chosroēs*, Χοσρόης).³⁷ Georgian Xuasro, like Arabic *Kisrā*, has a dual meaning: it is both a proper name and a generic designation for all Sasanian *šāhan šāhs*. This is reminiscent of the application of *caesar* (Gk. *καῖσαρ*; Geo. *keisari*, კეისარი) to Roman and, from the seventh century, Byzantine emperors. There may also be a Parthian influence

1). For other examples, see Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.64, II.65 and III.40. On dates in Armenian texts based on the regnal year of the *šāhan šāh*, see: Garsoïan 1999b, 55–56, 441 and 512; and Greenwood 2008b, 24–25. Early Armenian ecclesiastical councils were customarily dated according to the reigning *šāhan šāh*: Garsoïan 1984, 227 and 237.

³² For the Christian-era development of a Georgian creation date and the derivative Georgian era, called *k'oronikon*[i] (ქორიკონიკონი) < Gk. *χρονικόν*, see: Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 500–504; Rapp 2003, 386; and Grumel 1958, 151–153. See also T'aqaišvili 1935, but note that while the *k'oronikon* was popularised by the K'art'velian Bagratids, it was based on the existing (pre-Bagratid) K'art'velian creation date that reckoned the passing of 5604 years from the creation of the world to the birth of Christ.

³³ Pērōz also might be mentioned in a Greek inscription (perhaps dating to 480) at Mastara in Armenia Major: Greenwood 2004, G.15, 87.

³⁴ This may be linked to a relaxed Sasanian stance in Christian Caucasia following the defeat of a major Iranian force by the Hephthalites, during which Pērōz himself was captured. Pērōz again attacked the Hephthalites in 484, but this time he perished in battle. For these failed campaigns, see Greatrex 1998, 46–47. Pērōz's successor Balāš (Vālagš; r. 484–488) attempted to placate the peoples of Caucasia by granting freedom of worship: Lazar P'arpec'i, caps. 87–96. See also Greatrex 1998, 48.

³⁵ Silogava 1994, 107. *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 138, credits the K'art'velian king P'arsman IV (r. 406–409) with building a church at Bolnisi.

³⁶ On Kavād's temporary overthrow and the brief rule of his brother Zāmāsp, see Daryaei 2009, 26–27.

³⁷ MacKenzie 1986, 45. For the thirteenth-century rendering *Xvasro* (ხვასრო), see Ioane Šavt'eli, *Abdulmesiani*, 38.1, Lolašvili ed., 129.

here, for the generic throne-name Aršak was used by Arsacid kings, including those ruling in Caucasia.³⁸ In any event, medieval Georgians imagined the Sasanians to have been founded by a certain Xuasro and refer to the family as the “Xuasrovanni” (ხუასროვნები), “[those] descended from Xusrō”.³⁹ If Evstat’i’s hagiographer has in mind a *šāhan šāh* actually named Xusrō, a conjecture prevailing in scholarship, we are left with two viable candidates: Xusrō I *anōšag-ruwān* (var. Anūširwān, “Immortal Soul”, r. 531–579) and Xusrō II (r. 590, 591–628).⁴⁰ If, however, the *vita*’s Xuasro is a generic designation for all *šāhan šāhs*, a probable date in the middle to late sixth or early seventh century is the best we can say.

The synchronism in *The Passion of Šušānik* is more ambiguous. Hagiographer Iakob C’urtaveli does not specify any Sasanian *šāhan šāhs*, even by the blanket term “Xuasro”, and instead locates the start of his tale in “the eighth year of the king of the Iranians [*sparst’a mep’e*]”. Beyond a handful of Christian figures, bishops and martyrs, C’urtaveli names only Šušānik’s apostate husband Varsk’en, the *bidaxš* (Geo. *pitiaxši*), “toparch”, of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands; his brother Jojik;⁴¹ and their father Aršušay (var. Aršuša[y]).⁴² But Caucasian historiographical sources allow us to date the story. In his ca. 800 continuation of *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*, Ps.-Juanšer Juanšeriani embeds Šušānik’s martyrdom within the reigns of Bakur III (?–580) – whose death marks the beginning of the K’art’velian *interregnum* (ca. 580–888) – and *Šāhan šāh* “Urmizd”.⁴³ The terse *Royal List II*, exclusively found within the corpus *Mok’c’evay k’art’lisay* and echoing the same tradition as Ps.-Juanšer, also arranges Šušānik’s demise within the sway of Bakur III.⁴⁴ Ps.-Juanšer does not elaborate on this Hormizd, but in light of Bakur III’s chronology he must be Hormizd IV (r. 579–590). The historian had fallen under the impression that Šušānik’s martyrdom took place under a

³⁸ “It is a curious fact that the Parthian rulers of the house of Arsak were all on principle called Aršak, the family name being as it were a royal title ...”: Widengren 1959, 253–254. See also Dąbrowa 2010, 124.

³⁹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 136₁₈.

⁴⁰ The identification of this Xuasro is a bone of contention in the blistering debate between Marina Č’xartišvili and Davit’ Musxelišvili over the date of *The Martyrdom of Evstat’i* and the methods of ascertaining it: Č’xartišvili 1994, 3–53; Č’xartišvili 2005; and Musxelišvili 2007.

⁴¹ Jojik (Ջոյիկ) in the Armenian version: *Vita Šušānik* (Arm.), e.g., cap. 5, Abulaže ed., 14₃. This name is known in other Georgian contexts, too, e.g., the *patrikios* Jojik specified in an inscription on a wall painting at Oški dating to 1036: Eastmond 1998, 232.

⁴² For the sketchy chronology of the *bidaxš*es of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands, see Toumanoff 1990, 543. See also: Garsoïan 1999b, 339–353; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Gugark’”, 466. According to Toumanoff’s calculations, Aršušay II held power just before 470; his son Varsk’en I was *bidaxš* from ca. 470 to 482; and Varsk’en was succeeded by Aršušay III (482–post 540/541). See Appendix IV below.

⁴³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 215₂₆–221.

⁴⁴ *Royal List II*, §17, Rapp trans., 308.

king of kings Hormizd (this information is not found in her received *vita*) and accordingly situated her demise within the discussion of Bakur III, Hormizd IV's contemporary.⁴⁵ The compiler of *Royal List II* blindly repeated Ps.-Juanšer's error – or, quite possibly, the error of a common but lost source.⁴⁶

An invaluable Armenian history of the late fifth century demonstrates that Šušanik's murder actually took place in or near the reign of Hormizd III (457–?459).⁴⁷ Like his kinsmen writing before the schism of the Armenian and K'art'velian churches in the early seventh century, Łazar P'arpec'i does not mention Šušanik. But in the context of a mid-fifth-century alliance of Christian Armenians, K'art'velians and Albanians against the Sasanians, P'arpec'i alludes to Varsk'en's father: the *bdeašx* Ašušay “from Virk' [i.e., eastern Georgia and/or its marchlands]”. Ašušay was “... a wise and prudent man and had as wife an Arcruni, the sister-in-law of the great noble of the Mamikoneans, Vardan's brother”.⁴⁸ She is later identified as Anušvram, sister of Juik; her children were Vahan, Vasak, Artašēs and Vard.⁴⁹ Reminiscent of Varsk'en in *The Passion of St Šušanik*, Ašušay appeared before the Sasanian Yazdgird II (r. 438–457).⁵⁰ More to the point, P'arpec'i explicitly mentions Varsk'en and his demise: “Vaxt'ang killed the impious *bdeašx* Vazgēn in the twenty-fifth year of King Pērōz”.⁵¹ The twenty-fifth and last year of Pērōz's rule corresponds to 484 AD. Vaxt'ang (Վախթանգ) – P'arpec'i's transcription of Vaxtang (ვახტანგ) – is the K'art'velian king

⁴⁵ Rapp 2003, 223–225; and Toumanoff 1963, 262–263 and 418–421.

⁴⁶ But the potential (lost) source identified in the Epilogue was highly Iranic in structure and content and might not have mentioned Šušanik's martyrdom. This helps to explain the chronological gaffe, for Ps.-Juanšer attempted to insert Šušanik into the received Iranic tradition and misjudged the identity of “Urmizd”.

⁴⁷ Toumanoff 1963, 262, for the date 475; and Peeters 1935, for 482–484. Both dates fall within the reign of Šāhan šāh Pērōz.

⁴⁸ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 25, and for the quotation, cap. 27, Tēr-Mkrtč'ean and S. Malxasean eds., 52^{17–19}, Thomson trans., 91: “... բոլորին Վրաց Աշուշայ, որ էր այլ խելացի և խորհրդական և ունէր կին յազգէն Արծրունեաց, գբնի մեծի սեպչին Մամիկոնէից, եղբօրն Վարդանայ”.

⁴⁹ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 62.

⁵⁰ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 59.

⁵¹ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 66, Tēr-Mkrtč'ean and Malxasean eds., 118^{20–21} = Thomson trans., 171: “Վախթանգ սպանանէր զբոլորին Վազգէն յամի քաններորդի չինդերորդի Պերդի աղբայրի.” Note the synchronism with the šāhan šāh. The form Vazgen (Վազգէն) is encountered in *Vita Šušanik* (Arm.), e.g., cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 3^{8–9}. Remarkably, the Georgian historiographical tradition credits King Bakur (d. ca. 580) with the murder of Va[r]sk'en: Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 216. The muddled chronology is an artefact of the story's later insertion into historiographical sources. The emphasis of the monarchy's violent removal of the apostate *bidaxš* (“[t]hey cut him to pieces and hung the fragments on a tree”: Thomson trans., 228) is a later effort to demonstrate the crown's superiority over the *bidaxšate*.

Vaxtang I Gorgasali whose long reign stretched from 447 to 522.⁵² *Bdeašx Vazgēn* is the figure known in Georgian as *Pitixaxši Varsk'en*, toparch of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier.⁵³ Significantly, P'arpec'i enjoyed tremendous access to the household of the *bidaxš*. His patron Vahan Mamikonean was Šušanik's cousin. Along with Vahan and his brothers, P'arpec'i had lived on the estate of Varsk'en's renowned father, Aršušay (Arm. Ašušay).⁵⁴ In light of P'arpec'i's testimony, Šušanik's martyrdom must have occurred during the reign of Vaxtang I, which coincides with Hormizd III, not Hormizd IV.

The absence of the K'art'velian king and his realm is characteristic of all three early Georgian hagiographies. C'urtaveli wrote from the viewpoint of the largely autonomous *bidaxšate* then headquartered at C'urtavi⁵⁵ (whose location is not certain) and not from the vantage of the monarchy based at Mc'xet'a. But Evstat'i's anonymous hagiographer was quite possibly a resident of Mc'xet'a or had some direct familiarity it. Despite the fact that much of Evstat'i's *vita* takes place in the former royal city, the K'art'velian crown again plays no role. The capital had been transferred to nearby Tp'ilisi (mod. T'bilisi) under King Vaxtang's son Dač'i (r. 522–534), so the change of venue could be a factor. Crucially, if the text were written *post ca.* 580, as I think it was, K'art'velian royal authority had already been suppressed by the Sasanians, hence the silence. We shall return to this crucial issue below.

⁵² I usually observe the regnal dates computed by Toumanoff (esp. 1963 and 1990), although some – including those of Vaxtang – are rarely accepted by specialists in the Georgian Republic. For the conventional modern Georgian reckoning, see Lort'k'ip'anizē and Metreveli 2000.

⁵³ Vask'en in some variant manuscripts of Šušanik's *vita*: Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11, *apparatus criticus*, #13.

⁵⁴ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 62. See also Thomson in P'arpec'i, introduction, 15. P'arpec'i's valuable testimony for eastern Georgia is specially investigated in Janašia L.-N. 1962. Another Armenian historian, the tenth-century *katholikos* Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, also resided in Gugark': LIII.34, Maksoudian trans., 189.

⁵⁵ *Girk' T'lt'oc' (The Book of Letters)* preserves important information about C'urtavi (Arm. C'urtaw) in a set of Armenian polemical documents. Among other things, these endeavoured to undermine the legitimacy of the K'art'velian Church once it had openly embraced the christological formula of Chalcedon in the early seventh century. The Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands and Šušanik's memory were often evoked by the Armenian prelate. The tenth-century Armenian historian Uxtanēs, who relied heavily upon *Girk' T'lt'oc'*, reports in his time the decline of C'urtavi, then called Gajenk', "the residence of the great *bdeašx* of Gugark'" ("... *եղեալ Յուրտան այն բնակարանն Բգեշխի մեծի Պուզարացոյն*": Uxtanēs, II.18, trans. in Garsoïan 1999b, 340–341 (with Arm. text), and Arzoumanian trans., 62–63. For Uxtanēs' account of Šušanik in the context of the later schism, see II.67.

Iranians in K'art'li: The Case of Gwrobandak

Despite their open yet measured enmity towards Sasanian Iran and Zoroastrianism, the *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat'i – like contemporaneous Armenian works, whose hostility tend to be more pronounced – concede close relations between southern Caucasia and Iran.⁵⁶ As we have seen, Varsk'en travelled to the Iranian court for an audience with the king of kings. By pledging his allegiance to the *šāhan šāh*, the *bidaxš* shrewdly recalibrated his loyalty from the K'art'velian monarchy towards the Sasanian Empire. This act entailed not only Varsk'en's public apostasy to Sasanian Zoroastrianism but also his persistent efforts to convert his family, particularly the indefatigable Šušānik.⁵⁷ So far as we can ascertain, Varsk'en did not attempt to force other Christians under his jurisdiction to convert to Zoroastrianism. In fact, neither Šušānik's nor Evstat'i's *vita* is set against the backdrop of a systematic Sasanian/Zoroastrian assault upon Christians.⁵⁸ The "Great Persecution" of Šāpūr II (r. 309–379) had taken place in the 340s.⁵⁹ Large-scale persecution may have been renewed at end of the reign of Yazdgird I (399–420); it was definitely in motion under his successor Bahrām V (r. 420–438) when, *inter alia*, the Sasanians dispensed with royal authority in Armenia Major. Religious animosity was a key ingredient of the Armenian insurrection against Yazdgird II (r. 438–457), which ended in the well-known massacre of Armenian *naxarars* in 451. Thereafter, under Hormizd III (r. 457–?459) and Pērōz (r. 459–484), empire-wide attacks against Christians dissipated. Šušānik was martyred in the early part of this period; the construction of the Bolnisi Sioni basilica commenced towards its end. And, so, Šušānik was killed by her Sasanian-aligned husband, Varsk'en, a solitary act that was not part of a systematic anti-Christian program. The contours of Evstat'i's martyrdom are similar. Following complaints lodged by Iranian expatriates in Mc'xet'a, the holy man was put to death by order of a high-ranking local Sasanian official. Significantly, the Zoroastrian priesthood is afforded no role in any of these early martyrdom episodes, and Evstat'i's demise was not the result of organised

⁵⁶ Martin-Hisard 2008a credits this situation in large measure to the lack of theological controversy in late antique K'art'li. Tempering the hostility of Armenian narratives is the third book of Łazar P'arpec'i: Greenwood 2008b. This is compelling evidence for a paradigm of peaceful interaction that was interrupted by occasional violence and persecution (Greenwood, personal communication, 3 October 2011).

⁵⁷ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 12⁷⁻⁸, for "a daughter of the king" (սեղևոյ թղթոնս). In return for Varsk'en's conversion to Zoroastrianism, the *šāhan šāh* is said to have promised him a Sasanian princess in marriage.

⁵⁸ Amussen 1983, for the relative toleration of Christianity across the Sasanian age. See also: Wood 2012; Williams 1996; McDonough 2006; and Garsoïan 2009b. Pourshariati 2008, 348, observes that "[t]he central authorities' relations with the Jewish and Christian communities living in their realm was ... not directed by any systematic policy ..."

⁵⁹ See now Walker 2006, 109–112.

persecution. The same holds true for the children of Kolay, whose infuriated “pagan” parents were responsible for their murder.⁶⁰

The pockets of Zoroastrian Iranians residing permanently in Caucasia sometimes mobilised against kinsmen who had apostatised to Christianity. *The Martyrdom of Evstat'i* provides a remarkable glimpse into the colony of Iranian émigrés residing in Mc'xet'a, the spiritual centre and former capital of K'art'li. The most acclaimed defector was the future St Evstat'i. Originally named Gwrobandak, Evstat'i was a native of Ganzak (Geo. Ganzak), a city in northwestern Iran. According to his hagiographer, in the late sixth century Ganzak was home to a substantial community of “Christians” (*k'risteaneni*, ქრისტიანები) shepherded by its own “bishop” (*ebiskoposī*, ეპისკოპოსი).⁶¹ Ganzak's “Christians” allegedly outnumbered the adherents of other faiths. Indeed, the East Syrian Church – the Church of the East or “Nestorian” Church, then based at Ctesiphon – enjoyed a considerable presence in Ganzak from at least the second half of the fifth century.⁶² During his interrogation by Vēžan Bu[r]zmihr⁶³ (Geo. Vežan Buzmir), the Sasanian *marzbān* (*marzapani*, მარზპანი) of K'art'li headquartered in Tp'ilisi, the martyr-to-be also spoke of an active Jewish community in Ganzak.⁶⁴

Gwrobandak was not simply an Iranian immigrant: he was the son of a *mowbed*, a high-ranking Zoroastrian priest. In accordance with Iranian custom Gwrobandak was expected to assume his father's place. Not only had he abandoned Iran but he had repudiated his father's prestigious profession and had chosen the life of a lowly cobbler.⁶⁵ In Mc'xet'a Gwrobandak took the next step by formally converting to Christianity.⁶⁶ The young Iranian now became Evstat'i (Gk. Εὐστάθιος, Eustathios; Lat. Eustathius), the embrace of a Christian name along with a Christian wife being unequivocal public badges of his religious transformation.⁶⁷ Evstat'i's hagiographer reports the performance of

⁶⁰ There is no hint of “pagan” signifying “Zoroastrian” here. In this *vita*, political and ecclesiastical officials are vaguely presented. The anonymous hagiographer alludes only to a local *mt'avari* (prince) and a Christian *xuc'esi/mydeli* (priest): *Vita Children of Kolay*, e.g., caps. 1–2, Abulaže ed., 184, 184₂₀ and 185₁₂₊₁₃.

⁶¹ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed. 31, esp. ll. 27–28.

⁶² Fiey 1973, 398–401. For “Nestorian” and the Church of the East, see now Wood 2013.

⁶³ On Bu[r]zmihr, see also below, p. 71 and p. 97 (for the sacred Zoroastrian fire Ādur Burzēn-Mihr).

⁶⁴ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed. 35. For the heterodox religious environment of the Sasanian Empire's northern and northeastern sectors, see Crone 2012. See also Pourshariati 2008, ch. 5, esp. 368–392.

⁶⁵ Cf. Mar Qardagh. See Walker 2006, esp. 210–211.

⁶⁶ His *vita* seems to report two ritual “baptisms”, for which see further.

⁶⁷ The assumption of a Christian name, especially for solitaries, monks and clerics, was common throughout the medieval period. A colophon in the Sin.Geo.N.50 manuscript of the first half of the tenth century records the donation of the manuscript to St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai by Iovane, the former Aršuša[y]: Alek'size *et al.* 2005, 284 and 411; and Alek'size's introduction to Sin.Geo.N.50, facsimile ed., 13 and 18. Similarly, Murvanos

his hero's baptism by none other than the foremost ecclesiastic in K'art'li, the *katholikos*.⁶⁸ If this actually took place, news of the important event would have travelled throughout eastern Georgia. When it came to light that members of Mc'xet'a's Iranian community⁶⁹ had snubbed an Iranian festival, identified by a "K'art'velised" rendition of the undocumented Middle Persian *tōzīg*,⁷⁰ complaints were lodged with Sasanian officials against Evstat'i and seven other men who had succumbed to Christianity.⁷¹ The grievance was heard by the Sasanian commandant, the *c'ixist'avi* (Հոբոհոսո; Arm. *hambarakapet*, Համբարակապետ) Vistahm (Geo. Ustam), who conveniently deflected the thorny matter to the *marzbān* Arvand Gušnasp,⁷² the Sasanian viceroy of eastern Georgia sitting in nearby Tp'ilisi.⁷³ Two of the accused acknowledged their actions and renounced Christianity. The others served out prison sentences. Under the subsequent *marzbān* Vēžan Buzmihr, fresh charges were levelled against Evstat'i and a certain Step'anē (Stephen). Syrian nobles won Step'anē's release by confirming his Syrian background and ancestral attachment to Christianity.⁷⁴ Evstat'i had no such defence and at any rate had no intention of backing down. Instead, he is made to lecture the *marzbān* about the virtues of his faith through a fascinating summary of Judaeo-Christian history. Unmoved, Vēžan ordered Evstat'i's

became Peter the Iberian, for which see the Georgian *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Geo.), cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 217^{24–25}. Cf. the received Syriac version, *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), caps. 5, 14 and 40. At cap. 40, hagiographer John Rufus emphasises that Peter the Iberian and his companion John the Eunuch (from Lazika in western Georgia) were originally named Nabarnugios and Mithridatos respectively. See also Horn and Phenix Jr 2008, xxiv and lxi. Colophons in later Georgian manuscripts copied in the vicinity of Antioch mention Basil, the former T'oreli (Djobadze 1976, 21), and Arsen, the former P'arsman (*ibid.*, 30). The same trend is evident elsewhere in the Near East and the Iranian Commonwealth. Thus, the Christianised Parthian Mihrānīd Grigor, who was martyred during the reign of Xusrō II, was originally named Pīrāngušnasp (see below). Before her baptism, the Iranian martyr Mariam – a relative of Xusrō II – was named Gulanduxt: *Vita Gulanduxt* (Geo.), §1, Kekeliže ed., 210^{3–5}, citing the Georgian version of her *vita*. For Gulanduxt and the context of her *vita*, see Brock and Harvey 1998, 67. In a different context, see Widengren 1959, 253, for the taking of a new throne-name by the *šāhan šāh* at his coronation.

⁶⁸ Here rendered *kat'alikoz* (კათალიკოსი): *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 7, Abulaže ed., 43.

⁶⁹ Some of the Iranian colonists may have been lawyers: Gippert 2004, 108–110.

⁷⁰ See below, p. 60.

⁷¹ It is not impossible that some of these men were Manichaeans.

⁷² Arvand ultimately derives from Avestan *aurand*, "mighty, hero". Variants of the name are fairly common in Armenian (e.g., Eruand); the Eruandid (Orontid) dynasty of Armenia had ended in the early second century BC. For the name, see: Toumanoff 1963, 278; and Justi 1895, 40.

⁷³ Martin-Hisard 1998b, 498, for the possibility of Arvand Gušnasp succeeding as *marzbān* the Christian convert and martyr Pīrāngušnasp-Grigor.

⁷⁴ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 35.

beheading. Thus, Gwrobandak's journey from Zoroastrian priest-in-waiting to Christian martyr and saint was completed.⁷⁵

Gwrobandak the Manichaean?

Gwrobandak's Zoroastrian connections could not be more obvious: his father was a Zoroastrian *mowbed* and his hometown, Ganzak, was a locus of Zoroastrianism thanks to the nearby sacred fire of Ādur Gušnasp specially venerated by the Sasanians. Yet as a young man residing in Ganzak, Gwrobandak forever turned his back on Zoroastrianism:⁷⁶

"After I had [come to] understand and [had been] informed about everything from the archdeacon Samoel, everything from Creation until now, and I had considered every [aspect] of the religions of the Jews and the Christians, I believed in God [Who is] eternal and His Son Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. *And that is how I have been baptised* and no one will separate me from Christ until my soul rises [to Heaven] ..." ⁷⁷

Gwrobandak's baptism is not as straightforward as it might seem. Following the synchronism mentioning the *šāhan šāh* and the *marzbān* of K'art'li, the *vita* foreshadows Gwrobandak's migration to eastern Georgia:⁷⁸

And he was a pagan, and his name was Gwrobandak, and he was a youth of about thirty [years].

And he came to the city of Mc'xet'a and was trained as a cobbler. And he saw the Christians [holding] services and worshipping Christ and [witnessed]

⁷⁵ In light of his experiences, Gwrobandak-Evstat'i must be placed in the company of the Iranian martyrs. Some of these murdered Iranians, like Gwrobandak-Evstat'i himself, were sons and daughters of Zoroastrian *mowbeds*. For the broader context, see: Walker 2006; and Rist 1996. Martin-Hisard 1998b, 493–496, emphasises this framework for understanding Evstat'i, drawing attention to the martyrdom of the Mihrānid Pīrāngušnasp, general and *marzbān* of Albania and eastern Georgia who converted to Christianity ca. 620. While it may be tempting to equate Arvand Gušnasp and Pīrāngušnasp, the similarity of names can be explained by a shared Parthian Mihrānid matrix.

⁷⁶ This section revisits and extends Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, esp. 279–290.

⁷⁷ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 7, Abulaže ed., 42, ^{21–26}, emphasis added: "მაშინ ვითარცა გულისკმა-ყვავ და ვცან ყოველი სამოელ არქედიაკონისაგან დასაბამითანი ყოველი ვიდრე აქამომდე და მივიწიე ყოველსა ზედა რჩულსა ჰურიათასა და ქრისტეანეთასა, მრწმენა მე ღმერთი დაუსაბამოდ და ძმ მისი იესუ ქრისტემ და სული წმიდა მისი. და ამით ნათელ-მიღებებს და ვერვინ განმაშოროს მე ქრისტესგან ვიდრე სულისა ჩემისა აღმოსლვამდე..." See also Lang trans., 110.

⁷⁸ Cf. Mar Qardagh's abandonment of his Sasanian administrative post and his severing of relations with his (Zoroastrian) family: Walker 2006, esp. 206.

the manifestation of the power of the Holy Cross. He became enamoured with the Christian religion and he believed in Christ. *And once he had learned [how] to make shoes, he sought a Christian wife, he became a Christian, and he received baptism. And when he was baptised he was called by the name Evstat'i. And the holy Evstat'i lived in the Christian [religion] and in the virtue of Christ.*⁷⁹

It is extraordinary that the hagiographer should brand Gwrobandak a “pagan” (*carmart'i*, წარმართი) upon his arrival in Mc'xet'a if he had already undergone a Christian baptism in Ganzak. Although there is some ambiguity in the first passage, it maintains in no uncertain terms Gwrobandak's “Christian” instruction by a certain “archdeacon” Samoel while the saint-to-be still lived in Iran. Here we should remember the timing of the outward signs of Gwrobandak's religious reorientation. His christening as Evstat'i and marriage to a Christian woman (whether she was an Iranian/Parthian, a K'art'velian or of some other origin we do not know) materialised only after his baptism in Mc'xet'a and not during his “Christian” phase in Ganzak. If the two passages affirm separate rituals, and I think they do, a conundrum arises: a second Christian baptism was canonically unacceptable and, besides, the religious and confessional pluralism of contemporaneous eastern Georgia – in many ways still immune from divisive obsessions with orthodoxy and heresy⁸⁰ – would have made unnecessary the baptism of an already baptised adherent of, say, the East Syrian Church.⁸¹

How do we account for this peculiar situation? It is not impossible that a later Chalcedonian scribe who was unwilling to create a comprehensively sanitised tradition⁸² detected Evstat'i's attachment to a heretical confession/

⁷⁹ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 1, Abulaze ed., 30³⁻¹², emphases added: “და წარმართ იყო იგი, და სახელი ერქუა მას გურობანდაკ, და დღითა ერმა იყო იგი ვითარ ოც და ათ წლის. | და მოვიდა იგი ქალაქად მცხეთად და ისწავლებოდა კეცლსა მეკამლეობისასა. და ხედვიდა იგი რჩულსა ქრისტეანეთასა და მსახურებასა ქრისტესსა და წმიდისა ჯუარისა ძალისა ჩინებასა. შეიყუარა მან რჩული ქრისტეანობისად და პრწმენა ქრისტე. და ვითარ ისწავა მეკამლეობად, ითხოვა მან ცოლი ქრისტეანს და თვთ ქრისტეანე იქმნა და ნათელი მოიღო. ხოლო ნათლის-ცემასა მისსა უწოდეს სახელი ევსტათი. და ცხონდებოდა წმიდად ევსტათი ქრისტეანობასა შინა და სათნოებასა ქრისტესსა”. Cf. Lang trans., 95. See also *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 3, for Evstat'i and his Christian Iranian and Syrian companions claiming to have been attracted to Christianity only after their arrivals in K'art'li.

⁸⁰ For the pluralistic religious milieu of contemporary eastern Georgia, see: Ceret'eli *unpub.*; and Martin-Hisard 2008a.

⁸¹ Martin-Hisard 1998b, 503, accepts a literal interpretation and has Gwrobandak-Evstat'i receiving his first Christian instruction from what she terms a Nestorian archdeacon in Ganzak.

⁸² Consider, e.g., the radical rewriting of the tradition of Peter the Iberian. Other figures, like the important *katholikos* Kwrion of the early seventh century, were entirely excised from the Georgian literary canon.

religion and purified the saint by having him undergo a fictive second baptism in Mc'xet'a. If Gwrobandak was actually baptised twice, it is conceivable that the *katholikos* of K'art'li, who purportedly carried out the ritual, acted uncanonically by rebaptising a member of the East Syrian Church. But contemporaneous Georgian sources report no examples of this kind of behaviour. If there were two baptisms, then we must consider whether Gwrobandak had first been initiated into a Christian-like religion and we must consequently entertain the possibility of Gwrobandak's "Christian" instruction in Ganzak representing initiation into a Manichaean congregation.

The religion established by Mani (216–276) is one of the most notorious, long-lived and widely disbursed products of the trans-Eurasian Silk Roads. Mani fused original ideas with elements appropriated from Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Christianity was of special importance: its ideas, symbols and vocabulary were so prevalent that Jesus is "the most visible figure in Manichaean mythology".⁸³ In cosmopolitan environments, Manichaeism could be misconstrued as a Christian sect, a phenomenon we observe in *The Martyrdom of Evstat'i*.⁸⁴ Precisely how and why Gwrobandak ended up in K'art'li is unknown, but he would have found a society whose religious life was remarkably plural and heterodox.⁸⁵ So far as we can tell, Manichaeism had a limited presence in sixth- and early seventh-century K'art'li (a third-century mission to eastern Georgia bore little if any fruit),⁸⁶ and yet its conspicuous Christian adaptations would not have made it out of place.

Ganzak, Gwrobandak's hometown, was a hub not only of Zoroastrianism and East Syrian Christianity but also, to some degree, Manichaeism.⁸⁷ In earlier times, at least, Ganzak had a definite association with Manichaeism: Mani himself had been active within the city. In the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis* (CMC), Mani is made to say: "In [the land] of the Medes I went [to the brothers in] Ganzak".⁸⁸ To quote Michel Tardieu's paraphrase of this source, in Ganzak Mani "healed the daughter of a wealthy man and conceived the institutional embryo of his church in the form of messengers [*presbeutai* and *apostoloi*], whom he succeeded

⁸³ Foltz 1999, 76.

⁸⁴ Durkin-Meisterernst 2012, for the close relationship, both real and perceived, of Zoroastrianism/Zurvanism and Manichaeism.

⁸⁵ Examined by Mgaloblišvili in her outstanding unpub. typescript "The Ideological Situation in 3rd–4th Century Iberia and How It Is Expressed in Georgian Literature".

⁸⁶ Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 269–275, for the Manichaean mission to a K'art'velian king (Waručān-šāh) named Haḇzā testified in fragments of a Manichaean missionary history discovered in Turkestan and the Turfan oasis in Xinjiang. Haḇzā is the pretender Amazasp (r. 260–265) who was supported by the Sasanians against the legitimate, Roman-leaning Mihrdat II (r. 249–265). For this "anti-king" Amazasp, see Toumanoff 1969a, 18–19. For Haḇzā, see also Henning 1944. This third-century mission is examined in more detail below, p. 160.

⁸⁷ See Fiey 1973, 398–401.

⁸⁸ *Life of Mani*, Gardner and Lieu trans., #121, 69.

in sending into the Caucasus (Armenia and Georgia)".⁸⁹ The hodgepodge of Christians and Manichaeans in Ganzak explains how the author of Evstat'i's *vita* could portray "Christians" as constituting the religious majority of the city.⁹⁰

Gwrobandak's depiction as a "pagan" when he first crossed into eastern Georgia would seem to be an effort by the hagiographer – or a subsequent scribe – to shroud the saintly Evstat'i's heterodox background. Once established in Mc'xet'a, the former Manichaean was baptised as a Christian. Because Samoel the *katholikos* of K'art'li (reportedly) performed the rite with his own hands, the unspoken implication may be that the chief prelate took a more stringent stand on Manichaeism.⁹¹ Moreover, the baptism of a young man who had been groomed for the Zoroastrian high priesthood also demanded special attention. All the while, the received text never refers to Manichaeism by name, and although it disparages "paganism" it makes no obvious attempt to undermine the faith established by Mani. Had Manichaeism been mentioned in the lost autograph (this is not at all certain), it would have been deliberately removed in or after the mid-seventh century, following the definite triumph of Chalcedonian Christology and the concomitant concern with heresy. As a consequence, the embryonic K'art'velian "national" church would have had no discernible ties with Mani's infidel/heretical teachings. Direct references to Manichaeism are lacking, yet Evstat'i's *vita* incorporates an unusual Gospel harmony that may have been partly influenced by similar Manichaean harmonisations. This Georgian harmony is not based on Tatian's well-known *Diatessaron*.⁹² All this suggests a heterodox religious experience for Gwrobandak-Evstat'i and his anonymous hagiographer. Whatever explanation is accepted, Evstat'i's *vita* and its author are vivid testaments to the syncretic religious environment of late antique Caucasia and to the dense cultural ties linking it to Iran.

⁸⁹ Tardieu 2009, 20. See also: Lieu 1985, 54; Tardieu 1998, 257; and Russell 2001–2002, 71.

⁹⁰ But Christianity was expanding in the late Sasanian Empire: Morony 1984, 332–383.

⁹¹ *Vita Evstat'i*, Abulaže ed., 43.

⁹² Birdsall 1971–1972, esp. 456; and Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 281–284. There may, however, be some connection to the second-century apology of Aristeidēs: Giorgaže M. 1998. Its use of the rare Georgian word *spetaki* (სპეტაკი < MPers. *spēdag*), "white", to describe a dove during Jesus' baptism may ultimately have a Manichaean origin. See Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 283–284. (For a thirteenth-century usage, see Ioane Šavt'eli, *Abdulmesiani*, 71.3, Lolašvili ed., 140). For white as a sacred colour in Mazdaism, see Boyce 1990, 68–70. The application of Geo. *spetaki* could imply an Armenian influence or source; *spitak* (սպիտակ), "white", is commonly found in Armenian texts, for which see Schmitt 1986, 452. However, the Georgian harmony does not seem to have been based on or influenced by an Armenian exemplar. Among other traces of Manichaean vocabulary in Old Georgian, Mgaloblišvili *unpub.* – following Giorgi Ceret'eli's earlier research – mentions the liturgical terms *anderzi* (ანდერძი), "will", and *iadgari* (იადგარი), "tropologion".

Linguistic Connections

The names, terminology and language of the *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat'i are strong indicators of K'art'li's active participation in the Iranian Commonwealth. The dominance of Iranian and Iranic proper names in élite circles is immediately obvious, a fact confirmed by other Georgian sources including the historiographical narratives examined in Part II below.⁹³ Though only a few proper names appear in the pages of *The Passion of Šušānik*,⁹⁴ C'urtaveli specifies two dynastic Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxšes*: Aršušay⁹⁵ and his son Varsk'en (Varsk'en's sibling Jojik is also mentioned). In contrast, three Christian clerics bear Judaeo-Christian names: the priestly author Iakob (Jacob) and bishops Iovane (John) and Samoel (Samuel). Another bishop has the unusual name Ap'oc'i, sometimes rendered Ap'uti.⁹⁶ For its part, the *vita* of Evstat'i is focused almost entirely upon Iranians within a K'art'velian setting. Along with his hero Gwrobandak-Evstat'i, the

⁹³ Andronikašvili 1966, 569: "Proper names of Iranian origin may ... be subdivided into three main groups: 1. Proper names represented in a form indicative of their having been borrowed directly from Iranian languages. 2. Names represented in Armenized form. 3. Names represented in Arabicized form". We must therefore keep in mind that Iranic loans in Georgian arrived in a variety of ways, directly and through multiple intermediaries, and at different times. The Georgian and Syriac versions of the *vita* of Peter the Iberian confirm the prevalence of Iranian and Iranic proper names in eastern Georgia including those of the *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands. In the distorted Syriac *vita*, Peter's father is named Bosmarios (Buzmihr?). It should be noted, however, that extant Georgian redactions long postdate the fifth-century *floruit* of Peter. On Peter and his biographers, see Horn and Phenix Jr 2008.

⁹⁴ Šušānik's name echoes Arm. *šušān* (շուշան), "lily": Peeters 1935, 5. The name is also attested later, e.g., on a ninth-century stele-cross from Bolnisi Sioni once belonging to a certain Šušānik: Šošiašvili 1980: 154; and as Šušān, daughter of Prince Arč'il: Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 244₁₉, and *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 249–250. Cf. St Šušānik's father Vardan, whose name might be based on Parth. *vard*, "rose" (Arm. *vard*, վարդ; Geo. *vardi*, ვარდი). For the anti-Chalcedonian Peter the Iberian as a "rose blossom", see *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), cap. 20.

⁹⁵ For this name in late antique and early medieval Georgia, see Alek'size's introduction to Sin.Geo.N.50, facsimile ed., 18–20.

⁹⁶ The correct form Ap'oc' (*Ա.փոց*) also appears in the Armenian version: *Vita Šušānik* (Arm.), e.g., cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 8₇. The name's origin is unknown but the received variance stems from a confusion of the Georgian letters *ჟ* (*u*) and *ო* (*o*) as well as *ქ* (*t*) and *ც* (*c*) in the *nusxuri* script. Both forms are attested in the surviving Georgian *vita*: Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 3 and 18, Abulaže ed., 13₁₁ and 28₆. The *nusxuri* script was an innovation of the early Bagratid era (probably ninth century): Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 498–499; and Danelia and Sarjvelaže 1997, 218–222. See also below, p. 259 (fn. 375). Other bishops of C'urtavi (Arm. C'urtaw) are enumerated in the Armenian *Book of Letters*: *Girk' T'lt'oc'*, Polarean ed., #78, 336–337, Fr. trans. in Garsoian 1999b, 562–563. The list begins with Ap'oc' and continues: Gaṛnik, Sahak, Elišay, Yakovb, Yohan, Step'anos, Esayi, Samuēl, another Step'anos and Yohanēs.

hagiographer mentions: the Sasanian *marzbān*s of K'art'li Arvand Gušnasp and his successor Vēžan Buzmihr;⁹⁷ the *c'ixist'avi* Vistahm (Geo. Ustam), the Sasanian commandant of Mc'xet'a; several Iranian colonists accused of apostasy alongside Evstat'i – Baxdiad, Burzo/Borzo (Burzōg), Gušnak, Panagušnasp (Panāgušnasp), Perozak (Pērōzak) and Zarmil (Zarmihr?; only one of the accused, the Syrian Step'anē, lacks an Iranian name); and a Sasanian *šāhan šāh* generically styled “Xuasro”. We also encounter Aršuša[y], “the *pitiaxši* of K'art'li” (*k'art'liša pitiaxši*, Քարտղիս թիթիանի), i.e., the *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark'. Though related to the Parthian Mihrānids, Aršušay's family had acculturated to the bicultural marchlands. It is therefore most appropriate to characterise him as an Armeno-K'art'velian.

The Mihrānid presence in Caucasia was by no means restricted to the *bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier. Because this house favoured the name Gušnasp/Višnasp, the Tp'ilisi-based *marzbān* Arvand Gušnasp may well have been a Parthian Mihrānid prince, though one who had come from Iran directly.⁹⁸ Further, as noted by Rika Gyselen in her pioneering sigillographic study of the four *spāhbeds* (generals) of the later Sasanian Empire, Vistahm is an unusual name.⁹⁹ The Ustam/Vistahm of Evstat'i's *vita* may therefore be a distorted memory of the famous Parthian Vistahm Ispahbudān, uncle of Xusrō II (r. 590, 591–628). Vistahm and his brother Vindūyīh were instrumental in Xusrō's assumption of the throne but subsequently fell from grace and were killed by order of the *šāhan šāh*. Vistahm had once occupied high offices within the Sasanian Empire, including *hazārbed* (lit. “chief of a thousand”)¹⁰⁰ and *spāhbed* of the West (*kūst-i Xwarwarān*).¹⁰¹ Not long before his death around the year 600, he managed to wrest from the *šāhan šāh*'s control *kūst-i Ādurbādagān* – including parts of southeastern Caucasia – and the eastern sector of *kūst-i Xwarāsān*. He controlled these areas for no less than seven years.¹⁰² Vistahm Ispahbudān's chronology is broadly consistent with the *c'ixist'avi* Ustam. But for the moment we cannot say for certain whether this position was among the esteemed Sasanian posts held by Vistahm Ispahbudān. Should Ustam and Vistahm Ispahbudān be identical, the *marzbān* and *c'ixist'avi* of K'art'li were Sasanian agents representing different – and rival – Parthian houses. This may have been a deliberate Sasanian

⁹⁷ The Sasanian *marzbānate* headquartered at Mc'xet'a was established no later than 520 and perhaps already in 517/518: Toumanoff 1963, 370; Greatrex 1998, 130; and Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 78.

⁹⁸ Adontz/Garsoïan 1970, 508 (n. 22).

⁹⁹ Gyselen 2001, 32. For the seal of Vistahm Ispahbudān, see also Pourshariati 2008, 107–109.

¹⁰⁰ By this time, probably “grand intendant”. See also Gyselen 2001, 20–22.

¹⁰¹ Var. *Xwarbarān*. This side included Iraq and other western regions. See further for *spāhbed* and Geo. *spaspeti*.

¹⁰² For the numismatic evidence, see Pourshariati 2008, 133.

ploy to exploit intra-Parthian tensions so as to thwart the possibility of a united front in Caucasia against the empire.¹⁰³

Proper names are only one dimension of the elaborate linguistic interface. The vocabulary employed by early K'art'velian hagiographers is rich in parallels and loanwords exhibiting the close bond of eastern Georgia and Iran.¹⁰⁴ Some specialists, including Mzia Andronikašvili, have attempted to trace a direct linguistic link back to the Achaemenid era and even earlier.¹⁰⁵ While some manner of contact already in the mid-first millennium BC is likely, at present we lack *definitive* proof. Beyond doubt is a significant influx of Iranian terminology into the K'art'velian idiom of Georgian under Parthian Arsacid and then Sasanian rule. The contribution made by acculturating Parthians should not be underestimated. Some loans entered Georgian directly and others were transmitted through intermediaries, especially *via armeniaca* and to a lesser extent through East Iranian languages.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the path of transmission was not always direct and it did not always involve Iran itself. On the whole, the process cannot be characterised as unidirectional diffusion. As Andronikašvili stresses, "some of the earliest Iranian elements recorded in the Georgian language ought not be regarded as mere borrowings; for they form an integral part of the Georgian language, being comprised in its basic lexical core".¹⁰⁷ The language of the hagiographical texts investigated in this section and of the historiographical ones explored later together demonstrate a durable linguistic and, in a larger sense, cultural bond to Iran. They are not simply artefacts of Arsacid and Sasanian imperialism but are manifestations of Caucasia's *active participation in and contribution to* the Iranian Commonwealth across the *longue durée*.

¹⁰³ Garsoïan 2009a, 109, observes that the *marzbān* "was not necessarily the only royal official in a given province". In addition, "[e]ven through *marzbans* were unquestionably drawn from the upper ranks of the nobility no particular order of precedence is discernible among ap[p]ointees, nor is there any indication that this office was at any time hereditary in a particular clan. On the contrary, in the case of unmistakably Armenian *marzpan*s, the sources painstakingly underline the fact that the *marzpanate* was a Persian office distinct from local dignities even where the same man was simultaneously honoured with both, one native and inherited whereas the other was administrative and bestowed by the Persians".

¹⁰⁴ For the close relationship of Parthian/Middle Persian and Armenian, see, e.g.: Schmitt 1983 and 1986; Bolognesi 1990; and Gippert 1993a. For Albanian, see Gippert 2007b, 2008 and 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Andronikašvili 1966, "Žveli sparsuli leksik'uri elementebi k'art'ulši", 20–32; and Andronikašvili 1996, 260–262.

¹⁰⁶ Bielmeier 1994a, 34. Insofar as intermediaries are concerned, the meanings and contexts of imported Iranian words were not lost on the eastern Georgians.

¹⁰⁷ Andronikašvili 1966, 547.

There are no fewer than 100 identifiable Parthian parallels and loans in Georgian, and considerably more involving Middle Persian.¹⁰⁸ According to Andronikašvili, “Middle Persian words and personal names occur in Georgian in large numbers, the bulk being attested in Old-Georgian literary texts of the 5th-6th to the 11th cent. In the majority of cases they were adopted directly”.¹⁰⁹ Andronikašvili devotes an extended chapter – the bulk of the initial and most important volume of her *Narkvevebi iranul-k'art'uli enobrivi urt'iert'obidan* (*Studies in Irano-Georgian Linguistic Contacts*) – to Middle Iranian lexical elements.¹¹⁰ Because of its centrality to Georgian and Caucasian linguistics, this subject has attracted several talented scholars, including Europeans Roland Bielmeier and Jost Gippert – the latter of whom authored the two-volume *Iranica Armeno-Iberica: Studien zu den iranischen Lehnwörtern im Armenischen und Georgischen* (1993) – and Georgians T'eo Č'xeiže (Chkheidze) and now Helen Giunašvili. For her part, Č'xeiže emphasises the incorporation of Iranic loans and parallels into almost every category of Georgian vocabulary, including proper names; religious, administrative, social and military terminology; weights and measures; flora and fauna; and ordinary household items.¹¹¹

The refined language of the earliest specimens of original Georgian literature displays many affinities with Parthian and Middle Persian. Although these sources were composed in the late fifth through early seventh centuries, their surviving witnesses were produced appreciably later. None of their surviving manuscripts predates the tenth century. Thus, the occurrence of a particular word conceivably belongs to a later scribe, and in such cases we must consider introduction through Arabic or New Persian. Their forms and pervasiveness show, however, the employment of the vast majority of these terms in Late Antiquity. Many have retained currency in Georgian ever since.

A comprehensive catalogue of the Iranian loans and parallels found in early Georgian hagiography falls beyond the purview of this volume. The following words drawn from the *vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i are indicative of the close linguistic connection between Georgian and Middle Iranian languages:¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Andronikašvili 1996, 268–269. Andronikašvili catalogued in excess of 600 words having Iranian etymologies. See also Gippert 2004, 106.

¹⁰⁹ Andronikašvili 1996, 262.

¹¹⁰ Andronikašvili 1966, “Sašualo iranuli sitqvebi k'art'ulši”, 142–416, Eng. sum., 556–571; and Andronikašvili 1996, “Middle-Persian or Pahlavi Vocabulary of the Sassanian Period in Georgian”, 262–264.

¹¹¹ Č'xeiže 2001.

¹¹² There is a significant number of additional Iranian/Iranic words in these *vitae*.

AMBORI (ამბორი), “kiss” < Parth. **hambōδ*; Geo. via Arm. *hamboyr* (համբոյր)¹¹³

AMBOXI (ამბოხი), “mob” < Parth. *hambōh*; Arm. *ambox* (ամբոխ)¹¹⁴

ATROŠANI (ატროშანი), corrupted as *artošani* (არტროშანი), “[Mazdean/Zoroastrian] fire temple”; Arm. *atrušan* (ատրուշան); both probably based on Parth. *āturš-*, “fire” (cf. MPers. *ātaxš* and much older Av. *ātarš*)¹¹⁵

AXOVANI (ახოვანი), “heroic” < Mir. *axw* || *axwān*, “being, existence, world”; Arm. *axoyan* (ախոյան), “antagonist, adversary, opponent, champion, hero”¹¹⁶

BAGINI (ბაგინი), “temple, sanctuary” < Parth. *bay*, MPers. *bay*, “god, lord”; Arm. *bagin* (բաგին), “pagan altar, shrine”¹¹⁷

DEVI (დევი), “demon” < MPers. *dēw*; Arm. *dew* (դեւ)¹¹⁸

¹¹³ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 41₂₅, *amboris-uqves* (ამბორი-უკვესი). For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 222–223; Schmitt 1983, 87; Schmitt 1986, 450; and Bielmeier 1994a, 34. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Nino and Serapion Zarzmeli.

¹¹⁴ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 9, Abulaže ed., 20₂₁ and 21₁. For the term, see: Schmitt 1986, 451 and 454; Andronikašvili 1966, 223–224; and Cherkesi 1950, 4, “revolt, rising”. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Serapion Zarzmeli and Davit' and Tiričan.

¹¹⁵ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 12₂₆, a *hapax* in Georgian literature. In the Armenian witness we encounter the expected Arm. form *atrušan*: *Vita Šušanik* (Arm.), cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 5₁₂. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 225; Russell 1987b, 482–483; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Atrušan”, 511, who notes that according to the usage of this fifth-century text “Armenian *atrušans* were either separate buildings or interior shrines, as is the case of the fire altar found under the high altar of the cathedral of Ējmiacin. Like the Iranian *atrušans*, however, they could be either interior or outdoor shrines”. Garsoïan suggests a connection with an unattested Mir. form **ātarōšan-*. On Iranian *ātaxš* and *ātur*, see Nyberg 1974, 35.

¹¹⁶ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 17, Abulaže ed., 27₂₅. In the same sentence, *Šušanik* is described as *axovani* and *mq'ne* (მკნე) “courageous”, terms which are applied to royal heroes and their champions in the pre-Bagratid historiographical tradition (discussed in Part II). For *axovani*, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 288–289; MacKenzie 1986, 14; and Bedrossian 1875–1879, 5. On the Iranian meaning “world”, see Nyberg 1974, 39, s.v. “*axuān*”. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Habo and Grigol Xanžt'eli.

¹¹⁷ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 35₃₂ and 36₁. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 225–226; MacKenzie 1986, 17; Nyberg 1974, 42; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Bagin”, 513–514. According to Garsoïan, the Armenian renders a “[p]agan altar or shrine bearing a cult image, as opposed to a fire altar or *atrušan* or the Christian altar ...” Other instances are found, for example, in *Vita Nino*.

¹¹⁸ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 15₈. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 26; Nyberg 1974, 62; Andronikašvili 1966, 310–311; Schmitt 1983, 95; Schmitt 1986, 453; and Bielmeier 2005, 12, who notes “[i]t is difficult to determine whether the Georgian word is a direct loan from Middle Persian or a loan that took the path via Armenian”.

DIASPANI (დიასპანი), “messenger, envoy” < Mr. *bayaspān*, “[royal] messenger, envoy”; cf. Parth. *biaspān*; Arm. *despan* (դեսպան); cf. Arab. *dusfān*¹¹⁹

EŠMAKI || **EŠMA** (ეშმაკი || ეშმა), “devil, Satan” < MPers. *xēšm*, “anger, the demon Wrath”¹²⁰

GLAXAKI (გლახაკი), “poor, beggar”, possibly < MPers. *gilag*, “complaint, lamentation”¹²¹

JOJOXET’I (ჯოჯოხეთი), “hell” < Parth. *dōžax*, MPers. *dušox* “hell”; Arm. *džoxk’* (դժոխք), “hell”¹²²

KERPI (კერპი), “idol” < Mr. *kirb*, “body, form”; Arm. *kerp* (կերպ), “form, figure, shape”¹²³

MARZAPANI (მარზაპანი), “*marzbān*, viceroy, keeper-of-the-marches, margrave, marquess”, MPers. *marz[o]bān* < *marz*, “frontier, border, district, march” + suffix *-bān*, “keeper, guard”; Arm. *marzpan* (მარզպան)¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 12₁₃ (*sadiaspanoy*, სადიასპანო). For the term, see especially Bielman 2011. See also: MacKenzie 1986, 17; Nyberg 1974, 46; and Andronikašvili 1966, 231. *Diaspani* is also encountered in *The Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 170₅ and 197₉.

¹²⁰ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 8, Abulaže ed., 19₁₈; and *Vita Evstat’i*, caps. 3 and 6, Abulaže ed., 33₁₅ and 40_{9,12,14-15}. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 315–317; MacKenzie 1986, 94; Bielman 1985, 34–35; and Russell 1990, 385. *Ešmaki* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹²¹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 16 and 18, Abulaže ed., 27₁₄ and 28₈ (both senses are expressed here). For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 299–301; MacKenzie 1986, 36; and Nyberg 1974, 82 (*gilak*). *Glaxaki* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹²² *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 40₁₅. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 414–415; MacKenzie 1986, 29; Nyberg 1974, 65; Schmitt 1986, 453; and Russell 1987b, 340. *Jojaxet’i* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature. Bielman 2005, 2–3, raises the possibility of its introduction *via armeniaca*.

¹²³ *Vita Evstat’i*, Abulaže ed., 38₆ (of the Israelites); and *Vita Children of Kolay*, Abulaže ed., 185₅ (vague allusion to local idols). For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 51; Andronikašvili 1966, 334–335; Schmitt 1986, 452; and Bielman 1990, 39–40. *Kerpi* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹²⁴ E.g., *Vita Evstat’i*, caps. 1, 2 and 3, Abulaže ed., 30₁₋₂₇, 32_{9,23,27}, 33_{13,19-20,21,25,33} and 34₁. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 54; Andronikašvili 1966, 340–341; Schmitt 1983, 102; Schmitt 1986, 451; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Marzpan”, 544. See also Gignoux 1985–1988, 59–61. In hagiographical literature the term also occurs in *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, Abulaže ed., 241₃₄, 242₂₆ (*zena-sop’lad marzapnisa*, ჯენა-სოფლად მარზაპნისა), 244_{26,29,31} and 245_{2,24}. For a late reference to *marzapani*, see the thirteenth-century *Abdulmesiani* by Ioane Šavt’eli, 30.3, Lolašvili ed., 127.

MOGWI (მოგვი), “mowbed, magus, Mazdean/Zoroastrian priest”, and the derivative **moguebay** || **mogobay** (მოგუეება || მოგობა), “Magism” i.e., “Mazdaism, Zoroastrianism”, all < MPers. *mayūg* (an uncertain form); cf. Parth. *moymard*; Arm. *mog* (մոգ)¹²⁵

NETARI (ნეტარი), “blessed” < MPers. *nēttar*, “better, best”¹²⁶

NIŠI || **NIŠANI** (ნიში || ნიშანი), “wonder, sign, mark” < Parth. and MPers. *nišān*; Arm. *nšan* (նշան)¹²⁷

PATIVI (პატივი), “honour, respect”, via Arm. *patiw* (պատիւ), “diadem, honour”, probably through an undocumented Parth. form; cf. Sogd. *pt̥by-*, “reverence”¹²⁸

PITIAXSĪ || **PATIAXSĪ** (პიტიახში || პატიახში), “toparch, marcher-lord, margrave, viceroy”; cf. MPers. *bidaxš*; Arm. *bdeašx* (բդեաշխ)¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 11, Abulaže ed., 23; and *Vita Evstat’i*, caps. 1, 2 and 4, Abulaže ed., 30, 31₂₅ and 35₂₅. On *mogobay* || *moguebay*, see: C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 11, Abulaže ed., 23; *Vita Evstat’i*, caps. 2 and 4, Abulaže ed., 31₂₆ and 35_{26,29}. For the term, see: Gignoux 1972, 57; Bielseimer 1990, 34; Schmitt 1986, 448; and Andronikašvili 1966, 341–342. Abulaže 1973b, 261, notes other meanings, including “astrologer”, “soothsayer” and “witch”. See also Daryae 2009, 128–129. These terms are commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹²⁶ See, e.g.: Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, caps. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 19 and 20, Abulaže ed., 12₁₆ (*sanatrelman*, სანატრელმან), 12₂₃, 13_{19,20}, 14₃, 14_{14,17}, 16₉, 19₁₀, 22₂₅, 23₁₆, 25₂₀, 26₃, 26₅₋₆, 27₈, 28₁₅ and 29₂₋₃; and *Vita Evstat’i*, caps. 2 and 3, Abulaže ed., 30_{14,15}, 31_{8,19,21}, 32_{6,13}, 33_{4,17,22} and 34₁₂. For the term, see Andronikašvili 1966, 355–358. *Netari* is commonly encountered in Georgian literature.

¹²⁷ *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 38₃₁₋₃₂, 41₃₂ and 42₇ (all three references impart the sense of “wonders”). For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 349–350; Nyberg 1974, 142; and Schmitt 1983, 94. Another instance is found, for example, in the *vita* of Grigol Xanzt’eli.

¹²⁸ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, caps. 1 and 17, Abulaže ed., 11₂₀₋₂₁ and 28; *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 8, Abulaže ed., 45₂₀; and *Vita Children of Kolay*, Abulaže ed., 185₄₁₋₄₂. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 263–265; and Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Patiw”, 552–553. *Pativ* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature. On Sogd. *pt̥by-*, see: Gershevitch 1961, §521; and Livshits 2006, 83. I am grateful to Roland Bielseimer for drawing my attention to the possible connection with Sogdian.

¹²⁹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, caps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 16, Abulaže ed., 11₆, 12₉, 13_{10,14-15}, 14_{20,24}, 15₁₂, 19_{1,7,15,17}, 20_{14,19}, 21_{3,6,13}, 22_{11,13}, 24_{1,6,11,19} and 26₂₉; and *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 34₃. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 18; Andronikašvili 1966, 362–364; Schmitt 1986, 450; and Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Bdeašx”, 516–517. For the relationship of the Georgian and Armenian terms and the controversial background of the Iranian, see Gippert 1993a, “Pit̥iaxš”, 207–216.

SASTIKI (სასტიკი), “severe, rigorous”, perhaps < MPers. **sāstik*, but MPers. is based solely on Av. *sāsta*, “severe, rigorous”; Arm. *sastik* (սաստիկ), “severe” and *sastkut*-iwn (սաստկութիւն), “severity”¹³⁰

SENAKI (სენაკი), “cell”, perhaps < MPers. **sēnak*; Arm. *seneak* (սենակ), “room, chamber”¹³¹

ŠARAVANDI (შარავანდი), “consecration, corona/rays of the Sun, crown”; MPers. **šahrawand* < OIr. **xšaθravant*; Arm. *ašxarawand* || *ašxarhawand* (աշխարհամեղ || աշխարհամեղ), “crown tie”;¹³² cf. MPers. *arwand*, “swift, valiant”¹³³

SPAYPETI || **SPASPETI** (სპაჲპეტი || სპასპეტი), “*spaspeti*, general, commander, high constable” < Parth. *spāḍpat*, MPers. *spāhbed*; Arm. *sparapet* (սպարապետ)¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 8, Abulaže ed., 19₂₁. For the term, see Andronikašvili 1966, 368–369. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Habo, Serapion Zarzmelī and Grigol Xanzt’eli. The connection of the Georgian and Armenian terms is certain, but their shared etymology is not and their background may not be Iranian at all (Roland Biellemeier, personal communication, 3 October 2011).

¹³¹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, caps., 6 and 8, Abulaže ed., 17₂₀ and 19_{11,12}. The Iranian background is uncertain. For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 369; and especially Gippert 1993a, 229–244. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vita* of Grigol Xanzt’eli.

¹³² A *hapax* in *Epic Histories*, V.xxxviii, Garsoian trans., 222. Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Ašxarawand/Ašxarhawand”, 509: “Presumably the knot tying the royal diadem over the crown and from which flowed the undulating ribbons denoting the ‘royal glory’ of the Iranian monarchs”. Garsoian proposes a possible parallel in the undocumented OPers. **awi-sara-banda-*. See also Russell 1996, 30 (fn. 26). I wish to thank James Russell (private communication, 29 October 2011) for reminding me of the Armenian term.

¹³³ *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 5, Abulaže ed., 37₃₃ (*šaravandedobisay*, შარავანდედობისაჲ). For the term, see Andronikašvili 1966, 392–398. On *arwand*, which forms the basis of the name Arm. *Eruand*/Gk. *Orontēs*, see: MacKenzie 1986, 11; Burney and Lang 1972, 186; and, for *Eruand*, Garsoian 1997b, 44–51. Other instances of *šaravandi* are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Serapion Zarzmelī, Grigol Xanzt’eli and Davit’ and Tiričan. For the royal/dynastic importance of *šaravandi* under the Bagratids, see: Rapp 2001, 115–116; and Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 658–662.

¹³⁴ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11₈ (“the *spaypeti* of the Armenians”). *Spaypeti* is the oldest Georgian form. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 75; Nyberg 1974, 177; Biellemeier 1994b, 433 (including remarks about the seemingly extraneous -s- in *spaspeti*); Andronikašvili 1966, 371–372; Garsoian 1976, 22–23 (fn. 44); Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Sparapet/Sparapetut-iwn”, 560–561; Schmitt 1983, 84 and 90; and Schmitt 1986, 449.

TAŽARI (ტაძარი), “palace”, later “temple” < Parth. *tažar*, “palace”; Arm. *tačar* (տաճար), “palace”¹³⁵

TOMI (ტომი), “family, tribe, people” < MPers. *tōhm*, “seed, family”, Parth. *tōxm* > Arm. *tōhm* (տոհմ)¹³⁶

TOZIKI (ტოზიკი), “[pagan] festival, celebration” < MPers. **tōzīg* < *tōz-*, “to compensate, pay for”; cf. Parth. *tōž-*, “to pay back”; cf. MPers. *ham-tōžīg*, “having debts in common with another”¹³⁷

VAČARI || **SAVAČAROY** || **VAČROBAY** || **MOVAČREBAY** (ვაჭარი || სავაჭაროე || ვაჭრობა || მოვაჭრეობა), *vačari* “merchant”, *savač[a]roy* “market” < Parth. *wāžār*, “market”, *wāžāragān*, “merchant”; cf. MPers. *wāžār* and *wāžāragān*, “dealer, merchant”; Arm. *vačar* (վաճար) and *vačarakān* (վաճարական)¹³⁸

VANI (ვაწი), “abode, dwelling place”; uncertain origin, cf. MPers. *āwahan*, “fortified place, stronghold”; cf. Arm. *awan* (աւան), “village, small market town”, and *vank* (վանք), “monastery” but also “lodging, dwelling, house”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 13, Abulaže ed., 13₁ (“palace”), 16_{14-15,20} (“palace” of Varsk’ēn), 19₂₆ (“palace”), 20_{2,14} (“palace”) and 24_{2,12,13} (“palace”); and *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 40₂₂ (“temple” of God in Jerusalem), 40_{27,31} (“temple” overthrown in Jerusalem) and 41₁ (“temple” built by Solomon). Note *palati* (პალატი) for “palace” in Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, Abulaže ed., 27₁₁, and *bagini* (ბაგინი) for a Jewish “temple” in *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 35₃₂ and 36₁. *Bagini* is not employed in *Vita Children of Kolay*, which invariably gives *eklesia* (ეკლესია), “church” (a transcription of Gk. *ekklēsia*, ἐκκλησία). For *tažari*, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 377–379; Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Tačar”, 562–563; Schmitt 1983, 95; Schmitt 1986, 453; and Russell 1987b, 63 and 495. *Tažari* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹³⁶ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 17₁₄ (*t’esl-tomsa*, თესლ-ტომსა). Cf. *Vita Evstat’i*, Abulaže ed., cap. 5, 37₂₆ (*uc’xo-t’esl’ni*, უცხო-თესლნი, “foreign peoples”). For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 83; Nyberg 1974, 194; Andronikašvili 1966, 379–380; Schmitt 1986, 452; and Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Tohm”, 565. *Tomi* is commonly encountered in hagiographical literature.

¹³⁷ *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 30₁₄ (*tozikobdes*, ტოზიკობდეს), 30₁₆ (*tozikic’a*, ტოზიკიცა), 30₁₇ (*metozikenic’a*, მეტოზიკენიცა) and 30₁₈ (*toziksa vtozikob*, ტოზიკსა ვტოზიკობ). For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 380–381; and Gippert 2004, 108–109. I am grateful to Roland Bielmeier for the connections to MPers. *tōz-* and *ham-tōžīg* (personal communication, 3 October 2011).

¹³⁸ *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 6, Abulaže ed., 40₂₃ (*savačroy*, სავაჭროე, “market”). For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 89; Bielmeier 1985, 35; Andronikašvili 1966, 320–321; Schmitt 1983, 91; and Schmitt 1986, 452. For *vačarni* (ვაჭარნი), “merchants”, see Iovane Sabanis-že, *Vita Habo*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 53₁₉. See also Daryae 2009, 136–146.

¹³⁹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps., 3 and 10, Abulaže ed., 13₁₁₋₁₂ and 22₁₀; and *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 34₁₁. For the term, see especially Gippert 2004, 280–295. See also: MacKenzie 1986, 13; Andronikašvili 1966, 234–235; Schmitt 1986, 451; Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Awan”, 512; and Bedrossian 1875–1879, 80 and 666. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vita* of Grigol Xanzt’eli.

VARDI (ვარდო), “rose” < Parth. *vard*; Arm. *vard* (վարդ)¹⁴⁰

ŽAMI (ჟამო), “hour, time” and in a Christian context, “liturgy” < Parth. *žām*, “time”; cf. Parth. *žamān*, “time, hour”, and MPers. *zamān*; Arm. *žam* || *žamanak* (ժամ || ժամանակ)¹⁴¹

The oldest written form of Georgian – the literary medium of K'art'velians from the fifth to the seventh century – thus incorporated a considerable number of words shared with and borrowed from Iranian languages. What is more, the Iranic flavour of Old Georgian is not limited to these earliest specimens of Georgian literature: it infuses subsequent hagiographical compositions, too, including the *vitae* of the K'art'velised Arab perfumer Habo (mod. Abo, written by Iovane Sabanis-ze, late eighth century), of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers (which attained their received versions in the early tenth century),¹⁴² of Kostanti Kaxay (late ninth/tenth century), of Serapion Zarzmeli (Serapion of Zarzma, tenth century),¹⁴³ of Ražden (its extant form may be as early as the eleventh/twelfth century),¹⁴⁴ of Gobron (by Bishop Step'ane Mtbevari, tenth century) and of Grigol Xanžt'eli (Gregory of Khandzta, written by Grigol Merč'ule, tenth century). In addition, the same Iranic terminology saturates the language of the ecclesiastical components of the corpus *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* (seventh century and later),

¹⁴⁰ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 20, Abulaže ed., 29₁ (*vardobay*, ვარდობაჲ, “Month of the Rose”). For the term, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 235–236; Schmitt 1983, 93; and Schmitt 1986, 448 and 452. See also Gippert 2011, 95. Other instances are found, for example, in the *vitae* of Habo, Grigol Xanžt'eli and Abibos Nekreseli.

¹⁴¹ Extremely common, e.g., Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 5, 6 and 7, Abulaže ed., 16_{14,23} (*ražams*, რაჟამს), 16₂₅ and 19₂; and *Vita Evstat'ī*, caps. 5 and 8, Abulaže ed., 37_{26,31} and 45₄. On the Iranian background, see Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 197. For the term, see also: MacKenzie 1986, 98; Schmitt 1986, 448; and Andronikašvili 1966, 259–261.

¹⁴² The surviving *vita* of Abibos Nekreseli probably contains elements of a lost seventh-century textual and/or oral tradition. Newly-identified variants of this work and the *vita* of Iovane Zedazneli are contained in the tenth-century Sin.Geo.N.50 manuscript produced and still housed at St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai. *Vitae* of Davit' Garesjeli (of Garesja, later variants Gareja, Gareji) as well as Šio and Evagre are also extant. For these sources and the complicated problems of their origin and transmission, see: Abulaže 1955; Alek'size 1999; Tarchnishvili 1955, 410–412; Tamarati 1910, 211–222 and 296–298. On the *vita* of Abibos, see further.

¹⁴³ Rayfield 1994, 43: “[t]he only surviving manuscript (about 9,000 words) is a rather corrupt metaphorical in a sixteenth-century copy, although the text survives intact despite the additions”. See also Č'xartišvili 1994, 54–83.

¹⁴⁴ Tarchnishvili 1955, 412–413; Tamarati 1910, 208; and Qubaneišvili 1946, 240, for the *vita*'s preservation in a collection of Georgian hagiographical works transmitted by a manuscript produced in 1733 (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts A-170). It is also found in another collection that might belong to the 1720s (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts S-3269). For the surviving *vita*, see also: K'av'aria 1959 (which focuses on the labours of Besarion Orbelišvili preserved in S-3269); and Sxirtlaže 1985.

translations of biblical books including the Gospels,¹⁴⁵ yet other religious works, and the earliest historiographical compositions.

The *Bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian Marchlands

Administrative nomenclature displays a close affinity with the Iranian world. We have already seen that the geographical pivot of Šušānik's *vita* is Somxit'i-Gugark', the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands.¹⁴⁶ From about 470 until 482 the saint's apostate husband, Varsk'en, was the dynastic overlord of this strategic region. In Georgian his office is designated *pitiaxši* (პითიახში),¹⁴⁷ which mirrors Middle Iranian *bidaxš/bitaxš*. *Bdeašx* (ბდჳაშხ, var. *bdešx*, ბდჳაშხ) is encountered in Armenian, *bitaxēs* (βιτάξης) and *pitiaxēs* (πιτιάξης) – in Greek, and *vitaxa* – in Latin.¹⁴⁸ *Bidaxš* has no exact equivalent in English; “toparch”, “marcher-lord” and “margrave” capture its essence.¹⁴⁹ Although as a procedural matter Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxšes* were not subordinated immediately to the *šāhan šāh*, they were nevertheless an important institution of the Sasanian world. Stationed in Caucasia were also imperial *bidaxšes* who served within the Sasanian government. Several of these officials are attested in early Georgian historiographical works.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ The oldest *complete* Georgian-language version of the Gospels belongs to the Adiši manuscript dated 897: Kekeliže 1960, 411–428; Tarchnishvili 1955, 313–328; Čumburize 2000, 111–132; and Metzger 1977, 186–196. See also Outtier 1988. On early fragments of the Georgian New Testament, see Molitor 1956. Gippert 2007a dates the earliest layers of the Vienna Codex (Vindobonensis georgicus 2) to the fifth/sixth century; they contain Gospel fragments. For a recent survey of the Georgian Bible, see K'urc'ikize 2010.

¹⁴⁶ On *bidaxšes*, see: Pagliaro 1929–1930; Grigolia 1959; Hewsens 1990–1991; and Baxtaže 2003, 30–71.

¹⁴⁷ Geo. *pitiaxši* more closely renders Mlr. *bidaxš*. In certain early-modern manuscripts of Šušānik's *vita*, we encounter the form *patiaxši* (პათიახში) – a corrupted spelling also found in some later variants of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* – and even *pitaxši* (პიტახში), which is – probably by coincidence – close to the Middle Persian. See Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, e.g., cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11₆ and *apparatus criticus*. See also Goguaže 2007, “Pitiāxš-i”, 384. Scribal unfamiliarity with this term is evident even earlier, e.g., *patiaxi* (პათიახი) in *Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay's* Čeliši witness, which was copied in the thirteenth/fourteenth century: *Royal List II*, §17, Abulaže ed., 92₄, *apparatus criticus* (fn. 1) = Rapp trans., 304 (and fn. 13).

¹⁴⁸ Andronikašvili 1966, 363–364. Iranian *vitaxae* are attested in Ammianus Marcellinus, XXIII.6.14.

¹⁴⁹ See Garsoīan in *Epic Histories*, 516. Cf. *monapires* (sing. მონაპირე), border-lords established by the “Golden Age” Bagratids: Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 599–601. Queen T'amar entrusted the Armenian general Zak'aria Zak'arean/Mq'argrēli with the strategic border at Gagi: *Life of T'amar*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 129–130.

¹⁵⁰ For imperial *bidaxšes* mentioned in Georgian historiographies, see below, pp. 179–184. Imperial *bidaxšes* may have been installed in Caucasia already under the Parthian Arsacids.

Their origin uncertain, Caucasia's non-imperial *bidaxšates* may initially have been created by the Armenian crown.¹⁵¹ According to Toumanoff, the four marcher-lords of King Tigran II the Great (r. 95–55 BC), the foremost representative of the Artašēsīd (Artaxiad) dynasty, were possibly *bidaxšes* in function if not in name.¹⁵² In his biography of the Roman general Lucullus, Plutarch mentions Tigran's four "attendants or bodyguards", though he does not explicitly identify them as *bidaxšes*.¹⁵³ At its maximum reach, the empire of Tigran the Great stretched from the eastern Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea. Tensions with Parthia and Rome necessitated an effective border defence, hence the conjectured establishment of four margraves. As early as the reign of Tigran, then, four *bidaxšes* under the command of the Artašēsīds were charged with shielding the borders of Armenia.

While Toumanoff has probably gone too far in attributing the origin of the Caucasian *bidaxšes* to Tigran the Great, there is no doubt of their existence within the next two centuries. Armenian sources provide the most extensive documentary information on the Caucasian *bidaxšates*. *The Epic Histories* and Agat'angelos delimit the jurisdictions of the *bidaxšates* under the Armenian Arsacid (Aršakuni) monarchy in this way:¹⁵⁴

the *bidaxš* (Arm. *bdeašx*) of Aljnik', Keeper of the March of Arabia, also called the "great *bidaxš*";

¹⁵¹ Cf. Frye 1962, 354: "... based only on analogies and on the Iranian names of the various *bitaḥš* in Georgia, Armenia and elsewhere, ... the title refers originally to those representatives of the great king of the Parthians who lived at the courts of those feudal lords or sub-kings who owed their allegiance to the Parthians, and who flourished on the borders of the empire. The office then came to mean 'margrave', almost like a class and finally under the later Sasanians generally gave way to the eastern title *marzbān*". And in Frye 1963, 186: "... any attempt to reconstruct a feudal system of vassalage under the Arsacids would be highly conjectural because of lack of sources and ambiguities in words and etymologies". And again in Frye 1984: "The *bidakhsh* is more military in character than civil ... [We may conjecture that] the historical importance of this title ... was originally the king's representative at the courts of the sub-kings or 'vassal' rulers. From later usage in Armenia and Georgia the term may have already developed in Parthian times to a meaning of 'warden of the marches', or something similar to the *mrzwpn* (*marzban*), although the functions of both offices were undoubtedly more than simply military commands".

¹⁵² Toumanoff 1963, 154, but viewed with appropriate skepticism in: Garsoïan 1997b, 57; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, "Bdeašx", 516.

¹⁵³ Plutarch, *Lives* (Lucullus), XXI.5, Perrin ed. and trans., 536–537. See also Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.23. On Tigran the Great, see Garsoïan 1997b, 52–60.

¹⁵⁴ E.g.: Agat'angelos (Aa), §§795 and 873, Thomson trans., 332–335 and 406–409; and *Epic Histories*, III.ix and IV.l, Garsoïan trans., 77–80, 167–168.

the *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands, Gugark', Keeper of the March of Virk' (i.e., Iberia/K'art'li),¹⁵⁵ sometimes designated “the other *bidaxš*” (*miws ... bdeāšxn, ძიუ ... բղաշխն*);¹⁵⁶

the *bidaxš* of Noširakan, Keeper of the March of Media/Adiabēnē;

and the *bidaxš* charged with the March of Asorestan/Assyria.¹⁵⁷

According to received texts, the early *bidaxšes* were subservient to the Armenian crown. But this relationship may have been a somewhat later development. These marcher-lords, Garsoian observes, “had precedence over all the magnates and may originally have been independent hereditary rulers ... [who were] subsequently compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Armenian king”.¹⁵⁸

Epigraphical evidence from Georgia sharpens the picture. The Armazi Bilingual inscription of ca. 150 AD attests a *bidaxš* associated with Armazis-q'evi (mod. Armazis-xevi), a lavish necropolis four kilometres west of Mc'xet'a's centre. *Biṭaḥš Zewaḥ* (Zewax) is specified in the Bilingual's Aramaic text, which is composed in the regional Armazic idiom and script. The corresponding Greek identifies this figure as *Zeuachou tou neōterou pitiaxou* (Ζευάχου τοῦ νεωτέρου πιτιάξου), *Pitiaxēs* Zeuach the Younger or, far less credibly, Zeuach the junior *pitiaxēs*.¹⁵⁹ Zewaḥ probably belonged to the dynasty of Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxšes* that Toumanoff calls Gušarids, the descendants of the eponymous Gušar chronicled by Movsēs Xorenac'i.¹⁶⁰ Additional Gušarid *bidaxšes* are encountered in other contemporaneous inscriptions unearthed at Armazis-q'evi, a site which may have temporarily served as the headquarters of the Armeno-K'art'velian

¹⁵⁵ The Armenian designation “March of Virk”, typically called the “Iberian March” in Western publications, is a geographical marker (i.e., the borderland with eastern Georgia) and is not necessarily an indicator of the region's dominant culture and *ethnie*. The same is true of the early Georgian term for the area, Somxit'i (cf. Somxet'i, “Armenia” < *samxret'i*, “south”).

¹⁵⁶ E.g., Agat'angelos (Aa), §795, Thomson trans., 334–335. Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.11, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 121₁₆, also refers a certain Mihrdat as “the great *bdeāšx* of Virk”.

¹⁵⁷ Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Bdeašx”, 516–517; and Toumanoff 1963, 163–183. Bivar 1983, 89, for the Iranian toponym Asūristān designating the province known elsewhere as Babylonia.

¹⁵⁸ Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, 516–517.

¹⁵⁹ Ceret'eli K. 1992; and Xauxč'išvili T'. 2000, #235, 255–256. See also: Braund 1994, 213; and Kavtaraze 2000, 217–218. For “junior *pitiaxēs*”, see Toumanoff 1963, 184. *Contra* “younger/junior *bidaxš*”, see Giorgaže 2005, 42. On the Armazi Bilingual, see Part II including photograph, Figure 4.3.

¹⁶⁰ Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.8. Specific Gušarids are attested as early as the first century AD, see: Toumanoff 1963, 186–187; and Toumanoff 1990, G XXVI, 543.

bidaxšate.¹⁶¹ Besides the Armazi Bilingual, the Armazis-q'evi necropolis has yielded a signet of Aspaurouk[is] *pitiāxēs* (Ἀσπαυρούκις πιτιάξης);¹⁶² a signet of Ousas “*pitiāxēs* of the *Karchēdoi* Iberians” (Ousas *pitiāxēs Ibērōn Karchēdōn*, Οὔσας πιτιάξης Ἰβήρων Καρχηδών), that is, A[r]šušā[y], *bidaxš* of the Irano-K'art'velians(?);¹⁶³ and a silver cup inscribed ἐγὼ βασιλεὺς Φλ[αύιος] Δάδης ἐχαρισάμην Βερσουμᾶ πιτιάξη (*ego basileus Fl[avius] Dadēs echarisamēn Bersouma pitiāxē*), “I, King Fl[avius] Dadēs, have given [this cup] to *pitiāxēs* Bersoumēs [i.e., Bar Šauma]”.¹⁶⁴ Epigraphical materials from the environs of Mc'xet'a thus confirm that Caucasian *bidaxšates* preceded Sasanian rule by *no less than three-quarters* of a century and perhaps substantially more.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Mtskheta I* 1958, 69–73. Generally, see Braund 1994, 206–214 and 237. It is possible that some of these *bidaxšes* were (or served simultaneously as?) imperial *bidaxšes* for the Parthian Arsacids, hence their connection with Mc'xet'a at this time. Moreover, Armazis-q'evi may have been connected with imperial *bidaxšes* as is suggested by the late third-century silver bowl of *Bidaxš* Pāpag, for which see below, pp. 179–181.

¹⁶² Qauxč'išvili T'. 2000, #242, 260. See also Ap'ak'ize 1968, 201–237, summarised by Bíró 1984, 195–196 (fn. 5). The name Asparug is attested in the so-called Armazi Monolingual inscription: Ap'ak'ize 1968, 162; and Braund 1994, 215. The name may appear in other Caucasian contexts, too. A K'art'velian king of the late third century AD bore the name Asp'agur (Ἀσπᾶγυρ), which is possibly related (but this association is rejected by Schmitt 1985). In Armenia Major, Aspurak of Manazkert, chief prelate of the Armenian Church, was the apparent predecessor of St Sahak I: *Epic Histories*, VI.iv and VI.xv (and Garsoïan, “Aspurak of Manazkert”, 360); and Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.41 and III.49 (Aspurakēs). See also Thomson in his 2010 trans. of Agat'angelos, 90.

¹⁶³ Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999, 13. See also: Peeters 1935, 273–277 (Ousas = Ašušā[y]); and Ap'ak'ize 1968, 204. Although the precise meaning of this inscription is disputed, Giorgi Ceret'eli's reading of “Aršušā” for the first word inspired Korneli Kekeliže (e.g., Kekeliže 1956a) to interpret the phrase as “Aršušā, *pitiāxši* of the Iranian-Iberians”. For the meaning of Καρχηδών, see also below, p. 124.

¹⁶⁴ Qauxč'išvili T'. 2000, #261, 267–268. For this figure, see Braund 1993.

¹⁶⁵ The Armazi Monolingual inscription, also found at Armazis-q'evi and whose reading is debated, refers to a *bidaxš* named Šrgs (Šargas?). This monument may be significantly earlier than the Armazi Bilingual; Giorgaže 2008, 253, dates it to the mid-70s AD. For one reading of the inscription, see Braund 1994, 214. Armazic's existence endured the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. Toumanoff 1963, 156, for the forceful claim that “There is ... no reason to presume that the Armenian office was borrowed from Parthia or from the Sassanid State ... The institution of super-governors of viceroys, placed in command of several governors, existed before the Parthian Arsacids, for we find it in the empire of the Achaemenids (*bēvārāpaitiš* or toparch), and was not restricted to Iran, for it was introduced into that of the Seleucids”. Cf. Christensen 1944, 22–23. While I concur with Toumanoff's sentiment, I have routinely substituted Mlr. *bidaxš* for Geo. *pitiāxši* and Arm. *bdeāšx* according to the same logic that I have used Gk. *katholikos* for the closely-related local variants. Toumanoff's application of Lat. *vitaxa* unintentionally undermines the Iranian/Iranic origin and function of the institution.

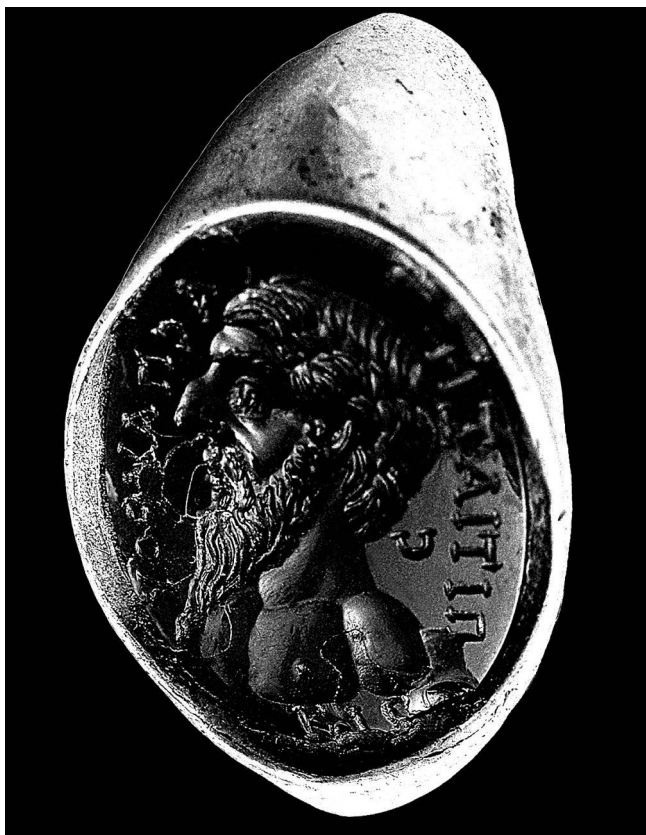


Figure 1.4. Signet of Aspaurouk[is] pitiaxēs.

The Armazis-q'evi inscriptions and *The Passion of Šušanik* confirm that the *bidaxšate*'s political station fluctuated in Late Antiquity. According to Toumanoff, after its hypothetical (but unlikely) establishment under Tigran the Great,¹⁶⁶ this institution vacillated between the kingdoms of Armenia Major and K'art'li until the partition of Armenia ca. 387,¹⁶⁷ from which time the *bidaxšate* remained under K'art'velian hegemony.¹⁶⁸ As noted, the earliest documented Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxšes* fell under the nominal authority of the Armenian monarchy.

¹⁶⁶ Toumanoff 1963, 154–192 and 499. Here Toumanoff uncharacteristically relies upon flimsy evidence. Hewsen 1990–1991, 156–157, for the possibility of the creation of the four *bidaxšates* at different times.

¹⁶⁷ The exact date of the partition is unknown; it occurred sometime in the period 383–388: Greenwood 2012, 121.

¹⁶⁸ The seventh-century Armenian geographer Anania Širakac'i reports that by his time the K'art'velians had “taken” Gugark' from the Armenians: *Ašxarhac'oyc'*, V.12,

In Armenian sources the toparchs of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier are known as *bdeaxšes* of the March of Virk' (**Վիրք**, “Iberia”, i.e., K'art'li), also called Gugark' (**Գուգարք**; Gk. Gogarēnē, Γωγαρηνή).¹⁶⁹ But from the eastern Georgian point of view, these *bidaxšes* administered the Armenian March, Somxit'i (სომხეთი).¹⁷⁰ In Old Georgian “Armenia” – especially Arsacid Armenia and then Persarmenia – is normally designated by the nearly identical term Somxet'i (სომხეთი). In some cases, received sources use Somxit'i and Somxet'i interchangeably, a situation probably arising from the confusion of later scribes and authors who no longer perceived the distinction. Both toponyms derive from *samxret'i* (სამხრეთი), “south”. Thus, the K'art'velians called the marchlands Somxit'i, the Armenian or Southern March, whereas the Armenians called the same territory the March of Virk' (K'art'li) and, alternately, Gugark'.

Around the year 330 the dynastic Gušarid *bidaxšes* were replaced by an acculturated line of Parthian Mihrānids established by P'eroz (MPers. Pērōz), son-in-law of Mirian III, the first Christian king of K'art'li.¹⁷¹ The prestige of the Mihrānid-derived *bidaxšate* is confirmed by the appearance of its founder in four early components of K'art'lis *c'xovreba*: *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Nino*, *The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer's continuation. While P'eroz is not explicitly styled *bidaxš* in these sources, he is called *erist'avi* (ერისთავი; usually a general or a governor-general administering a district in the name of the king) and *mt'avari* (მთავარი; prince).¹⁷² *Bidaxšes* were functionally both.¹⁷³

The relationship between the K'art'velian crown and the *bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands was especially close at this time.¹⁷⁴ Prior to

long recension only, Hewsens trans., 65. We should also bear in mind the attempts of the *bidaxšes* to play one Caucasian monarchy off another.

¹⁶⁹ Also the March of Mazk'ut'k'. The geographical extent of Gugark' is explored in Hewsens 1990–1991.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Russell 1987b, 31.

¹⁷¹ Toumanoff 1963, 187–192. This Mihrānid branch lost power towards the end of the eighth century. As will be demonstrated in Part II, King Mirian was a Parthian Mihrānid imported from Iran.

¹⁷² At first he administered far eastern Georgia and western Albania, areas which probably did not fall under the *bidaxš*'s command.

¹⁷³ For the confusion of various Caucasian political élites during the (later) *interregnum*, see *Royal List III*, §4, Rapp trans., 311–312 and 326–327. Among its “*erist'avis*” are K'art'velian presiding princes, later *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier, a K'art'velian Bagratid prince, a K'art'velian Guaramid prince, and princes of Albania, Gardman-Albania and Siwnik'. Elsewhere in the Iranian Commonwealth individuals could be invested as both *bidaxš* and *marzbān*, e.g., Mar Qardagh in Christian Iraq, for whom see *History of Mar Qardagh*, cap. 6, Walker trans., 22 (*bidaxš* is rendered by Syr. *paṭāḥšā*). See also Walker 2006, 1 *et sqq.*

¹⁷⁴ Toumanoff 1963, 186–188 and 499. This *bidaxšate* had nominally reverted to Armenian suzerainty in the later second century.

Mirian's baptism in the 320s or 330s, P'eroz married one of the king's daughters,¹⁷⁵ thus augmenting the bond with the eastern Georgian monarchy and further offsetting the influence of its Armenian counterpart. Although P'eroz resisted the mounting pressure to convert following the Christianisation of Mirian and Trdat,¹⁷⁶ *The Life of Nino* insists on his continued loyalty to the K'art'velian king.¹⁷⁷ Nino intended to baptise P'eroz herself but became ill *en route* and died at Bodbe in Kakhet'i.¹⁷⁸ That Nino should have led the mission seeking to convert P'eroz is an indication of the power of the contemporary *bidaxšate*. Ultimately, P'eroz and his entourage were baptised under Bak'ar I (r. 363–?380), Mirian's son and successor. As a confidence-building measure, King Bak'ar and P'eroz agreed to a land transfer involving western Albania and the important marchland city of Samšwilde (Samshvilde).¹⁷⁹

Around 370 the Armenian *Epic Histories* reports an invasion of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands and eastern Georgia by *Sparapet* Mušel Mamikonean. Mušel's aim was the recovery of areas lost after the Romano-Sasanian treaty of 363. He executed members of the local aristocracy, ordered the crucifixion of royal "P'arawazeans" (i.e., P'arnavazianis), and beheaded the *bidaxš* "who had formerly served the king of Armenia and subsequently revolted".¹⁸⁰ Not long afterward the *bidaxšate*'s vassalage passed permanently to the K'art'velian monarchy. Ties between the *bidaxšate* and Mc'xet'a were further bolstered when King Varaz-Bak'ar II (r. 380–394) took as his second wife a granddaughter of P'eroz.¹⁸¹ This union produced P'arsman IV, who ascended the throne in 406.¹⁸² During Varsk'en's tenure the Mihrānid *bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier – the only of the four original Caucasian *bidaxšates* to have weathered the suppression of the Armenian Arsacid kingdom in 428 – remained under K'art'velian control.

¹⁷⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 68–69.

¹⁷⁶ The baptism of the Albanian king Urnayr seems to have taken place a few decades later.

¹⁷⁷ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 117₂₋₄. This may be a slight anachronism because the *bidaxšate* remained under the ostensible authority of the weakening Armenian Arsacids. This episode demonstrates the dangers of equating the conversion of Mirian with that of the *bidaxšes*, *erist'avis* and other political élites, let alone the masses who are largely invisible in our sources.

¹⁷⁸ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 125–126.

¹⁷⁹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 130–131.

¹⁸⁰ *Epic Histories*, V.xv, 1883 ed., 177 = Garsoïan trans., 201: "... որ յառաջն ծառայէր թագաւորն Հայոց և ապառամբեաց, կալեալ զվաստէր".

¹⁸¹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 134–135.

¹⁸² P'eroz's memory is also evoked in the two subsequent texts in *K'art'lis c'xovreba: Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 159; and Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 240–241.

Under Varsk'en and probably earlier, C'urtavi – called C'urtaw in Armenian – was established as one of the seats of the *bidaxšate*.¹⁸³ The precise location of this settlement remains shrouded in mystery. As it happens, over the course of its history the *bidaxšate* had multiple capitals. Another was Samšwlde, an extensive fortified city that awaits comprehensive archaeological study. A later inscription on Samšwlde's ruined Sioni (Zion) church affirms the hereditary nature of *bidaxšate* still in the mid-eighth century, though by this time the institution was a shadow of its former self.¹⁸⁴

Throughout much of Late Antiquity, the authority of the *bidaxšes* of Somxit'i-Gugark' was considerable. The earliest Georgian narrative attesting the *bidaxšate*, Šušanik's *vita*,¹⁸⁵ gives no indication of *Bidaxš* Varsk'en's subjection to the K'art'velian king.¹⁸⁶ In fact, local monarchs are nowhere to be found in the hagiographical tale, a circumstance reinforcing the notion of an autonomous *bidaxšate*. The geo-political vantage of the *vita* of Šušanik is neither that of the royal capital Mc'xet'a nor of the central Kura/Mtkuari basin but of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands. Although a particular apostate *bidaxš* is cast as the villain, the *bidaxšate* is presented as a powerful, fully legitimate and substantially independent institution. To this end, the hagiographer C'urtaveli describes Šušanik as *dedop'ali* (დედოფალი), “queen”,¹⁸⁷ and Varsk'en's family as “royal”, in other words, dynastic and sovereign.¹⁸⁸ In the *vita*'s oldest extant redaction

¹⁸³ On C'urtavi, see Menabde 1961, 176–179. Heated debate surrounds the historical “ownership” of Somxit'i-Gugark'. This has far more to do with competitive patriotism than history. For the area in Late Antiquity, see: Adontz/Garsoïan 1970, 497–498; Toumanoff 1963, 467–475; and Musxelišvili 1977, 146–167.

¹⁸⁴ Šošiašvili 1980, 234–236, l. 16. See also Alek'size's introduction to Sin.Geo.N.50, facsimile ed., 18 and 58.

¹⁸⁵ In light of the bicultural nature of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands, it is not surprising that an Armenian version of Šušanik's *vita* was produced.

¹⁸⁶ The monarchy of Armenia Major had been dissolved by the Sasanians back in 428. The *vita* of Šušanik is also silent about Varsk'en's background (Georgian? Armenian? Iranian? mixed?). However, Šušanik is explicitly identified as the daughter of the Armenian hero Vardan Mamikonean.

¹⁸⁷ In *The Life of Nino*, the illuminatrix and her pupil Salome Ujarmeli, “of Ujarma [var. Užarma]” – daughter of Armenian King Trdat and wife of King Mirian's son – are also described as “queens”, i.e., holy women: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 72₆ and 127₂. Salome could claim a royal title; but even the earliest written traditions about Nino emphasise her humble background (she is described as a “captive”, for which see now Sterk 2010a, but note this study's bewildering lack of engagement with Georgian sources, a problem which also plagues its companion, Sterk 2010b). Therefore, Šušanik's portrayal as *dedop'ali* has a powerful double meaning.

¹⁸⁸ One might wonder if the “King Peroz” attested in the foundational inscription of Bolnisi Sioni actually refers to a *bidaxš* P'eroz who claimed royal authority. But the only known *Bidaxš* P'eroz held this office between ca. 330 and ca. 361.



Figure 1.5. Ruins of Samšwde Sioni.



Figure 1.6. *Asomt'avruli* inscription mentioning local *pitiaxšis*, ᲛᲣᲠᲚᲗ (*PTXŠNI*), Samšwde Sioni.

preserved in the eleventh-century Parxali *mravalt'avi* (*polykephalon*),¹⁸⁹ “royal” is rendered by the uncommon attributive *sadedop'lo* (სადეოპ'ლო), indicating matrilineal royalty through its root *dedop'ali*. Later manuscripts yield assorted forms of the expected *samep'o* (სამეპ'ო), “royal, kingdom, kingship”, which is

¹⁸⁹ Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts A-95, written in *nusxuri*. See Bregaže 1973, 361–393.

based on *mep'e* (მეფე), “king, monarch”.¹⁹⁰ This royal image, which is not unique to Šušānik's *vita*, proceeds from an important truth: *Bidaxš P'eroz* was a relative of King Mirian, and further biological bonds were established through high-profile marriages. Consequently, when the historiographical *Life of the Kings* imputes P'eroz with “royal descent” (*nat'esavi mep'et'a*, ნათესავი მეფეთა), it does so on the basis of history, not legend.¹⁹¹

Bakur-Bak[o]urios

The rivalry engulfing monarchy and *bidaxšate* is also perceptible in the *vitae* of Peter the Iberian (Petre K'art'veli), which are preserved in Georgian and Syriac versions. The former, at least, was subject to massive editing, rewriting and distortion thanks to the staunch anti-Chalcedonian stance of its fifth-century hero.¹⁹² Signs of political antagonism are evident already in Peter's genealogy. John Rufus, author of the Syriac narrative, describes Peter as royalty by identifying the holy man's father as “King” Bosmarios (Buzmihr?).¹⁹³ No other source knows a K'art'velian monarch of this name. A silver plate from Bori is inscribed with the Aramaic phrase “Buzmihr, the good *bidaxš*”, but the object has been dated to the third century and therefore its Buzmihr cannot be Peter's father.¹⁹⁴ Even if this dating proves incorrect, it is uncertain whether the Buzmihr mentioned on the Bori plate was an imperial *bidaxš*, a *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands, or some other toparch.

¹⁹⁰ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 5, Abulaže ed., 16₅. Because the Georgian language lacks formal grammatical gender, *mep'e* could be applied to female monarchs, i.e., Queen T'amar (r. 1184–1213). But *dedop'ali* is intrinsically feminine because of the root *deda*, “mother”.

¹⁹¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 68₁₉.

¹⁹² I am grateful to my friend and colleague T'amila Mgaloblišvili for sharing her unpublished typescript (Mgaloblišvili *forthcoming*). Mgaloblišvili makes a fascinating argument against Peter the Iberian as one of the principal champions of the Miaphysite movement. In her view, John Rufus, Peter's Syriac-writing hagiographer and would-be successor, deliberately cast Peter as a “Monophysite” in order to enhance his own position.

¹⁹³ *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), caps. 6, 7 and 24. Horn 2006, 51 (fn. 5), stresses that Peter's paternal grandfather was also named Bosmarios. Horn's detailed commentary of the English translation of Peter the Iberian's Syriac *vita* largely neglects the profound Iranic society and Iranian orientation of early Christian Caucasia.

¹⁹⁴ Toumanoff 1963, 260–261. For the Bori plate, see also: Giorgaže 2008, 255 (including date); and Burney and Lang 1972, 227–228. The fact remains, however, that the *vita*'s description of “royal” figures is not always accurate. Given the occasional confusion of *bidaxš* and *marzbān*, we might wonder whether Rufus' Bosmarios is actually the Sasanian *marzbān* Vēžan Buzmihr. But see Toumanoff 1963, 261.

The Syriac *vita* further identifies Peter's maternal grandfather as Bakurios (Geo. Bakur, Bak'ar). This figure, it claims, was the first Christian "king" of the K'art'velians (!).¹⁹⁵ Bakurios has potentially been confused with an actual monarch, either Mirian III's son Bak'ar I (r. 363–?380) or Varaz-Bak'ar/Bakur II (r. 380–394), the latter of whom is mentioned in Peter's sanitised Georgian *vita*.¹⁹⁶ We must tread cautiously, however, for some if not many of the genealogical particulars in both *vitae* are faulty.¹⁹⁷ The late Wachtang Djobadze nevertheless attempted to explain the discrepancy in confessional terms:

[the] reference could imply the renunciation of the Arian faith by Bakur and acceptance of the Nicean Orthodoxy or the "true Christian religion". In view of the shaky Arian position during the first quarter of the fifth century, to see Bakurios as the first Christian king is reasonable.¹⁹⁸

Though intriguing, Djobadze's measured speculation is not confirmed by any Georgian source.

Fortunately, the important figure Bakurios is attested elsewhere.¹⁹⁹ Less prone to later manipulation is the account of K'art'li's conversion in the well-known *Ecclesiastical History* of Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 410). Writing in Latin, Rufinus names his informant as "... Bacurius, a most trustworthy man, king [rex] of his own people ...", "Hæc nobis ita gesta, fidelissimus vir Bacurius, gentis ipsius rex ..." ²⁰⁰ The lost *Ecclesiastical History* of Gelasios of Caesarea (d. 395), elements of which are preserved in the history attributed to the writer formerly known as Gelasios of Kyzikos (Cyzicus), refers to this individual in a similar way: "... the trustworthy Bakkourios ... of the royal family [tou basilikou genous]", "... ὁ πιστότατος Βακκούριος ... τοῦ βασιλικοῦ γένους ..." ²⁰¹

Bakourios²⁰²–Bakur is mentioned in other foreign sources, including the *Ecclesiastical History* of Sōkratēs (Socrates) and the *Historia nova* of Zōsimos.²⁰³ He

¹⁹⁵ *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), caps. 6, 7 and 11, the last of which identifies "the great Bakurios" as "the first Christian king of the Iberians" (Horn and Phenix Jr trans., 13).

¹⁹⁶ *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Geo.), cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 215_{9–12} (both Ц and Л variants). Bakurios' brother Arsilio may have been confused with the later Chosroid King Arč'il (caps. 7 and 14; r. 411–435). King Pharsamanios, if an actual *mep'e*, must be King P'arsman IV (r. 406–409).

¹⁹⁷ Peeters 1932, 54–58; and Toumanoff 1969a, 33.

¹⁹⁸ Djobadze 1976, 63 (fn. 2).

¹⁹⁹ For what follows, see especially Toumanoff 1969a, 31–33. See also *PLRE* = Jones 1971, vol. 1, 144.

²⁰⁰ Rufinus, I.10, Migne ed., col. 482.

²⁰¹ Ps.-Gelasios of Kyzikos, I.10.21, Loeschke and Heinemann eds., 154_{14–16}.

²⁰² From this point, precedence is given to Gk. Bakourios when referring to non-Georgian traditions.

²⁰³ Sōkratēs, I.20 and V.25; Sōkratēs (Arm.), cap. 113, Thomson trans., 160, for "Bacurius, the emperor's general"; and Zōsimos, IV.54–58.

held high positions within the Roman army, serving as *dux Palaestinae* and then *comes domesticorum*.²⁰⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus reports his participation in the Battle of Adrianople in 378.²⁰⁵ Bakourios-Bakur visited Antioch in 391 and met with the renowned rhetorician Libanios, with whom he had corresponded back in 380.²⁰⁶ Bakourios-Bakur was still active in the Roman military in 394.²⁰⁷ The individual who accomplished all this is, quite possibly, the inspiration for the oddly-described Bakurios of the Syriac *vita* of Peter the Iberian. On more solid ground, the fifth-century Armenian writer Koriwn claims that his mentor and hero Maštoc' (later called Mesrop), inventor of the Armenian script still used today, also devised a script for the K'art'velians. In this task he was aided by "King Bakur" (*t'agawor ... Bakur, Թագաւոր ... Բակուր*), Movsēs the "bishop of the land" (*episkopos ašxarhin, եպիսկոպոս աշխարհին*), and an eastern Georgian translator named Jałay.²⁰⁸

Was the Bacurius of Rufinus and the Bakur of Koriwn a king of the K'art'velians residing in Mc'xet'a? The problem boils down to chronology. At the time when this individual should have occupied the throne (after 394), there was no K'art'velian monarch by this name. The reign of Varaz-Bak'ar/Bakur II ended precisely in 394; but the next king in Mc'xet'a was Trdat (r. 394–406). Koriwn's Movsēs likewise presents a temporal conundrum, for early Georgian sources are entirely unacquainted with a K'art'velian chief prelate named Movsēs/Moses in this period.²⁰⁹ We are left with three possibilities: Bakourios-Bacurius-Bakur and Moses are figments of the historical imagination; they are misrepresentations; or surviving Georgian sources somehow managed to be ignorant of both personalities.

An important clue is found in the history of the Constantinople-based Zōsimos completed just after the year 500. It identifies General Bakourios (Βακούριος) as having been born into a family *from Armenia*, ἐξ Ἀρμενίας τὸ γένος (*ex Armenias to genos*).²¹⁰ Considering the totality of evidence, this phrasing links Bakourios' family to the bicultural Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands. This area was called Somxit'i, the March of Armenia, by the K'art'velians and was called Gugark',

²⁰⁴ For Bakourios-Bakur's prominent position in the Roman army, see also Woods 1996. Woods confuses K'art'li and Colchis/Egrisi in his discussion of Bacurius and Subarmachius. In relation to the latter, Woods writes: "His description [in a fragment of the fourth-century history of Eunapios of Sardis] raises the possibility that he was an Iberian" (p. 367).

²⁰⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, XXXI.12.16. See also Braund 1994, 246–247.

²⁰⁶ Libanios, *Epistulae*, 963, 964 and 980, cited in Djobadze 1976, 63–64. See also Kekeliže 1955d.

²⁰⁷ Toumanoff 1969a, 31.

²⁰⁸ Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc'*, cap. 15, Abelean ed., 62^{14–15}.

²⁰⁹ However, Koriwn's testimony has prompted some modern observers to insert Moses between Swm[e]jon I and Iona, roughly between 410 and 425: Salia 1983, 74–76. See also Rapp 2003, 329 (fn. 67).

²¹⁰ Zōsimos, IV.57.

the March of Virk'/Iberia, by the Armenians. From a K'art'velian perspective, including his own, Bakourios hailed from Somxit'i, the Armenian March.

The fame of Bakur in Roman sources gives no reason to doubt his existence. With regards to Bakur's identity back in the homeland, there can be little question of Bakur having become the dynastic *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark'. And he impressed upon others, including Rufinus, the aggrandised royal status of his family. Bakur's investiture as *bidaxš* occurred sometime after 394, more than fifteen years after the Battle of Adrianople; he died after 430. Toumanoff further identifies him as the son of the first Mihrānid *bidaxš* P'eroz who was, so far as we know, the first Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxš* to accept Christianity.²¹¹ Bakur's mother was the daughter of the first Christian king Mirian III, the first Christian king of K'art'li and the Mihrānid founder of the royal Chosroid dynasty. Bakur's auspicious parentage would have provided more incentive to lay claim to the status of *mep'e*, *t'agawor*, *basileus* and *rex*.

Certainly, the Christian Bakur performed royal feats by fostering Somxit'i-Gugark's Christianisation and perhaps by sponsoring the project resulting in the first Georgian script. Had Maštoc' spearheaded the effort to invent the Georgian script, as is reported by Koriwn, the bilingual marchlands would have been the ideal place to begin, and the alphabetic architect – whoever he might actually have been – would have sought the sanction of its ruler Bakur.²¹² Accordingly, Maštoc' would have coordinated his efforts with the bishop of C'urtaw/C'urtavi.²¹³ The alleged fashioning of the Georgian script by the first king P'arnavaz – a tradition articulated in the ca. 800 *Life of the Kings*, one of the earliest surviving works of Georgian historiography – not only followed the conventions of the Iranian epic, but it also may have been a clever tactic to undercut the autonomy of the *bidaxšate*. All of this makes it tempting to identify Bakur-Bakourios as the first *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands to have been a Christian from the time of his accession to the post – and as not the first Christian king of the K'art'velians. Although Nino's untimely death prevented her from converting Bakur's father P'eroz, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* reports success under Mirian's successor, King Bak'ar.²¹⁴ There is no reason to doubt P'eroz's acceptance of the Christian God, but political expediency may have spurred his outward conversion.

²¹¹ Thus, his father cannot be the *bidaxš* Buzmihir attested on the Bori plate.

²¹² Later, however, Maštoc's hagiographer Koriwn correctly distinguishes between K'art'velian king Arjiwl (Arjiwl ... *t'agawor Vrac'*, *Արժիւլ ... Թագաւոր Վրաց*), i.e., Arč'il I (r. 411–435), who sat in Mc'xet'a, and Ašušay, "prince of Tašir" (*išxan Tašrac'*, *Իշխան Տաշրաց*): *Vita Maštoc'*, cap. 18, Abelean ed., 72–75. Note Koriwn's distortion of "Arč'il". Tašir[i] was a district of Somxit'i-Gugark'; see Hewsen in Anania Širakac'i, esp. 200–204.

²¹³ Might he have been named Movsēs? Maštoc's activity in the marchlands might have been part of an Armenian effort to destabilise the suzerainty of the K'art'velian monarchy.

²¹⁴ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 130–131.

Bakur's holding of exalted positions within the Roman army and participation in Roman campaigns are noteworthy. Like the K'art'velian monarchy, the *bidaxšate* found itself squeezed in an imperial vice and its leaders often seized opportunities to play one great power off the other. *Bidaxšes* could align themselves with either the Sasanian or Roman Empires, though the latter avenue appears to have been rarely pursued.

What, then, are we to make of the absence of Bakur-Bakourios in Georgian historiographical sources? Because K'art'lis c'xovreba and the non-ecclesiastical components of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay embody royalist perspectives, the renowned Bakur, a powerful *bidaxš* who claimed some attributes of monarchical authority, was passed over in silence. (These sources mention the apostate Varsk'en only in connection with the martyrdom of Šušanik and with the *bidaxš's* subsequent demise.) In light of the fascinating local and foreign evidence, the *vita* of Šušanik's portrayal of the *bidaxšate* as royal, not to mention the text's geographical setting, are compelling signs of its creation in the marchlands. Initially written at the end of the fifth century when the hereditary *bidaxšes* of Somxit'i-Gugark' were quasi-autonomous rulers, the *vitae* of Peter the Iberian are poignant reminders of the interlocking interests and genuine biological and matrimonial bonds drawing together the *bidaxšate* and the K'art'velian monarchy beginning in the fourth century.²¹⁵ In the words of Toumanoff, "[i]t is easy to see how a later memory might represent these powerful vassals as a line of parallel kings".²¹⁶

Spaspeti and Naxapeti

Pitixši is not the only office having an Iranian name and function in early Georgian hagiographical literature. The *vita* of Šušanik once refers to a *spaypeti* (სპაჲპეტი), "general, commander", an archaic form of the word *spaspeti* (სპასპეტი) invariably found in subsequent texts.²¹⁷ *Sparapet* (სპარაპეტი) is the

²¹⁵ The confusion of names in the Syriac *vita* of Peter the Iberian is particularly evident with Peter's maternal grandmother. His mother is identified as Bakurduktia (caps. 6 and 19), a transcription of Bakarduxt. She was, according to the source, the daughter of King Bakurios. Bakurduktia's mother is simply termed Duktia (caps. 6 and 12), i.e., Duxt, the standard Mlr. suffix "daughter" transformed into a proper name. Osduktia was Peter's paternal grandmother (cap. 16). For her part, Zuzo is identified as one of the foster mothers of the young Nabarnugios-Peter (caps. 9 and 17). This must be a distortion of the root of Geo. *dedamžuze*, "foster mother". See below, pp. 88–89 and 239. The source rightly suggests, however, that the monarchy and *bidaxšate* were connected through marriage, and it also implies a rivalry more bitter than is conveyed in the royalist texts of K'art'lis c'xovreba.

²¹⁶ Toumanoff 1969a, 4. Cf. Ingoroqva 1954, 72–80 and 442–447. See also Toumanoff 1969a, 4–5: "[Ingoroqva] actually makes the Vitaxae of Gogarene of the first-second centuries a branch of the royal Iberian house that was co-sovereign with it".

²¹⁷ Andronikašvili 1966, 371–372.

Armenian equivalent. Both Caucasian terms derive from Parthian *spāδpat* and Middle Persian *spāhbed*.²¹⁸ In the Sasanian environment, *spāhbed* designated a general and more particularly one of the later empire's four great generals.²¹⁹ In late antique Caucasia, the *spaspeti* || *sparapet* was the commander of the royal army.²²⁰ In the oldest Georgian example, C'urtaveli describes Šušanik as the "daughter of Vardan, *spaypeti* of the Armenians [*somext'a spaypeti*]"'.²²¹ This *spaypeti* is none other than the famous Vardan Mamikonean, hero of the insurrection against the Sasanians in 451 celebrated in Elišē's sixth-century *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*.²²² About the office in Arsacid (Aršakuni) Armenia, Garsoïan writes:

During the fourth century, the office of *sparapet* was clearly the most important one after that of the king, and he could even act as ruler in the absence of an effective king ... Throughout this period, the *sparapetut'iwn* was hereditary in the Mamikonean house ... Like the other contemporary offices of this type it belonged to the family as a whole and did not necessarily pass in direct line from father to son.²²³

Although *spaspeti* || *sparapet* is derived from Middle Iranian, it was integrated into Caucasian languages and came to be regarded as indigenous. This position was hereditary among local aristocrats not just in Armenia Major but throughout southern Caucasia. It should be noted that the regional adaptation of *spāδpat* || *spāhbed* in no way necessitates an Iranian origin for the commanders of the K'art'velian and Armenian – and presumably Albanian – armies.²²⁴

Another high-ranking office based on an Iranian term is attested in the *vita* of Iovane Zedazneli, leader of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers who popularised

²¹⁸ Of the Caucasian forms, Geo. *spaypeti* most closely replicates the Parthian.

²¹⁹ Gyselen 2001.

²²⁰ Drawing heavily upon Western "feudal" terminology (usually a misleading approach in Caucasian and Iranian contexts), Toumanoff 1963, 97 *et seq.*, translates *spaspeti* as "high constable".

²²¹ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11, "იყო ასეველი ვარდანისი, ლომებისა სპაიპეტისა". Later redactions give *spaspetisa* and, rarely, the corrupted *spatpetisa*.

²²² Thomson in Elišē (1993 repr.), 14. For Elišē in the context of the sixth century, see Andrews 2013, esp. 37–41.

²²³ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 560–561.

²²⁴ Cf. Gippert 2004, 107, who, on the basis of their Iranian titles, finds it likely that *Bidaxš Varsk'en* was an Iranian. There is no doubt about the Parthian pedigree of Varsk'en's family, though it had acculturated to the Caucasian environment well before his time. The prevailing view in scholarship – which has been swayed by the fact that the earliest surviving witness of Šušanik's *vita* is composed in Georgian – makes Varsk'en a K'art'velian/Georgian, e.g., Lang 1966, 97.

Naxapeti's rarity in surviving Georgian textual and epigraphical sources suggests intermittent usage. The term may well have reached Georgian *via armeniaca*: the commonly-found *nahapet* (ნაჰაპეტი) parallels an undocumented Middle Persian **nāfbed* || **nāfapet* and denotes the head of an aristocratic family.²²⁹ Among Armenians *nahapet* – often used interchangeably with *tanutēr* (տանուտէր) – was the principal of a *naxarar* house.²³⁰ There is no direct equivalent in Georgian; *mt'avari* (prince) and *erist'avi* (general, governor) come closest. It is not by accident that the few epigraphical survivals of *naxapeti* are found in Somxit'i-Gugark', where Armeno-K'art'velian interplay was sustained and intense.

²³⁰ The term also appears in the Armenian-language *History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movsēs Daxuranc'i, I.26, Aṙak'elyan ed., 94₁₈.

Sasanian Officials: *Marzbān* and *C'ixistavi*

In contrast to Armenian sources, early Georgian hagiographies say precious little about the central administrative machinery of the Sasanian Empire.²³¹ The one imperial office figuring prominently in the *vita* of Evstat'i is *marzbān*, a high-ranking post whose Middle Persian name is replicated by Georgian *marzapani* (მარჯპანი) and Armenian *marzpan* (մարզպան).²³² There is no exact English equivalent. D.N. MacKenzie suggests “margrave, warden of the marches”, Toumanoff – “viceroy”, and Garsoïan – “keeper/warden-of-the-marches, marquess”.²³³ Distributed throughout Caucasia were as many as three concurrent *marzbāns*, imperial appointees who represented the interests of the *šāhan šāh* – although the office may have been held hereditarily within certain aristocratic families. *Marzbāns* were headquartered at Duin in Persarmenia (the former Arsacid [Aršakuni] domains in Armenia Major), at Tp'ilisi in K'art'li, and at Partaw in Albania. In addition, there was a *marzbān* based in Sasanian Ādurbādagān, perhaps at Ganzak.²³⁴

The stimuli leading to the creation of the three Caucasian *marzbānates* share important traits.²³⁵ In Armenia Major, Bahrām V Gōr (r. 420–438) permanently installed a *marzbān* following the suppression of the Arsacid monarchy in 428, an act solicited by Armenian *naxarars*.²³⁶ In the words of Toumanoff, the empire “showered favours upon the princes. The Court of Ctesiphon was careful to respect their sovereign rights; its suzerainty was expressed in the presence of

²³¹ For the Armenian narratives (e.g., the Armenian *Epic Histories*, Agat'angelos, Łazar P'arpec'i, Elišē and, somewhat later, Movsēs Xorenac'i), see Garsoïan 2009a. See also Traina 2007.

²³² Andronikašvili 1966, 340–341. A *marzbān* is attested in the Armenian *vita* of Šušanik, but the post is entirely unknown in the received Georgian text: *Vita Šušanik* (Arm.), cap. 7, Abulaže ed., 23₆₆ and 72. This may be an indication of the later provenance of the Armenian *vita*.

²³³ MacKenzie 1986, 54; Toumanoff 1963, 133 *et seq.*; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Marzpan”, 544. On the office, see: Gignoux 1984a; and specifically for Armenia, Garsoïan 2009a, 105–112.

²³⁴ On the *marzbāns* of Persarmenia after the demise of the Armenian Arsacid dynasty, see Garsoïan 1997c. For Varaz-Šapuh, a fourth-century *marzbān* based in Ādurbādagān (Arm. Atrpatakan), see: *Epic Histories*, III.xx; and Garsoïan 2009a, 106 (fn. 90). On the possibility of the three Caucasian *marzbānates* having been joined into one in the mid-sixth century, see: Trever 1953, 224 and 232; Toumanoff 1963, 476 (fn. 169); and Ghodrat-Dizaji 2011, 317. But the information contained in *Vita Evstat'i* militates against it. There were yet other *marzbāns* in the wider Caucasian arena: Garsoïan 2009a, 109 (and fns. 104–105).

²³⁵ Other high-ranking Sasanian officials in Caucasia may have preceded *marzbāns*, including imperial *bidaxšes*.

²³⁶ For the *marzbānate* in Armenia Major, see, e.g.: *La Narratio de rebus Armeniae*, §16, Garitte ed., 28; and Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.63ff.

a viceroy (*marzpān*) at the old royal capital of Dvin [i.e., Duin]”.²³⁷ Elsewhere he adds: “[e]ven though respecting the social and political *status quo* of their new dependency, the Iranian government attempted to Iranianize it culturally and even religiously”.²³⁸ This may, in fact, not have been the first *marzbānate* in Armenia Major. *The Epic Histories* speaks of the temporary establishment of a *marzbān* when the Armenian Arsacids still occupied the throne in the late fourth century. This would have occurred at a moment of political frailty during Queen Zarmanduxt’s tenure as regent.²³⁹ In neighbouring Albania the *šāhan šāh* definitely instituted a *marzbān* before the local Arsacid dynasty had completely lost power. Following the abdication of Vač’ē II in the early 460s (perhaps 463), a *marzbān* was established by Pērōz in his new – or at least rebuilt and expanded – city of Partaw. This *marzbān* remained in place until, if not through, the brief resumption of the monarchy under the last Albanian Arsacid Vač’agan III in 485.²⁴⁰ Vač’agan’s reign ended ca. 510; it is not certain when the Albanian *marzbānate* was reconstituted. For its part, the eastern Georgian *marzbānate* was created at the end the reign of the Chosroid Vaxtang Gorgasali. A time of political vulnerability, the post was probably instituted ca. 517/518, some sixty years before the Sasanians completely suppressed the K’art’velian monarchy. The *vita* of Evstat’i refers to the “*marzbān* of K’art’li” (*marzapan k’art’lisa*, მარზაპან ქართველისა) headquartered at the city of Tp’ilisi, but this would have been much later, sometime in the late sixth or perhaps early seventh century.²⁴¹ Evstat’i’s hagiographer explicitly names two *marzbāns* of K’art’li: Arvand Gušnasp and his successor Vēžan Buzmihr. Both acted as supreme judge within the eastern Georgian lands claimed – though not always directly controlled – by the Sasanians.²⁴²

The Martyrdom of Evstat’i attests another locally-based Sasanian official: the *c’ixist’avi* (ციხისტავი). This compound consists of *c’ixe* (ციხე), “fortress”, and *t’avi* (თავი), “head, chief”, thus “head of the fortress”. In Evstat’i’s time the “*c’ixist’avi* of Mc’xet’a” (*c’ixist’avi mc’xet’isa*, ციხისტავი მცხეთისა)²⁴³ was Vistahm (Geo. Ustam), who, as we have seen, is possibly the famous Vistahm Ispahbudān, uncle of Xusrō II. *C’ixist’avi* has long been regarded as a generic term: a military official entrusted with the defence and operation of a fortress. In the *vita* of Evstat’i, however, *c’ixist’avi* designates an important Sasanian representative, the commandant, in Armenian called *berdakal* (բերդակալ).

²³⁷ Toumanoff 1966, 599.

²³⁸ Toumanoff 1963, 153. See also Adontz/Garsoïan 1970. esp. ch. 9.

²³⁹ *Epic Histories*, V.xxxviii. See also Garsoïan 2009a, 106.

²⁴⁰ See also: Trever 1959, 214–215, and 225; Toumanoff 1963, 262–263 and 476 (fn. 169); and Toumanoff 1990, 568.

²⁴¹ According to my dating of the text, for which see *infra*.

²⁴² Judging from the names reaching us, the *marzbāns* of eastern Georgia were Iranians/Parthians.

²⁴³ *Vita Evstat’i*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., e.g., 31,. Note the variant *mc’xet’el c’ixist’avi* (მცხეთელ ციხისტავი) at *ibid.*, 31₂.

Like its Georgian counterpart, the Armenian term is based on the root *berd* (բերդ), “fortress”.²⁴⁴ *Berdakals* are attested in fifth-century Armenian sources, including *The Epic Histories* and Łazar P’arpec’i.²⁴⁵ Significantly, P’arpec’i reports the involvement of the *berdakal* Vehdenšapuh in a tribunal,²⁴⁶ a duty consistent with Vistahm hearing complaints from Mc’xet’a’s disgruntled Zoroastrian Iranian community. P’arpec’i simultaneously styles Vehdenšapuh as *ambarapet* (ամբարապետ), a variant of *hambarakapet* (համբարապետ < MPers. *hambār*, “store”), the “overseer-of-stores, quartermaster”, another high-ranking Sasanian office.²⁴⁷ It is conceivable that Vistahm also performed a dual role as *c’ixist’avi* and *hambarakapet* (whatever the Georgian equivalent might have been), thus paralleling Vehdenšapuh’s appointments in Armenia Major. Beyond question is the subordination of the *c’ixist’avi* of Mc’xet’a to the Sasanian *marzbān* of Tp’ilisi in the second half of the sixth and into the seventh century.²⁴⁸ Across Evstat’i’s adulthood, then, there were two principal Sasanian officials in eastern Georgia, both of whom were of Iranian extraction.

Literary Silence on the K’art’velian Monarchy

The presence of at least two high-level Sasanian administrators in K’art’li leads to an unresolved mystery: why is the K’art’velian monarchy completely absent from the pages of Georgian *vitae* produced in the fifth, sixth and early seventh centuries? The silence of the hagiographical celebration of Šušānik is easiest to explain: Iakob C’urtaveli wrote from the perspective of the substantially autonomous *bidaxšate* of Somxit’i-Gugark’. Despite the despicable actions of Varsk’en, the cleric-author makes no attempt to tarnish the legitimacy and claimed autonomy of the dynastic *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands. The writer’s scorn is restricted to the apostate and does not extend to his office. Indeed, he acknowledges Varsk’en’s Christian father Aršušay to have been a builder of churches and martyria.²⁴⁹ C’urtaveli also paints Varsk’en’s brother Jojik sympathetically. Varsk’en’s was, the hagiographer hoped, an anomaly. C’urtaveli’s testimony establishes that at the end of the fifth century the dynastic *bidaxšes* governing from C’urtavi conceived of themselves

²⁴⁴ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Berdakal”, 517.

²⁴⁵ *Epic Histories*, IV.lv, IV.lviii, IV.lxi and V.i; and Łazar P’arpec’i, cap. 86.

²⁴⁶ Łazar P’arpec’i, cap. 55.

²⁴⁷ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Hambarakapet/Ambarakapet”, 530.

²⁴⁸ For their part, early Georgian historiographical texts mention only one *c’ixist’avi*, the unnamed commandant of the Kala fortress in Tp’ilisi during Herakleios’ siege in 627: Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 224–225; and *Royal List II*, §§22–24, Rapp trans., 309–310. Ps.-Juanšer does not explicitly identify this commandant as a Sasanian official, however.

²⁴⁹ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 15₅₋₆. Varsk’en’s unnamed mother was also a Christian.

as autonomous rulers, although Varsk'en, at least, recognised the ultimate authority of the relatively distant Sasanian *šāhan šāh* as a counterweight to the K'art'velian monarchy.²⁵⁰ Because the king sitting at Mc'xet'a plays no role the story and because the *bidaxš* was in many respects independent, this short text had no incentive to mention the K'art'velian *mep'e*. The literary silence on the local monarchy further magnified the asserted autonomy of the *bidaxšate*.

The Martyrdom of Evstat'i's silence on K'art'velian kingship has proven more contentious. Three proofs of the demise of the eastern Georgian monarchy before or during Evstat'i's lifetime are frequently advanced: first, the presence of a Sasanian *marzbān* in Tp'ilisi (and, as we now know, a subordinate *c'ixist'avi* in Mc'xet'a); second, the opening synchronism based on the *šāhan šāh* and his *marzbān*; and, finally, the total absence of local kings. In reality, K'art'velian monarchs and Sasanian *marzbāns* could and did coexist as we see in Albania and probably Armenia Major.²⁵¹ *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* – a historiographical work preserved in *K'art'lis c'xovreba* – reports the construction of a Sasanian fortress “between the passes of Tp'ilisi opposite the fortress of Mc'xet'a” already at the end of the fourth century, during the reign of Varaz-Bak'ar II (380–394).²⁵² This circumstance is curious when we recall the principal K'art'velian settings of the *vita* of Evstat'i: Mc'xet'a, the former royal capital and Evstat'i's new home, and neighbouring Tp'ilisi, the subsequent royal city and the residence of a Sasanian *marzbān* since ca. 517/518.²⁵³ An allusion to the K'art'velian king is expected yet we do not find one.

Consider this remarkable passage in which *Marzbān* Arvand Gušnasp prepared to answer a summons at the Sasanian court:

As the *marzbān* was mounting [his horse], the princes [*mt'avaris*, i.e., the heads of noble families] of K'art'li and Samoel the *katholikos* of K'art'li and Grigol the

²⁵⁰ And perhaps also as a check upon Roman influence in the region. Here we should recall the close alliance of the *bidaxš* Bakur-Bakourios and the Roman Empire. Somxit'i-Gugark' retained considerable autonomy into the early seventh century: Garsoïan 1999b, 341–343 and 522 (fn. 15).

²⁵¹ Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 45, Tēr-Mkrč'ean and Malxasean eds., 83₃₀ = Thomson trans., 129, mentions the “*marzpan* of Virk' [eastern Georgia]” (ქრსან მარცპანს) in the mid-fifth century, a time when the K'art'velian monarchy definitely existed. In this passage, Vasak, the Armenian prince of Siwnik', made a report to a Sasanian tribunal in which he refers to his tenure as *marzbān* of K'art'li. In this capacity, Vasak says he controlled “the pass of Albania”.

²⁵² *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 136_{12–13}: “... ტფილისის კართა შორის ციხედ მცხეთისად”. Just before, the anonymous author reports the Sasanian invasion of K'art'li, which began in Somxit'i. In this instance, Thomson trans., 150, renders the term “Armenia”. But here the intended meaning is the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier. This Sasanian fortress and the Roman allegiance of the *bidaxš* Bakur-Bakourios suggest the intensification of the imperial contest for eastern Georgia and Somxit'i-Gugark'.

²⁵³ Toumanoff 1963, 370; and Toumanoff 1969, 30–31.

mamasaxlisi of K'art'li and Aršuša[y] the *bidaxš* [pitiaxši] of K'art'li and other princes [sep'eculni]²⁵⁴ arose ...²⁵⁵

The K'art'velian king is nowhere to be found despite the identification of other eastern Georgian luminaries, two of which are named: Grigol “the *mamasaxlisi* of K'art'li” and Aršušay “the *bidaxš* of K'art'li”. The office of *mamasaxlisi* (მამასახლისი), literally “father [*mama*] of the house [*saxli*]”, can be traced to antiquity, though its existence was not necessarily unbroken and its function certainly was not static.²⁵⁶ As it is employed in surviving narrative sources describing the Hellenistic and Parthian Arsacid ages, the *mamasaxlisi* was the custodian of the central K'art'velian city Mc'xet'a. The position must have been the hereditary prerogative of one of the great aristocratic houses, though over time it may have been possessed by different families. Insofar as Aršušay is concerned, his name and title are clear indications of his status as *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark'. In this account, the modifier *k'art'li*sa (ქართლისა), “of K'art'li”, signals the subordination of the *mamasaxlisi* and *bidaxš* to the Sasanian central authority in order to facilitate its governance of *interregnum* eastern Georgia.

Perhaps this passage was intended to enumerate only those K'art'velian officials who had formally accepted Sasanian hegemony at a time when the disenfranchised K'art'velian king clung on to a modicum of independence, maybe in exile beyond the confines of Mc'xet'a and Tp'ilisi. If nothing else, would not the bishop associated with the royal house – the leading Christian official in

²⁵⁴ This Georgian term – transcribed *sep'ecul* (სეპ'ეკული) – is documented by Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.7, Abelean and Yartut'iwnean eds., 112₇. For *sep'e*, see below, p. 87.

²⁵⁵ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 34₁₋₃: “... აღდგეს მთავარი ქართლისანი და სამოელ ქართლისა კათალიკოზი და გრიგოლ ქართლისა მამასახლისი და არშუშა ქართლისა პიტიახში და სხუანი სეფეწულნი ...”

²⁵⁶ For *mamasaxlisi* and its evolving meaning, see: Javaxišvili 1989, 107 and 119–120; and Toumanoff 1963, esp. 91 (fn. 128). Cf. Arm. *tanutēr* (տանուտէր), “master/lord of the house/family”, i.e., the head of a *naxarar* house, for which see Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 563. *Mamasaxlisi* and *tanutēr* are used as synonyms in the original Georgian and adapted Armenian versions of *The Life of the Kings*; for the Armenian, see *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 14₁₀. *Mamasaxlisis* are mentioned several times in *The Life of the Kings*. Before P'arnavaz, this ca. 800 source relates that “And whoever was at Mc'xet'a, he became leader [*t'avadi*] over all the others. And they did not name him king [*mep'e*] or *erist'avi*, but called him *mamasaxlisi*”, “ხოლო ვინცა იყვის მცხეთას, რეცა თავადი იგი იყვის ყოველთა მათ სხუათა ზედა. და არცა სახელ-ვედებოდათ მეფედ, არცა ერისთავად, არამედ მამასახლისი ეწოდებოდათ ...” (Qauxč'išvili ed., 11₂₋₄ = Thomson trans., 13). P'arnavaz's uncle Samar was *mamasaxlisi* of Mc'xet'a; he was allegedly slain by Alexander's troops: *ibid.*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 20. In a Christian ecclesiastical context, *mamasaxlisi* could designate the abbot or *hēgoumenos* (ἡγούμενος) of a monastery. Grigol the *mamasaxlisi* of Cromi is attested on a stele of the second half of the sixth/early seventh century: Mač'abeli 1998, 84. See also Šaniže 1971b.

eastern Georgia who since the end of the fifth century had assumed the lofty title *katholikos* – also have eluded Iranian suzerainty? Or might illustrious K'art'velian ecclesiastics have recognised Sasanian authority in return for guarantees of their station and safety? This last scenario is a strong possibility because, in the words of Touraj Daryae,

[b]y the fifth century ... the [Sasanian] state had realized the importance of the religious minorities and attempted to co-opt them into a system of governance where according to legal precepts, all would be considered simply as *mard/zan ī šahr* 'man/woman citizen (of the Empire)'. Each community was bound by their local religious tradition and under the jurisdiction of their Rabbi and/or Priest.²⁵⁷

Movsēs Xorenac'i hints at the mechanism of this process after the Sasanian removal of the Armenian Arsacids in 428. Bahrām V (Arm. Vřam, Վրամ) appointed the Syrian Samuēl as chief prelate and "set as his duties: to assist the *marzbān* and to oversee the assessment of the required taxes, the law courts and other secular institutions".²⁵⁸

The K'art'velian religious establishment may have broken ranks with the residue of the local monarchy, accepting Sasanian overlordship in return for assurances of its security. The alignment of the chief prelacy with the Sasanians also might conceal tensions between political and religious élites, thus paralleling the situation in Armenia Major.²⁵⁹ It is, moreover, a fair presumption that K'art'li's clerical ranks were split internally with regards to the church's relationship with the Sasanians. Received historiographical texts report none of this, and we would not expect them to do so since they project a strictly royalist perspective that emphasises – and frequently exaggerates – eastern Georgia's unity under the monarchy.²⁶⁰ Admitting the reduced state of the crown and the perfidiousness of the aristocracy and church would undermine their basic purpose.

On the suppression of the K'art'velian monarchy scholars have attached enormous weight to the testimony of the Late Roman historian Prokopios (Procopius) of Caesarea. In the first and second books of his *Wars*, Prokopios

²⁵⁷ Daryae 2009, 56.

²⁵⁸ Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.65, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 350_{15–17}, Thomson trans., 343, "և գործնմա զատուցանէ զընկերել մարզպանին, կալ ի վերայ բաշխից հարկաց ինպրեցելոց և զատաստանաց և ալ աշխարհական կարգաց:" See also Garsoïan 1984, 243.

²⁵⁹ Garsoïan 1997c, 96–98, for antagonisms between Armenian *naxarars* and the church and for the Sasanian installation of what seem to have been Iranian Christians as chief prelates of Armenia under the *marzbānate*. On the fourth-century "state of tension" between the Armenian Arsacids and the church, see Garsoïan 1984, 228–229.

²⁶⁰ Pre-modern obsessions with monarchical/aristocratic/ecclesiastical unity and the struggle against the enemy (however defined) have been transformed by modern ethno-master narratives into obsessions with national unity and the quest for national liberty.

stresses the precarious position of both eastern and western Georgia between the feuding Roman and Sasanian Empires. About K'art'li (Iberia) he writes:

This nation is Christian and they guard the rites of this faith more closely than any other men known to us, but they have been subjects of the Persian king, as it happens, from ancient times. And just then Kabadēs [i.e., Kavād I, r. 488–496, 498–531] was desirous of forcing them to adopt the rites of his own religion. And he enjoined their king, Gourgenēs, to do all things as the Persians are accustomed to do them, and in particular not under any circumstances to hide their dead in the earth, but to throw them all to the birds and dogs. For this reason, then, Gourgenēs wished to go over to the [Roman] Emperor Justin [I, r. 518–527], and he asked that he might receive pledges that the Romans would never abandon the Iberians to the Persians. And the emperor gave pledges with great eagerness ...²⁶¹

Chronology and the absence in the Caucasian literary canon of a contemporaneous king named Gourgenēs (Gurgen?)²⁶² necessitate his identification as a warped memory of Vaxtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522), the royal hero celebrated in the ca. 800 *The Life of Vaxtang*.²⁶³ The received Georgian tradition, which is based on an

²⁶¹ Prokopios, *Wars*, I.xii.3–6, Dewing ed. and trans., 96–97: “οὗτος ὁ λεὼς Χριστιανοὶ τέ εἰσι καὶ τὰ νόμιμα τῆς δόξης φυλάσσουσι ταύτης πάντων μάλιστα ἀνθρώπων ὧν ἡμεῖς ἴσμεν, κατήκοοι μέντοι ἐκ παλαιοῦ τοῦ Περσῶν βασιλέως τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες. τότε δὲ αὐτοὺς ἤθελε Καβάδης ἐς τὰ νόμιμα τῆς αὐτοῦ δόξης βιάζεσθαι. καὶ αὐτῶν τῷ βασιλεῖ Γουργένῃ ἐπέστελλε τὰ τε ἄλλα ποιεῖν ἢ Πέρσαι νομίζουσι καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τῇ γῇ ὡς ἥκιστα κρύπτειν, ἀλλ’ ὄρνισί τε ρίπτειν καὶ κυσὶν ἅπαντας. διὸ δὴ Γουργένης προσχωρεῖν Ἰουστίνῳ βασιλεῖ ἤθελε τὰ τε πιστὰ ἡξίου λαβεῖν ὡς οὐποτε Ἰβήρας καταπροήσονται Πέρσαις Ῥωμαίοι. ὁ δὲ ταῦτά τε αὐτῷ ξὺν προθυμίᾳ πολλῇ ἐδίδου ...” See also Braund 1994, 282.

²⁶² See below, p. 323, for K'art'velo-Sasanian coinage inscribed with the abbreviated name **ΛΓ**, G-N, “Gurgen”. But such coins definitely belong to the late sixth century. Geo. Gurgen faithfully transcribes MPers. Gurgēn: Schmitt 1986, 457.

²⁶³ For the identification of Gourgenēs with Gorgasali, see, e.g.: Toumanoff 1963, 369; Martin-Hisard 1983, 214; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 431–436. Contradictions in the testimony of Prokopios and Vaxtang's anonymous biographer have led some scholars to the conclusion that Gourgenēs and Vaxtang Gorgasali must be distinct kings, e.g.: Braund 1994, 283–284; and Greatrex 1998, 129 (fn. 25), 140 (fn. 3). Although Later Roman/Byzantine and Georgian traditions preserve valuable information about the period, especially insofar as broad trends are concerned, they are plagued by inconsistency and, in the Georgian case, a thick legendary and epic veneer. Given these circumstances, some inconsistencies have naturally resisted reconciliation. Nevertheless, Georgian historiographical sources are built upon a remarkably reliable sequence of kings, for which see, e.g., the publications of Toumanoff and Melik'išvili. For the blanket dismissal of the Georgian historiographical tradition insofar as Hellenistic-era K'art'velian kings are concerned, see Meißner 2000. But the blind prioritisation of Classical sources and archaeological evidence at the expense of their Georgian counterparts is unwarranted. While Meißner is right to draw attention to the limitations of Georgian texts for remote antiquity, the meticulous research of

earlier source, emphasises Vaxtang's desire to ally his Christian kingdom with the Roman Empire at the end of his reign. Meanwhile, in Lazika (Gk. Λαζική), on the western side of the Surami Mountains, King Tzathios I (r. 522-ca. 540) embraced Roman Christianity and recognised the sovereignty of Constantinople. By this act Tzathios reversed a cycle of non-Christian Laz monarchs stretching back to Goubazēs I in the mid-fifth century.²⁶⁴

Predictably, the Sasanians offset this encroachment with military force. According to Prokopios, towards the end of his life Gourgenēs fled eastern Georgia for the safe haven of Roman Lazika.²⁶⁵ Confused memories of this episode have been worked into *The Life of Vaxtang*, which is examined in Part Two below. Gourgenēs, Prokopios says, remained in Lazika following the “Eternal Peace” concluded by the Romans and Sasanians in 532.²⁶⁶ But this is a chronological impossibility: Vaxtang Gorgasali passed away in or around 522. Here Prokopios has telescoped Vaxtang's reign and his distorted sobriquet, Gourgenēs-Gurgen, onto that of his successor Dač'i.

Despite its sanguine name, the “Eternal Peace” was shattered already in 541 when Xusrō I invaded Lazika. As he chronicles the animosity after the collapse of the “Eternal Peace”, Prokopios writes:

... for since the most notable men of these barbarians together with their king, Gourgenēs, had looked towards revolt, as I have stated in the preceding pages, the Persians from that time on did not permit [the Iberians] to set up a king over themselves, nor were the Iberians single-minded subjects of the Persians, but there was much suspicion and distrust between them. And it was evident that the Iberians were most thoroughly dissatisfied and that they would attempt a revolution shortly if they could seize upon some favourable opportunity.²⁶⁷

many scholars, including Javaxišvili, Toumanoff and Melik'išvili (just to name a few), has demonstrated the historical worth of these complex sources. Significantly, Meißner cites not a single publication by these scholars. In an odd twist, the regnal dates he attributes to Thomson (pp. 199–200) were actually computed by Toumanoff, for which see Thomson 1996a, 379. Needless to say, Classical works present their own limitations and challenges.

²⁶⁴ Braund 1994, 282.

²⁶⁵ Prokopios, *Wars*, I.xii.11.

²⁶⁶ Greatrex 1998, 213–221.

²⁶⁷ Prokopios, *Wars*, II.28.20–21, Dewing ed. and trans., 520–521: “... ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οἱ τούτων δὴ λογιμώτατοι τῶν βαρβάρων ὁμοῦ Γουργένη τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐξ ἀπόστασιν εἶδον, ὥσπερ μοι ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθε λόγοις ἐρρήθη, οὔτε βασιλέα σφίσι καταστήσεσθαι τὸ ἐνθὲνδε ζυνεχώρουν Πέρσαι οὔτε αὐτογνωμονοῦντες Περσῶν κατήκοοι Ἰβηρες ἦσαν, ἀλλ' ὑποψία τε καὶ ἀπιστία ἐς ἀλλήλους πολλὴ εἶχοντο. ἔνδηλοί τε Ἰβηρες ἦσαν δυσανασχετοῦντές τε ἰσχυρότατα καὶ νεωτεριοῦντες οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον, ἢν τινός ποτε καιροῦ λαβέσθαι δυνατοὶ εἶεν”.

The “Eternal Peace” solidified Iranian hegemony over eastern Georgia.²⁶⁸ Most observers have therefore taken Prokopios at his word and have inferred the Sasanian dismantling of K’art’velian kingship in 532 or shortly thereafter. *The Martyrdom of Evstat’i*’s testimony about the existence of a Sasanian *marzbān* in Tp’ilisi and its silence about the K’art’velian monarchy have been advanced as incontrovertible proofs of the *vita*’s composition at a time when the local crown had ceased to exist. This is logical because the text is set chiefly in Mc’xet’a and Tp’ilisi, the twin hub of K’art’velian kingship.²⁶⁹ When this idea is combined with Prokopios’ testimony, the *vita*’s theorised origin in the mid-sixth century is appealing.

But there is a critical defect in this line of argument. On the basis of Romano-Byzantine and Caucasian historiographical sources, Toumanoff convincingly demonstrated the persistence of a diluted K’art’velian monarchy until ca. 580. As a result, the dearth of K’art’velian kings in the *vita* of Evstat’i is best explained by the text’s production during the *interregnum*. If a *šāhan šāh* actually named Xusrō lurks behind “Xuasro”, and if the absence of local monarchs echoes the *interregnum*, the opening passage’s chronological compass pointing to the tenth year of Xusrō’s reign must refer to Xusrō II (r. 590, 591–628). This yields ca. 600/601 as the date for Gwrobandak-Evstat’i’s arrival in Mc’xet’a. In turn, the *vita*’s original composition would belong to the early seventh century, assuming its production shortly after the holy man’s death. Alternately, if the synchronism is genuine, the text was created in the mid- or late-sixth century, shortly after the tenth year of the reign of Xusrō I (531–579) in 541. This is as many as four decades before the final abolition of K’art’velian royal authority.²⁷⁰ The earlier date cannot be ruled out entirely, however, because Toumanoff’s hypothesis, as reasonable as it is, could someday be invalidated with the discovery of new evidence. In addition, we must also consider these scenarios: (1) perhaps the hagiographer’s temporal distance from Evstat’i’s murder is longer than is commonly thought; (2) Evstat’i’s hagiographer might have overlooked or even deliberately ignored a diminished K’art’velian kingship that had relocated from the traditional centres of Mc’xet’a and Tp’ilisi; and (3) because of rivalry gripping king and *katholikos*, the hagiographer ignored what was left of the monarchy, although no such thing is implied in Ps.-Juanšer’s royalist accounts of the contemporaneous Chosroid kings Bakur II (r. 534–547), P’arsman V (r. 547–561) and P’arsman VI (r. 561–?).²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ See, e.g.: Gugušvili 1936, 115–117 (with reference to Javaxišvili); and Silogava and Shengelia 2007, 51–52.

²⁶⁹ Cf. *Vita Šušanik* and the foundational inscription of Bolnisi Sioni, both of which belong to the end of the fifth century. Deriving from the substantially autonomous Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands, these sources categorically ignore the eastern Georgian monarchy.

²⁷⁰ Martin-Hisard dates Evstat’i’s death to 547 and his *vita* to the end of the sixth century: Martin-Hisard 2008a, 177; and Martin-Hisard 1998b, 493ff.

²⁷¹ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 206–215.

In light of the evidence currently at our disposal, we should accept Toumanoff's calculation of ca. 580 as the start of the *interregnum*. Further, the "Xuasro" of Evstat'i's *vita* must be identified as Xusrō II. Therefore, Gwrobandak arrived in Mc'xet'a around 600/601 and his *vita* was written sometime during the initial decades of the seventh century.²⁷²

The Iranic Substratum: Social Stratification and Foster Parentage

Whereas the *vita* of Evstat'i focuses on the Iranian colony in Mc'xet'a and especially the conversion to Christianity of one of its members, Iakob C'urtaveli's *vita* of Šušanik embodies the perspective of élites through the experience of a noblewoman-made-martyr in Somxit'i-Gugark'. Like other Georgian hagiographies, Šušanik's *vita* concentrates narrowly upon its Christian hero. But it simultaneously gives insight into broader Caucasian society through Šušanik's travails in the bicultural *bidaxšate*, the most intense and enduring point of contact for the various Armenian and Georgian peoples in pre-modern times.

C'urtaveli provides some fleeting but valuable glimpses of the social stratification of early Christian Caucasia.²⁷³ He differentiates between "common-folk", *šeurac'xt'agani* (შეურაცხთაგანი, lit. "disgraceful"),²⁷⁴ and "noble-born [in this case, women]",²⁷⁵ *zepurni* (ზეპურნი), rendered in later manuscripts as *sep'e k'alni* (სევე კალნი). *Sep'e*, derived from the Northwest Iranian *vispuhr* (= Arm. *sepuh*, *սֵպուհ*), denotes a "member of a noble house".²⁷⁶ C'urtaveli draws a further distinction between "the free [*aznauri*] and unfree [*uaznoni*] [people]

²⁷² Evstat'i's *vita* refers to a K'art'velian *katholikos* named Samoel. If the reference is authentic, the candidates are Samoel III and IV (both last quarter of the sixth century) and Samoel V (630s). If an early seventh-century date of composition is accepted, it might be asked why the *vita* contains no information about the Armeno-K'art'velian schism following the Third Council of Duin in 607. But the schism has no direct bearing upon Evstat'i's story; moreover, his martyrdom may have occurred shortly before the convocation of the council. In any case, the decisions of Armenian clerics at Duin III seem to have had little immediate impact within eastern Georgia.

²⁷³ For a recent overview of Iran's social structure under the Sasanians, see Daryaei 2009, 39–67.

²⁷⁴ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 9, Abulaže ed., 20₁₈. For "disgraceful", see Abulaže 1973b, 490.

²⁷⁵ For an investigation of eastern Georgian women within a Sasanian context, see Vašalomiže 2007.

²⁷⁶ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 17, Abulaže ed., 27₂₂ and *apparatus criticus*. For the term, see: Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 558–559; and, for a later period, Šaniže in *Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos*, 205. Cf. the toponym Vaspurakan. See also above, p. 82 (fn. 254)

of the land of K'art'li".²⁷⁷ (To his mind, the autonomous *bidaxšate* belonged geographically and culturally to eastern Georgia.) *Aznavuri* has been frequently linked to Parthian *āzāt* and Middle Persian *āzād*, “free, high, noble”.²⁷⁸ Armenian *azat* (ազատ) is unquestionably related to *āzāt*,²⁷⁹ but it is unlikely that Georgian *aznavuri* (აზნაურნი) – which broadly designates the aristocracy – shares this derivation. Rather, it is connected to Armenian *azniw* (ազնիւ), “fine, good, exquisite, excellent, noble”.²⁸⁰ A false etymology is proffered in *The Life of the Kings*, one of the ca. 800 historiographies investigated in Part II. There a thousand “Roman” cavalry are said to have defected from Azon the Macedonian to the first K'art'velian king. P'arnavaz called these men *aznavuris*, “[the men] of/who once belonged to Azon”.²⁸¹

In the Sasanian Empire and throughout the Iranian Commonwealth it was customary for aristocratic children to be raised by foster parents or tutors.²⁸² The principal Georgian term *mamamžuze* (მამამჟუძე), “foster father”, is a combination of *mama* (მამა), “father”, and *žužu* (ძუძუ), “breast”, in the sense of a milk relationship or foster parentage. *Mamamžuze* parallels Armenian *dayeak*

²⁷⁷ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 17, Abulaže ed., 27^{22–23}: “აზნაურნი და უაზნონი სოფლისა ქართველისანი”. For other instances of *aznavuri*, see *idem*, caps. 2 and 17, Abulaže ed., 12¹¹ and 27²⁷.

²⁷⁸ Nyberg 1974, 41: “noble, nobleman, nobility, designation of the large class of lower Sas[anian] nobility”; MacKenzie 1986, 15; Schmitt 1986, 451; and Andronikašvili 1966, 218–221. For the term in the context of pan-Caucasian society, see Javaxišvili 1998a, 136–141. See also Vašalomizė 2007, 137–141.

²⁷⁹ Garsoiān in *Epic Histories*, “Azat-/Azatut'iwn”, 512–513: “Lowest stratum of the Iranian and Armenian nobility in the early medieval period, distinct from the *sepuhs* of the great *naṣṣarar* clans, but in no case merely ‘free’ as opposed to ‘servile’. The term is also used generally for the nobility as a whole. As such it appears as a component in a number of Sasanian personal names”. See also Perikhanian 1968, 11–13. For *azat-* (ԱԶԱԹ-) in an early Georgian inscription from Nekresi, see: Čilašvili 2000; and Čilašvili 2004, 36–43.

²⁸⁰ Bedrossian 1875–1879, 4. Russell 2001–2002, 64, for Arm. *aznawor* (ազնաւոր), “noble”.

²⁸¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 25^{21–24}, and 23^{5–6}. Yet earlier in the account, Alexander entrusted his representative Azon with “... 100,000 men from the land of Rome, which is called P'rotat'os. The P'rotat'oselni were strong and courageous men, who were oppressing the land of Rome”, “... აზი ათასი კაცი ქუეყანით პრომიით, რომელსა ჰქვან ფროტათოს. ესე ფროტათოსელნი იყვნეს კაცნი ძლიერნი და მკენენი, და ეკორთებოდეს ქუეყანასა პრომისას” (*ibid.*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 18^{19–21} = Thomson trans., 26). For the attempted derivation of the unusual P'rotat'os from Gk. *protassō* (προτάσσω), Attic variant *protattō* (προτάττω), “to post in the front [guard]”, see Kavtaraze 2000, 193–194, with reference to the research of G. Lort'k'ip'anize. Gagošize 1979, 97, suggests a connection with Gk. *protaktos* (πρότακτος), also “posted in front”; cf. Thomson 1996a, 25 (fn. 6).

²⁸² Caucasian sources yield the best evidence for this institution. On the broader phenomenon (with nods to northern Caucasia), see Parkes 2003 and 2004a–b. I wish to thank Kevin Tuite for these references.

(*qaujhuł*),²⁸³ which replicates Middle Iranian *dāyag*, “(wet)nurse, foster mother, servant”. In turn, *dāyag* may be traced to Avestan *daēnu-*, “that which gives milk”.²⁸⁴ According to Garsoïan, “The institution of *dayeaks* whereby *naḫarar* youths were raised by foster fathers of their own social class was widely prevalent in Arsacid Armenia and is also attested for Sasanian princes ...”²⁸⁵

Because *mamamžuze* and related terminology are attested in several early Georgian sources beginning with the *vita* of Šušanik,²⁸⁶ Garsoïan’s observation must be extended to eastern Georgia. The generosity displayed by Šušanik’s bishop Ap’oc’i was “like that of a father [*mama*] and foster father [*mama-mžuzesa*]”.²⁸⁷ C’urtaveli also mentions Šušanik’s *žužuys-mtē* (ძუძუის-მტე), “foster brother”, literally “partaker of the breast”. He is not otherwise identified.²⁸⁸ Significantly, the Georgian terms for tutors, wetnurses, foster parents and foster siblings – and the Iranic institution they embody – are restricted to late antique narratives. All such sources were produced in the pre-Bagratid era, before the intensive but selective “Byzantinisation” of élite K’art’velian society.²⁸⁹

²⁸³ In addition, Arm. *dastiarak* (*qաստիարակ*), “instructor, tutor”, is encountered, for example, in Łazar P’arpec’i, caps. 7, 29 and 32. “*Dayeak* is used both for nurses of infants and for the tutors of youths. *Dastiarak* does not have the familial overtones of *dayeak* in its second sense”: Thomson in his trans. of P’arpec’i, 95 (fn. 1). Tutors are attested in *The History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, I.10, but this passage is based on the late sixth-century Armenian history by Elišē, cap. 7.

²⁸⁴ The institution is also known in northern Caucasia (e.g., Rus. *atalyk*, аталык/Turk. *atalik*), for which see Parkes 2003, 751–753.

²⁸⁵ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “*Dayeak*”, 521. Members of the powerful Mamikonean house served as *dayeaks* of the Arsacid heir to the Armenian throne: *Epic Histories*, III.xviii and IV.ii.

²⁸⁶ Č’xeiže 1979; Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “*Dayeak*”, 521; Javaxišvili 1982, 150–154; Rapp 2009, 673–674 (esp. fn. 77); and Sarjvelaže A. 1989b, 18–21.

²⁸⁷ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 18, Abulaže ed., 28: “... ვითარცა მამასა და მამა-მძუძესა ...” Georgian *mama* renders “father” and *deda* “mother”.

²⁸⁸ Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 13, Abulaže ed., 24₁₁. For the term, see also Abulaže 1973, 529. *Žužuysmtē* also occurs in K’art’lis c’xovreba: *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 51₁₁; and *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 156₁₀ and 177₂₀. The Armenian Elišē, cap. 2, Tēr-Minasean ed., 43₂₀ = Thomson trans., 95 (and fn. 7), employs the phrase “foster friends”, *dayekasnund bnakac’* (*դայեկասնունդ բնակաց*). For *deda-mžuze* (“foster mother”) in the seventh-century *Conversion of K’art’li*, see below.

²⁸⁹ *Mzrdeli* (მზრდელი), “tutor”, perhaps better rendered “provider”, is attested in several hagiographical works (Goguaze 2007, 93) and once in a Bagratid-era historiographical narrative of the eleventh century: *Chronicle of K’art’li*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 304₇. See also Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 557.

Ecclesiastical Structures

With its inside perspective on the *bidaxšate*, *The Passion of Šušānik* opens an unconventional window onto early Caucasian Christianity, surviving narrative sources of which tend to focus on the region's three royal houses. The priestly hagiographer C'urtaveli makes clear the attachment of at least one bishop to the *bidaxš*'s estate. He explicitly describes Ap'oc'i/Ap'uti as *episkoposi igi saxlisay mis pitiaxšisay* (ეპისკოპოსი იგი სახლისად მის პიტიახშისად), "the bishop of the *bidaxš*'s house".²⁹⁰ Varsk'en claimed the prerogative to summon the Christian clerics of the *bidaxšate*, which he did during the crisis arising from Šušānik's refusal to embrace Zoroastrianism. (The fact that Varsk'en did not simply purge Christian leaders from his patrimony says a great deal about Christianity's grasp in fifth-century Somxit'i-Gugark'.) C'urtaveli also refers to an unspecified number of Christian "priests", *xuc'esni* (ხუცესნი) and *mydelt'agni* (მღვდელთაგნი), who were resident within the *bidaxšate*.²⁹¹ These must have been subordinated to the bishop. As it happens, Varsk'en's extensive patrimony may have encompassed as many as three bishoprics.²⁹² The overseer of one of these, Samoel (Samuel), was styled *t'avi igi episkopost'ay* (თავი იგი ეპისკოპოსთად), "head of the bishops", i.e., archbishop.²⁹³ Once cenobitic monasticism was firmly established in eastern Georgia by the start of the seventh century, bishoprics seem to have been increasingly centred at important monasteries. But in this earlier time, C'urtaveli's testimony shows that some – if not most – early bishoprics in eastern Georgia and the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier were fixed to noble domains, a state of affairs well documented for neighbouring Armenia Major.²⁹⁴

Mazdaism and Sasanian Zoroastrianism

In the Georgian context, Christianisation neither began nor ended with the baptism of Mirian III in the early fourth century. Emerging fully within the public sphere after Mirian's conversion, the accelerating process encompassed the entire fifth century and spilled into the sixth and early seventh centuries. Throughout much of this period, particular Sasanian officials based locally were

²⁹⁰ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 13₁₀. See also the later Armenian *Girk' T'lt'oc'*, Polarean ed., #53, 244, Fr. trans. in Garsoïan 1999b, 522: "bishop of the *bde[a]šx's* house" ("... *საქსისად მის ბდეაშხისად*").

²⁹¹ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 4–5, Abulaže ed., 14_{24–25} and 16₁₇.

²⁹² Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, caps. 17–18, Abulaže ed., 27–28. C'urtaveli mentions three clerics who kept watch over Šušānik: Archbishop Samoel and Bishops Iovane and Ap'oc'i.

²⁹³ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 17, Abulaže ed., 27₁₇.

²⁹⁴ For Armenia see Adontz/Garsoïan 1970, esp. ch. 12, "The *Naxarar* System and the Church", 253–288.

the primary threat to the Christians of Caucasia. But the Iranian presence was more extensive. Judging from Evstat'i's *vita*, Iranian colonists in Mc'xet'a not only maintained an attachment to Sasanian Zoroastrianism but also organised public festivals, some of which marked Zoroastrian holy days.²⁹⁵ According to other Georgian sources, when the Byzantine emperor Herakleios (Heraclius) passed through K'art'li in 627, clusters of "fire-worshippers" could still be found there. Herakleios dispatched heralds to the cities of Tp'ilisi and Ujarma (var. Užarma) and threatened Zoroastrians with execution should they not convert to (Chalcedonian!) Christianity. Some Zoroastrian priests "did not desire to be baptised [and] through deception blended with Christians until the time when the sword was employed upon all and rivers of blood [flowed into] the churches".²⁹⁶ The *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat'i impart a palpable sense of the religious difference between Sasanian Iran and Caucasia. Despite this, we should recall that neither source attests any systematic Sasanian persecutions of Christians. What's more, Zoroastrian priests play no role whatsoever in the martyrdoms of Šušānik and Evstat'i.

These early Georgian hagiographies divulge little about the hierarchy, practices and theology of Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism, a faith their pious authors invariably call *mogobay* (მოგობაჲ) and *moguebay* (მოგუებაჲ), "Magism".²⁹⁷ Later Georgian sources normally use the term *c'ec'xlis-msaxurebay* (ცეცხლის-მსახურებაჲ), "fire worship". The *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat'i refer to Zoroastrian priests as *mogwni* (მოგუნი), which, depending upon context, may represent *mowbeds* (Zoroastrian high priests) or, more generally, *magi*. C'urtaveli makes a solitary allusion to "a female Iranian magus", *dedakac'i ert'i sparsni mogw* (დედაკაცი ერთი სპარსნი მოგუ). Having converted to Christianity, she was healed through the intercession of another holy woman, the languishing Šušānik.²⁹⁸

Similar terminology is used in Classical Armenian. *The Epic Histories* associates *magi* (*mogk'*, մոգք) with Mazdaism,²⁹⁹ which its anonymous fifth-century author calls *Mazdezn* (Մազդէզն), the "Mazdean" faith. This word mimics Parthian **Mazdayazn* and Middle Persian *Māzdēšn*.³⁰⁰ In the sixth century, Elišē gave

²⁹⁵ And some Zoroastrian Iranian expatriates, including the men accused of apostasy alongside Gwrobandak, converted to Christianity – though their conversions were not always permanent.

²⁹⁶ *Royal List II*, §§25–26, Rapp trans. 310, quotation from §26, Abulaže ed., 96_{25–30}: "ხოლო მათ ნათლის-ღებაჲ არა ინებეს, ზაკუვით თანა აღერინეს ქრისტეანეთა, ვიდრემდის ყოველთა ზედა წარჰმართა მახული და ეკლესიათა შინა მდინარენი სისხლისანი დიოდეს".

²⁹⁷ E.g.: Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 11, Abulaže ed., 23_{3,17}; and *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 31₂₆. See also Goguaze 2007, "Mogueba-y", 156.

²⁹⁸ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušānik*, cap. 11, Abulaže ed., 23_{1–10}. This episode is also reported in the Armenian witness: *Vita Šušānik* (Arm.), cap. 11, Abulaže ed., 34–35.

²⁹⁹ *Epic Histories*, IV.xxiii.

³⁰⁰ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 389.

preference to *mogut'iwn* (მოგუტ'იუნ), clearly paralleling Georgian *mogobay/moguebay*. Other Near Eastern languages share this nomenclature. Christian Syriac texts, for instance, typically refer to Mazdaism as *mgošūtā*.³⁰¹

The *vita* of Šušanik gives an additional insight into Mazdaism. When Šušanik learned of her husband's apostasy, she allegedly exclaimed: "[Varsk'en] has renounced the true God, and he has professed Atrošani, and he has united with the godless".³⁰² A *hapax* in Old Georgian, *atrošani* (ატროშანი)³⁰³ corresponds to Armenian *atrušan* (ատրուշան);³⁰⁴ both are probably based on the Parthian root *āturš-*, "fire". Garsoiān advocates a derivation from an unattested Middle Persian **ātarōšan-*, "[the place] of burning fire",³⁰⁵ which, like its Armenian and Georgian analogues, denotes a fire temple or altar and more precisely its hearth.³⁰⁶

The incorporation of a Gospel harmony into the *Martyrdom of Evstat'i* afforded its author a golden opportunity to denigrate Zoroastrianism. In his defence before the *marzbān*, Gwrobandak-Evstat'i expounds a curious historical synopsis of Judaism and early Christianity, though it is put into the mouth of one of his "Christian" mentors in Ganzak.³⁰⁷ God's favour had shifted from Judaism to Christianity, the "Archdeacon" Samoel taught, but both had been anticipated by Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism:

... First there was the religion of the Iranians, as you yourself know, but God disliked the religion of the Iranians and He was not pleased [by it]. And then God favoured the Jews and they were pleasing to Him and He gave them a religion and commandment[s] to follow. After this God favoured the Christians more than the Jews.³⁰⁸

³⁰¹ Walker 2006, 22, fn. 14.

³⁰² Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 12²⁵⁻²⁶: "... უვარ-ყო ჭეშმარიტი ღმერთი და აღიარა ატროშანი და შეერთო იგი უღმერთოთა". Cf. *Life of Vaxtang*, for which see below, pp. 295–296.

³⁰³ Slightly corrupted as *artošani* (არტოშანი) in the oldest, eleventh-century manuscript (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts A-95); a yet later variant is *atrošine* (ატროშინე).

³⁰⁴ E.g.: *Epic Histories*, IV.xxiii, IV.lix, and V.i, 1883 ed., 119⁷, 152¹⁶⁺¹⁸ and 157²⁶; Lazar P'arpec'i, cap. 29, Tēr-Mkrť'ean and Malxasean eds., 56³¹; and Elišē, caps. 1 and 2, Tēr-Minasean ed., 12¹⁰⁻¹¹ and 51¹¹.

³⁰⁵ Andronikašvili 1966, 225.

³⁰⁶ Garsoiān in *Epic Histories*, "Atrušan", 511. For the survival of an **ātarōšan-* hearth at the pre-Christian site of Dedop'lis Mindori in K'art'li, see Gagošize 2001, 265–266. For an attempt to link *atrošani* with the deity It'rujan, see Kekeliže 1956d, 266–270; cf. Vacaze 2007. See below, pp. 146–147.

³⁰⁷ As we have seen, it is conceivable not only that Evstat'i belonged to a Manichaean congregation in Ganzak but also that the Gospel harmony incorporated into his *vita* was influenced by Manichaean traditions, for which see Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, esp. 281–284.

³⁰⁸ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 4, Abulaže ed., 36¹³⁻¹⁷: "... წინაით სპარსთა რწული იყო, ვითარცა შენ თუთ იცი, ხოლო ღმერთსა სძაგდა რწული იგი სპარსთად და



Figure 1.7. Presumed site of a late antique Zoroastrian temple, T'bilisi. The existing building was transformed into a mosque in the early modern period. Today the site is called At'eṣga (cf. *atrošani*). For the structure, see Daryae 2008c.

The “archdeacon” then recounted episodes from the Hebrew Bible and Christian Gospels beginning with Abraham and concluding with the proliferation of Christianity. Evstat'i, an Iranian, continues by ruminating on the nature of divine power and lamenting “the religion of my fathers [about which] I am both unwilling and ashamed to speak”.³⁰⁹ The holy man emphasises the role of the Judaeo-Christian God as the creator and regulator of everything, including the Sun and fire, principal objects of Zoroastrian devotion:³¹⁰

The Sun and the Moon and the stars are not God, but God [Himself] commanded the Sun to illuminate the day and He commanded the Moon and the stars to illuminate the night, but they are not God. For God [is able to] command the

არა სონდა. და მერმე ჰურიანი გამოირჩინა ღმერთმან და სათნო-იყვნა და მისცა მათ რჩული და მცნება და მარხუად. მაშინ-ღა ქრისტეანენი სათნო-იყვნა ღმერთმან უფროს ჰურიანასა”.

³⁰⁹ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 7, Abulaže ed., 42^{26–27}: “... მამულისა ჩემისა რჩულისათვის სიტყუადვე ზარმაც და მრცხუნისცა”.

³¹⁰ For the Sun and Moon in Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism, see now Daryae 2009, 82.

clouds, and they spread out [over] the brilliance of the Sun [*brcqinvalebay mzisay*] and they obscure the Moon. Thus, the Sun and the Moon are not gods. Likewise, fire is not God, since man starts fire and man also extinguishes [it], for man is the lord of fire [*up'ali ... c'ec'xliṣa*], thus fire is not God. If it starts some place and spreads, it is indiscriminate, whether tree or field or house, [and] if man is at hand it [also] burns him. But should water touch fire, then even so much a force as fire is extinguished, and the fire become invisible; thus it is not God, but should we honour it as God?

And God gave us fire for [our] needs, to melt ice and to prepare all food; and when we should require [it] we start [it], and when we should wish, we extinguish [it]. And, therefore, [fire] is not God.³¹¹

This passage is the most extensive refutation of Zoroastrianism in surviving early Georgian literature. The K'art'velians, so far as we can tell, had no Eznik.³¹² And as we shall see in Part II, at least one Georgian historiographical work paints Zoroastrianism as an honourable faith.

Ganzak

The geographical scope of late antique and early medieval Georgian texts tends to be heavily restricted, even within the Caucasian arena.³¹³ Not surprisingly,

³¹¹ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 7, Abulaṣe ed., 42₃₄–43₁₀, cf. Lang trans., 111: “მზე და მთოვარს და ვარსკულაენი არა ღმერთ არიან, არამედ ღმერთმან მზესა განათლებად დღისად უბრძანა და მთოვარესა და ვარსკულაეთა განათლებად ღამისად უბრძანა, ხოლო ღმერთ არა არიან. ღმერთმან-ღა ღრუბელსა უბრძანის, და მოეფინის ბრწყინვალეობა მზისად და მთოვარისად დააბნელის. მზე და მთოვარს ამისთვის არა ღმერთ არიან. მერმე კუალად ცეცხლი არა ღმერთ არს ამით,რამეთუ ცეცხლი კაცმან ადაგზნის და კაცმანვე დაშრიტის,რამეთუ კაცი უფალ არს ცეცხლისა, ამისთვის არა ღმერთ არს ცეცხლი. თუ ვისმე განერის და წარვიდის, რასაცა მიჰმართის, გინა ტყესა, გინა ველსა, გინა სახლსა, თუ კაცი დახუდის,და-ვე-წვს. ხოლო ცეცხლსა-ღა წყალი მიეახლის, ეგოდენი იგი ძალი ცეცხლისად დაშრიტის და უჩინო იქმნის ცეცხლი იგი; ამით არა ღმერთ არს, ხოლო ჩუენ ღმრთად გურწამს”. For a similar refutation of the Sun, Moon, air, fire, earth and water as gods, but in an Armenian context, see Eznik, cap. 3, Blanchard and Young trans., 39–40.

³¹² For anti-Mazdean polemic in early Georgian literature, see Kekeliṣe 1955a.

³¹³ These narratives display minimal knowledge about the geography, culture and history of the neighbouring western Georgian lands, including Egrisi and Lazika. However, these western areas are reasonably well attested in contemporary Roman sources, including Prokopios, Agathias, Menander Protector and Priskos, for which see Braund 1994. The fusion of the eastern and western Georgian experiences (prioritising the former) gained momentum in Tao-Klarjet'i during the *interregnum* and came into full political bloom under the Bagratid dynasty at the turn of the tenth/eleventh century.

early Georgian hagiographical literature offers limited and vague toponymical data for Iran. The *vitae* of Šušānik and Evstat'i make indistinct references to the Iranian seat of government, though neither specifies its name or location. Both the *bidaxš* Varsk'en and the *marzbān* Arvand Gušnasp are simply said to have travelled to the Sasanian court.³¹⁴ These must be allusions to Ctesiphon, but no details are offered about this city twinned with Seleucia on the Tigris River.

In these two *vitae* we encounter only one locale definitely within Sasanian Iran: the city of Ganzak (Geo. Ganžak, განძაკი). Not to be confused with Ganja (Az. Gəncə) in the modern Republic of Azerbaijan,³¹⁵ its ruins are located southeast of Lake Urmia near present-day Laylān.³¹⁶ Evstat'i described his origins to his Sasanian interrogators in this way:

... I used to [live] in the land of Iran, in the province [*q'evi*] of Aršaket'i, in the city of Ganzak. My father was a *mowbed* and he also taught me Magism, but I did not adopt [it], for in the city of Ganzak Christians [are in] the majority, and [they possess] a bishop and priests, and from them I learned above all that Christianity is the greatest religion, [and it stands] above godlessness. And now I believe in Christ and I am in the service of Christ.³¹⁷

Aršaket'i (არშაკეთი) is Sasanian Ādurbādagān (Arm. Atrpatakan, *Ատրպատական*; Gk. Atropatēnē, Ἀτροπατηνὴ), the capital of which was Ganzak. Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, the historian of Albania who perhaps flourished in the late tenth century (but whose composite work incorporates earlier and later materials, the former of which extend back to the seventh century),³¹⁸ alludes

³¹⁴ According to Armenian historiographical sources, it was customary for the political leadership of southern Caucasia to make such trips to the Sasanian court. For example, Aršušay (Arm. Ašušay), father of Varsk'en, accompanied Armenian nobles – including Vardan Mamikonean – to the *šāhan šāh*'s court: Łazar P'arpec'i, cap. 25. Vahan Mamikonean trekked to Ctesiphon to plead his case in a dispute over gold mines: *ibid.*, cap. 65. For this episode, see also Greenwood 2008b.

³¹⁵ Cf. de Waal 2010, 25.

³¹⁶ Christensen P. 1993, 323–324 (n. 10). Cf. Pourshariati 2008, 152–153. For the city and its name, see also Marquart 1931, 108–110.

³¹⁷ *Vita Evstat'i*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 31^{24–30}: “... მე სოფლისა სპარსეთისაჲ ვიყავ, ჳვეისა არშაკეთისაჲ, ქალაქისა განძაკისაჲ ვიყავ. მამად ჩემი მოგუ იყო და მეცა მოგუებასა მასწავებდა, და მე მოგუებაჲ არა თავსეიდევ, რამეთუ განძაკს ქალაქსა ქრისტეანენი უფროს არიან და ებისკოპოსი და მღვდელნი, და მათგან-და ყოველსა ზედა მივიწიე, რამეთუ უფროს არს ყოველსა რწუელსა ქრისტეანობაჲ, ვიდრე უღმრთოებაჲ. და აწ მე ქრისტე მრწამს და ქრისტეს მსახურებასა შინა ვარ”. See Javaxišvili 1998a for Georgian and Armenian geo-administrative terminology.

³¹⁸ On the name of this historian (sometimes called Kałankatuac'i), see Akinean 1953–1959. Several hands contributed to the received text; if the names Dasxuranc'i and/or Kałankatuac'i are authentic, they almost certainly refer to a tenth-century compiler. In his

to “the city of Ganjak ... in the canton of Aršakašēn [Արշակաշեն]”.³¹⁹ Aršaket’i/Aršakašēn was one of the traditional homelands of the dynastic Parthian nobility, hence the Caucasian designation “land of the Arsacids”. It comprised part of the northern region the Sasanians called *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*, the “side” or quarter of Ādurbādagān, also termed *abāxtar*, the North.³²⁰

The city of Ganzak is known in other Caucasian sources.³²¹ The fifth-century *Epic Histories* situates Ganjak (Գանձակ) along the southeastern border of Armenia and Iran. But the anonymous Armenian author may have in mind the province of which Ganzak was the capital and not the city itself.³²² The short recension of Anania Širakac’i’s seventh-century geography situates the city of Ganjak Šahastan within the province of Atrpatakan, which belonged to Sasanian K’usti Kapkoh (Քուստի Կապկոհ), “the Caucasus Side/Quarter”, that is to say, *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*.³²³ Writing in the second half of the seventh century, the Armenian historian known as Sebēos provides the most detailed account of the Byzantine emperor Herakleios’ expedition against the Sasanians. In the course of the narrative, we read:

And having traveled through the regions of the North, [Herakleios] managed to come out directly at the city of Karin, and having reached Duin in Ayrarat, he ravaged it and Naxčawan [i.e., Nakhichevan, the present-day Azerbaijani exclave of Naxçıvan]. Racing to Ganjak in Atrpatakan [i.e., Media Atropatēnē], he also destroyed the altars of the Great Fire which they called Všnapš.³²⁴

English translation, Dowsett emphasises the composite quality of the text and contends that “the last person to have a hand in the *History of the Aluank’* wrote at the earliest at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century. This person may have been Dasxuranc’i; if so, Mxit’ar Ayriivanec’i and Kirakos were mistaken in placing the compiler in the tenth century” (Dowsett in Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, xx). I accept that the received text is built around a seventh-century nucleus. Cf. the hypothetical *History to the Year 682*: Howard-Johnston 2010, 103–128. See also: Akopian A.A. 1987; and Greenwood 2000.

³¹⁹ Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, III.20, Aṙak’elyan ed., 331^{14–15}, cf. Dowsett trans., 218: “... Գանձակ քաղաքն Մ’Գ Ե թուին յԱրշակաշեն գաւառի”. See also *ibid.*, II.32.

³²⁰ See Gyselen 2000 for *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*. For *kūst-i Ādurbādagān* as “the North” (*abāxtar*), see below, p. 131.

³²¹ Boyce and Grenet 1991, 69–86. In Late Antiquity the city was renowned for nearby silver mines: Russell 2001–2002, 46. See also Tardieu 1998.

³²² *Epic Histories*, III.vii, IV.xxi, Vi, V.iv–vi and V.xxxiv; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 463–464. Gazaka (Γαζάκα) is also known to Classical authors, including Strabōn and Pliny the Elder.

³²³ Anania Širakac’i, V.29.4, Soukry ed., 40, Hewsen trans., 72–72A (short recension). See also: Schippmann 1971, 309–347; Christensen P. 1993, 207–208; and Ghodrat-Dizaji 2007. For the growth of Ganzak under the Sasanians, see Howard-Johnston 1995, 209–210.

³²⁴ Ps.-Sebēos, cap. 38, Abgaryan ed., 124^{23–27} Thomson trans., 81: “Ե ճանապարհ կալեալ ընդ Կոյմնա հիւսիսոյ՝ ել զէպ ուղիդ ի Կարնոյ քաղաք, և հասեալ ի Գոսին ալլարատեան՝ աւերէ զնա և զ Նախճաւան: Եւ զիմեալ ի Գանձակ Ատրպատականի՝ կործանէ և զբազինա

Ganzak was in the vicinity of – but was not identical to – the renowned shrine near Šīz (mod. Takāb), the Taxt-e Solaymān of the Islamic period. This sanctuary housed Ādur Gušnasp, the sacred fire of kings and warriors and one of the three great fires, *ātaxš ī wahrām*, of Sasanian Zoroastrianism.³²⁵ Taxt-e Solaymān was not the original site of Ādur Gušnasp: “The moving of the fire was presumably part of the vigorous promotion of its cult, in the mid Sasanian period, as the fire of kings ...”³²⁶ Excavations have shown that the fire of Ādur Gušnasp was not relocated to Taxt-e Solaymān before the fifth century.³²⁷ But once established, the new location was specially revered by the Sasanian *šāhan šāhs*.³²⁸ It was, in the words of Josef Wiesehöfer, “the most important sanctuary of the late Sasanian period”.³²⁹ Matthew Canepa emphasises the royal ritual associated with Ādur Gušnasp:

Although all were holy, through special reverence and lavish patronage the Sasanian kings increased the prestige of Ādur Gušnasp over that of Ādur Burzēn-Mihr, the fire that their erstwhile Parthian overlords favored. The Sasanian kings traveled to Ādur Gušnasp by horse; however, at the sanctuary's walls they dismounted and entered on foot as a sign of humility and respect. Through the contiguous link this sacred itinerary established the Sasanian kings anchored the traditions and rituals of the coronation to the primordial weight of Ādur Gušnasp. This long-distance link, in turn, associated the Sasanian kings' temporal coronations with the royal sacred significances of the site, first among which was the mythological arrival of the once itinerant fire at the site to aid their mythical Kayānid “ancestor”, Kay Husraw, in wresting it from the forces of darkness.³³⁰

Հրապարակման մեծի, որով Կրճնասպն կոչէին.” I wish to thank Tim Greenwood for his insights into the translation of this passage, which have been incorporated here. For Herakleios' path, see Kaegi 2003.

³²⁵ Minorsky 1944, 248–252; and Schippmann 1971, 349–350. Sigillographical evidence confirms the association of Taxt-e Solaymān (var. Taxt-i Sulaimān) and Ādur Gušnasp (var. Ādar Gušnasp): Humbach 1967; and Gyselen 2003. On the complex's layout, see Huff 2008.

³²⁶ Boyce and Grenet 1991, 77.

³²⁷ Boyce and Grenet 1991, 75. For the revival of the site under the Mongols, see Dashdondog 2011, 166.

³²⁸ Frye 1963, 139, 221. But a Parthian Mihrānid residence may have been located in the city, for which see Garsoïan/Adontz 1970, 508 (n. 22). According to Garsoïan, “the *Všnasp* [i.e., Ādur Gušnasp] was their family cult; fire was worshipped as the visible symbol of the great god Mithra or Mihr, from which the name Mihrān was derived”. On some level, the Sasanians may have appropriated Ādur Gušnasp as their own, thus exploiting Parthian and in this case Mihrānid traditions. For the importance of Miθra/Mihr to the Mihrānids, see now Pourshariati 2008, ch. 5. On Mithraism in Armenia, see Russell 1994a. See also Čilašvili 2001, which is based on a controversial reading of a short, abbreviated inscription.

³²⁹ Wiesehöfer 1996, 162.

³³⁰ Canepa 2009, 15.

Subsequent authors writing in Armenian, T'omva Arcruni³³¹ (second half of the ninth century) and Movsēs Dasxuranc'i among them,³³² repeat Ps.-Sebeōs' information about Ganzak. Ādur Gušnasp is also mentioned in Romano-Byzantine literature. According to Prokopios, Adarbiganōn (Ἀδαρβιγάνων) was the site of "the great sanctuary of fire, which the Persians revere above all other gods ..." ³³³ Later, in the ninth century, the Byzantine *Chronographia* of Theophanēs Confessor reports Herakleios' sacking of Gazakos (Γαζακός) and pursuit of Xusrō to Thēbarmais (Θηβαρμαῖς), the site of a prominent "fire temple". Herakleios destroyed the sacred structure and the whole of Thēbarmais, too, partly in retaliation for the Sasanians' sacking of Jerusalem in 614 and the removal of the True Cross.³³⁴

Evstat'i's hagiographer provides a few tantalising glimpses of Ganzak. As we have seen, he alleges "Christianity" to have held religious sway in the city. He also claims that Judaism had a significant presence there. From other sources we know that fifth-century Ganzak was the seat of a bishop of the East Syrian Church, also known as the Church of the East, an organisation based in Ctesiphon and often promoted or at least tolerated by the Sasanian government.³³⁵ Evstat'i explicitly names one of Ganzak's learned "Christians", the "archdeacon" Samoel,

³³¹ T'omva Arcruni, II.3, Patkanean ed., 92, Thomson trans., 159: "... և Հասեալ ի Քուրն աւերէ զնա և զ Նախճաւան և զՈրմի, և զիմեալ ի Քանձաւն Ըտրպատականի՝ բրէ զնա, աւերէ զԸճմատան և զՄայ, կործանէ զբազին Հրատին մեծի, որում՝ Ընապն կոչեն, և ընուն զծովան որ յանդիման Հրատին՝ զիսկաւմբ ք", "... and reaching Duin [Herakleios] sacked it and [also] Naxčawan and Ormi. Attacking Ganjak in Ətrpatakan [i.e., Atrpatakan], he destroyed it; he plundered Hamadan and May, overthrew the Great Fire altar called Všna[s]p, and filled the lake opposite the pyraeum with corpses".

³³² Dasxuranc'i's reference is oblique: "The great caesar Herakleios, seeing the king of Persia flee before him, had ceased to pursue him and made assaults in the region of Atrpatakan up to the place called Gayšawan, a fortified place on the Median border chosen by the kings of Persia as a summer residence ...", "Իսկ Կայսրն մեծ Հերակլիոս իբրեւ հոտն եթէ խոյս ետ յերեսաց նորա թագաւորն Պարսից, զազարեաց ի սնդեղւոյ զՀետ նորա: Եւ ասպատակ ափեալ զկողմամբ ք Ատրպատանակու մինչև ցտեղի անուանեալն Քալշաւան՝ տեղի ամարոցաց ամոց ջերմութեան ընտրեալ յառողջութիւն հովանութեան թագաւորացն Պարսից, որ է ի սահմանս Մարաց աշխարհին:" (Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.10, Arak'elyan ed., 131₂₀–132₄, Dowsett trans., 79).

³³³ Prokopios, Wars, II.xxiv.1–2, Dewing ed. and trans., 472–473, "τὸ μέγα πυρεῖον ἐνταῦθα ἔστιν, ὃ σέβονται Πέρσαι θεῶν μάλιστα". Prokopios equates this fire with Roman Vesta/Hestia (II.xxiv.2)

³³⁴ Theophanēs, AM 6114, de Boor ed., 307–308, Mango and Scott trans., 439–440. See also: Kaegi 2003, 159; and Howard-Johnston 2010, 309. Kanzakon (Κάνζακον) is attested in Theophylakt Simokattēs, III.7 and V.10–11. I am grateful for Mary Whitby's assistance with Simokattēs' testimony. Antiochos Stratēgos' account of the Sasanian capture of Jerusalem, originally composed in Greek, today survives only in Georgian and Arabic. The text was composed at the Jerusalemite monastery of Mar Saba, where the K'art'velians had a significant presence in Late Antiquity: Patrich 1995; and Mgaloblishvili 2001.

³³⁵ A bishop of Ganzak attended the East Syrian Church's synod of 486: *Synodikon orientale*, Chabot ed. and trans., cap, 4, #25, 307. For Christians in Ganzak, see: Fiey 1973,

whose instruction was instrumental in his rejection of Zoroastrianism. If the tale is accepted literally, we might seem to have evidence for the (presumed?) situation in Ganzak soon after its sacking by Herakleios in 624.³³⁶ However, this is anachronistic at best: Evstat'i was active in eastern Georgia at least two decades earlier. In any event, Herakleios is not mentioned in the *vita* and it is hard to imagine that Christians ever enjoyed a stable religious majority in the city despite the considerable presence of the East Syrian Church and the growing numbers of Christian converts in the western Sasanian Empire, including the heartland of Iraq.³³⁷ Evstat'i's hagiographer gives the impression of Ganzak's Christians constituting a monolithic body governed by a single bishop.³³⁸ Beyond acknowledging the presence of "Christians" and Jews, he mutes the city's confessional and religious heterogeneity. Alternately, and more likely, in this context "Christian" encompasses a variety of Christian confessions in addition to Manichaeism.³³⁹

The impact of Evstat'i's conversion to Christianity and his repudiation of Zoroastrianism are thus infused with even greater potency thanks to the religious significance of Ganzak and nearby Taxt-e Solaymān. An Iranian who quite possibly converted to Manichaeism and then deserted his homeland and accepted Christianity, the young Gwrobandak had received training as a Zoroastrian priest under the watchful eye of his father, a *mowbed*, in the shadow of one of the holiest sites in the later Sasanian Empire.

The Life of Abibos Nekreseli

Before turning to hagiographical treatments of the K'art'velian monarchy's conversion to Christianity, a few words should be said about *The Life of Abibos Nekreseli*. This tract is one of several medieval Georgian *vitae* devoted to the Thirteen Syrian Fathers, twelve ascetics under the leadership of Iovane Zedazneli (John Zedazneli; var. Zedažneli) who popularised monasticism throughout the eastern Georgian domains in the sixth century. The most famous of Iovane's disciples were Davit' Garesjeli (David of Gare[s]ja), Šio Mywmeli (Shio of the Cave, often transcribed Mghvime) and Abibos Nekreseli (Abibos of Nekresi;

398–401; Garsoiān 1992, 68–69 (esp. fn. 126), who traces the origin of the diocese at Ganzak to the early fifth century; and Garsoiān 1999b, 191–192.

³³⁶ On the fall of Ganzak to Byzantine forces, see Howard-Johnston in his commentary to Ps.-Sebēos, vol. 2, 214–215.

³³⁷ For Christian conversions in Sasanian Iraq, see Morony 1984, 332–333. He notes: "Christianity was spreading in Iraq in the late Sasanian period at the expense of Magians, Jews, and pagans ... [C]hristians may have been the largest single religious group in Iraq by the end of the sixth century ..." (p. 332).

³³⁸ Martin-Hisard 1998b, 503.

³³⁹ See above, pp. 48–51.

var. Abibo). Spirited debate surrounds the identities, confessional affiliations, accomplishments and even precise dates of these holy men. The uncertainty stems in large measure from the later and substantially rewritten versions of their extant *vitae*.³⁴⁰

There is no compelling reason to doubt the Syrian origin of most if not all these individuals and certainly not of their leader Iovane. Further, I remain persuaded by the argument that the Thirteen Syrian Fathers were non-Chalcedonians who were drawn to eastern Georgia not only by missionary zeal but also because of Roman persecutions waged against Miaphysites (“Monophysites”) in Syria. Though our sources divulge no direct connection with the Horn of Africa, these men belong to the same transregional phenomenon as the Nine Saints who arrived in Aksum in the late fifth century.³⁴¹ The non-Chalcedonian confession of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers is hinted at not only by historical context but also by the considerable reworking of their *vitae* in a tenth-century Chalcedonian environment. K’art’li’s confessional heterogeneity and relative tranquility were shattered after Duin III, when for the first time Chalcedonian affiliation and a stronger Romano-Byzantine orientation pushed notions of orthodoxy and heresy to the foreground. Many early non-Chalcedonian (and not necessarily Miaphysite!) works composed in Georgian have surely been lost thanks to neglect and deliberate destruction; others, like the *vitae* of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers and the Georgian *vita* of Peter the Iberian were substantially revised so as to make them suitable for a Chalcedonian audience.

In its received tenth-century form *The Life of Abibos* is short on historical detail, a deficit it masks with standard hagiographical flourishes.³⁴² As is the case with all texts devoted to the Thirteen Syrian Fathers, it is set in late Sasanian times. Abibos is noteworthy because of the campaign he waged against Zoroastrianism. Having been consecrated as bishop of Nekresi in the district³⁴³ of Kaxet’i, Abibos committed himself to battling “paganism” of every kind, including Zoroastrianism.³⁴⁴ In this far eastern part of Georgia, which bordered Albania,

³⁴⁰ Georgian-language literature on this subject is voluminous, but see Kekelīze 1956c. For the divergences of Davit’ Garesjeli’s extant *vita* and a visual cycle of his life in the *diakonikon* of the remains of the late tenth-/early eleventh-century main church at Udabno in southeastern Georgia, see Eastmond 2001, 226–235.

³⁴¹ See also Haas 2008, 117–120.

³⁴² Another variant of this text has recently come to light. Contained in the Sin. Geo.N.50 manuscript from Mt Sinai, it was copied in the first half of the tenth century. It is very similar to the longer witness (designated Γ , “A”) in Abulaže’s critical edition. For the text and its date, see Alek’siže 1999. See also Martin-Hisard 2008a, 179–180.

³⁴³ *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 242₁₅. The manuscripts render “district” variously as *q’evi* (ჰევი, mod. *xevi*, ხევი) – lit. “ravine, gorge, valley”, an old geo-administrative term which must have been used by the original seventh-century author – and *sam[t’av]roy* (სამ[თავ]როი, “principality”, i.e., the domain of a *mt’avari*.

³⁴⁴ Abibos won considerable fame for his efforts. His proselytisation activities are attested in two other sources: *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 126₅₋₆; and Ps.-Juanšer,



Figure 1.8. Sixth-century basilica, Nekresi monastic complex.

Zoroastrianism had a significant presence. Indeed, Abibos' sixth-century hilltop monastery not only stood above the thriving, multicultural town of Nekresi but was perched immediately above a large Mazdean temple that had been actively used until the fourth century.³⁴⁵ Abibos demonstrated supreme courage in his battle against rival religions. On one occasion, Abibos is said to have doused a sacred Zoroastrian flame with water. Having been detained by unspecified Iranians, the holy man was beaten nearly to death. Subsequently, Abibos was placed in the custody of the *marzbān* of Zena-Sop'eli (ზენა-სოფელი), that is to say, of Inner or Šida K'art'li. The archaic term Zena-Sop'eli must be a remnant of the original seventh-century text, but the description of the Sasanian *marzbān* as

Qauxč'išvili ed., 229₆₋₇. In both instances Abibos' work among "pagan" highlanders is reported.

³⁴⁵ Briefly described in *Nekresi* 2010, 44–47. For an image of the temple, see Figure 2.11. A large fourth-century basilica stood for a hundred years or more in the city below until it was destroyed by an earthquake, for which see *ibid.*, 56–65. I wish to thank Nodar Baxtaze for guiding me through Nekresi in July 2013. For early *asomt'avruli* inscriptions found on the site, see below, p. 214.

“their king” (!) is a unmistakable sign of the work’s comprehensive resculpting in the tenth century, by which time the meaning of *marzbān* had been forgotten.³⁴⁶

News spread of the tortures inflicted upon Abibos. Although they had never met, Abibos ostensibly became the spiritual companion of Symeon the Stylite (Geo. Swmeon *mesuetisa*), one of the brightest luminaries of the contemporary Christian world.³⁴⁷ The two are said to have exchanged letters. When the end of Abibos’ life neared, Symeon even composed a eulogy (*evlogia*, ევლოგია) for his friend and presented him with a staff (*kuert’xi*, კუერთხი; mod. *kvert’xi*). In Mc’xet’a the waning Abibos persuaded his captors to grant him a visit to the grave of the Syrian Father Šio, the focal point of the Šio Mywmeli monastery in a canyon just upriver on the Kura/Mtkuari. Fervently praying over Šio’s remains, Abibos bemoaned the Sasanian occupation of eastern Georgia.

At Req’i (var. Req’ay) K’art’velian notables gathered to witness the sentencing of the holy man. The *marzbān*’s initial question to the martyr-to-be is revealing: “Why have you rejected the authority of the king of kings and [why] have you killed our god?”³⁴⁸ If this passage belongs to the oldest layer of the text, and I think it does, then we have an indication of what most concerned the later Sasanians in eastern Georgia: loyalty to the Zoroastrian *šāhan šāh*. The beginning of Abibos’ reply is equally revealing: “I recognise no one as king [*meup’e*] except our Lord Jesus Christ ...”³⁴⁹ Abibos disparaged the Iranians’ devotion to fire and demanded that the *marzbān* submit to the one true God. The *marzbān* flew into a rage and committed Abibos to a fresh round of harsh tortures. The Syrian was ultimately stoned to death and his corpse was dragged from the city. Christians managed to collect the saint’s remains, which were interred in the “holy church” of Mc’xet’a.

The early layers of the *vita* of Abibos contain oblique indications of the suppression of K’art’velian kingship. We have just seen how, in his testimony before the *marzbān*, Abibos daringly proclaimed his recognition of one and

³⁴⁶ *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., recension **Л**, 242_{27–28}, also described in this way further in recension **Т**, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 245₂₄.

³⁴⁷ The audience before Daniel the Stylite of Goubazēs, king of the Laz (in western Georgia), and the Roman emperor Leōn I (r. 457–474) is recorded in *Vita Daniel Stylite*, cap. 51, Dawes and Baynes trans., 36. On the influence of the stylite Symeon the Younger upon the Georgians, see Lafontaine-Dosogne 1971; for the Georgian church on the grounds of the monastery of St Symeon the Younger on the Miraculous Mountain near Antioch, see Djobadze 1976, 87–89. The Georgians’ strong devotion to the stylites is evident in the eleventh-century *vita* of the Hagiorite Giorgi Mt’acmideli. Images of stylites commonly adorn the interior of medieval Georgian churches, including Ubisa and the main church of the Gelat’i academy near K’ut’at’isi (mod. K’ut’aisi).

³⁴⁸ *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, cap. 2, recension **Т** only, Abulaže ed., 244_{31–32}; Martin-Hisard trans., 78: “რადსათჳს უგარჴჳეჲ უფლებად მეფეთ-მეფისად და მოჴკალ ღმერთი ჩუენი?”

³⁴⁹ *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, cap. 2, recension **Т** only, Abulaže ed., 244₃₃; “მე არავინ ვიცი მეუფედ, გარნა უფალი ჩუენი იესუ ქრისტე ...” Medieval texts commonly employ the extended form *meup’e* (cf. *mep’e*), “king”, for Christ the King.

only one king: Christ. The main thrust of Abibos' words is to divest the *šāhan šāh* of legitimacy. At the same time, Abibos is made to acknowledge implicitly the Sasanians' dismantling of K'art'velian royal authority, which, in fact, had probably occurred by the time of his martyrdom. In a subsequent summary of Abibos' piety and asceticism, we encounter a prophecy in which the Greeks (i.e., Romans/Byzantines) would take possession of eastern Georgia from the Sasanians and thenceforth "the *erist'avis* will rule [*mpqrobeli*] K'art'li".³⁵⁰ Here, *erist'avis* must refer to the *interregnum*'s "presiding princes", sometimes styled *erist'avt'amt'avaris* ("the chief/head of the *erist'avis*") and shortened *erismt'avaris*.³⁵¹ Further, the intentional use of *mpqrobeli* communicates the notion of autonomous power.³⁵² Abibos' original seventh-century hagiographer was aware of the abrogation of K'art'velian kingship during the lifetime of his hero, but as it has reached us the *vita* does not provide any precise details about how and when this came to be.

³⁵⁰ *Vita Abibos Nekreseli*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 246₃₀₋₃₂: "... მიერითგან ერისთავნი იქმნეს მკურობელ ქართლისა ..."

³⁵¹ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 222₁₃, Thomson trans., 232.

³⁵² Rapp 2000.

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Chapter 2

The Nino Cycle

Georgian hagiographical texts composed at the end of the Sasanian Empire and within a few centuries of its demise also contain important albeit sporadic evidence about Iran and Iranians. While some of these sources address the Sasanian period, most have come down to us in heavily redacted and sometimes comprehensively rewritten versions. The *vitae* of Peter the Iberian, Ražden the Iranian, the Thirteen Syrian Fathers (including the aforementioned Abibos), the Armenians Davit' and Tiričan, and others show signs of significant adjustment.¹ This hagiographical overhaul is associated with the aftermath of the Armeno-K'art'velian schism, the triumph of Chalcedonian Christianity in eastern Georgia, and the ascendancy of the Byzantinising Bagratids.

The hagiographies of this category most germane to Sasanian history belong to the Nino Cycle, the related sources enshrining the life and deeds of the illuminatrix of K'art'li. The intercession of the foreign holy woman Nino led to the conversion of King Mirian III in the fourth century. The narratives of the two principal components of the Cycle unfold entirely within Sasanian times. Despite the temporal setting of the seventh-century *Conversion of K'art'li* and the dependent and considerably extended ninth-/tenth-century *Life of Nino*, neither yields much in the way of specific evidence for the central Sasanian authority. Iranian and Iranic imagery have been vigorously suppressed in these textual monuments to the supreme Christian moment in Georgian history, yet traces of the Irano-Caucasian nexus remain.

The Conversion of K'art'li

Exactly when and by whom *The Conversion of K'art'li* was written has long been a matter of debate. There can be no doubt, however, that in its received condition *The Conversion* postdates the Third Council of Duin held in 607.² At Duin III Armenian

¹ An early seventh-century Sasanian *šāhan šāh* “Varamšapoy” (ვარამშაპოყ; Bahrām-Šāpūr), a contemporary of the Byzantine emperor Herakleios, is mentioned in the initial synchronism of *Vita Davit' and Tiričan*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 186₆₋₇. For the Armenian Arsacid Vramšapuh who lived in the late fourth/early fifth century, see Łazar P'arpec'i, caps. 10–12.

² The Čeliši witness associates the text with a certain Grigol (Gregory) the Deacon but it is not at all certain that he was the original author: *Conversion of K'art'li*, cap. 13, Abulaže

clerics excommunicated the K'art'velian *katholikos* Kwrion and his flock, thus plunging the two ecclesiastical organisations into formal schism.³ Christological differences, divergent attitudes towards Constantinople (as conflict escalated between the Sasanian and Roman Empires),⁴ and the obstinacy of Kwrion⁵ and his Armenian counterparts Movsēs and Abraham are usually advanced as the chief culprits. But the decisive factor was the K'art'velian Church's steady march towards greater self-regulation at a time when the local monarchy had ceased to exist. The fissure hardened during Herakleios' Iranian campaign, which saw the emperor personally lead a Byzantine army through Caucasia. In 627 he reached the eastern Georgian capital Tp'ilisi,⁶ an event exemplifying the rise of Byzantine power in Caucasia's interior.

Notwithstanding the way it is typically handled in modern scholarship, *The Conversion of K'art'li* is not simply the oldest extant indigenous account of the Christianisation of eastern Georgia's monarchy. As received, it also embodies the official position of the K'art'velian Church shortly after the schism with its Armenian counterpart.⁷ More precisely, *The Conversion* is a resolute declaration of autonomy by the fledgling K'art'velian "national" church. Through a deliberate (re)framing of pivotal fourth-century events and a retrojection of ties with Constantinople and Jerusalem, it advocates for a Christianity that was at once K'art'velian, autocephalous and Chalcedonian. Significantly, earlier sources on Armenia's conversion, notably the texts of the Gregory Cycle attributed to Agat'angelos, were also affected by Duin III and all it represents. Every surviving witness of Agat'angelos is posterior to Duin III and exhibits – to varying degrees – an underlying religious ethnocentrism characteristic of the post-schism period.⁸

ed., 86,^{29–32} Rapp and Crego trans., 192. See also: Lerner trans., 143; and Lerner 2004, 25. Cf. Toumanoff 1943, 149–153.

³ The literature devoted to the Armeno-K'art'velian schism is plentiful, but see: Garsoïan 1999b; and Alek'size in his *Geo. trans. of Girk' T'lt'oc'*.

⁴ In 611, soon after Duin III, Caesarea in Cappadocia was captured by the Sasanians: Theophanēs, AM 6103, de Boor ed., 299, Mango and Scott trans., 429. For the date, see Kaegi 1973, 322–323.

⁵ In Greek Kwrion was known as Kyros (Lat. Cyrus); in Arabic texts he is called al-Mukawkas. Having abdicated/been removed from the *katholikos* of eastern Georgia, Kwrion served as metropolitan of Phasis in western Georgia, an area under strong Byzantine influence. Thereafter, Herakleios appointed him patriarch of Alexandria. In Egypt Kwrion persecuted Miaphysite Copts – his experience in the Duin III affair proving invaluable – and later was responsible for the formal surrender of Byzantine Egypt to the Arabs. For Kwrion as the patriarch of Alexandria, see: Alek'size in his *Geo. trans. of Girk' T'lt'oc'*, 167ff.; and Alek'size 2008, 148–149.

⁶ Kaegi 2003, 142–144, 180 and 184.

⁷ Van Esbroeck 1998, for a stronger theological and especially christological emphasis.

⁸ This is immediately obvious, e.g., in Greek (Vg) and Arabic (Va) witnesses of Agat'angelos (trans. in Thomson 2010). There Gregory and the Armenian king Trdat

We must not forget, however, that the waves of Christianisation sweeping across the Caucasian isthmus from Syria and Cappadocia in the third and fourth centuries did not wash upon neatly compartmentalised ethno-cultural shores. Instead, these waves represent a multi-century, cross-cultural phenomenon which, for the most part, transpired outside tightly arranged ecclesiastical hierarchies.⁹ This holds true not only for the Christianisation of political élites in Armenia Major, K'art'li and Albania, the focus of surviving conversion accounts, but also for associated events, notably the invention of the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian scripts. What's more, Caucasia's cross-cultural Christianisation encouraged further regional integration, at least initially. The notion of conversions unfolding within strictly bounded ethno-cultural boxes emanates principally from later times. The seventh-century schism was a watershed in this regard.

Produced in an unstable environment, the seventh-century *Conversion* aimed to conjure order from the turmoil by creatively reimagining K'art'li's royal conversion so that it had relevance for the present and future. It should be remembered that the K'art'velians had been without a monarch since the Sasanians' suppression of kingship around 580. The succeeding decades witnessed not only the formal break of the Armenian and K'art'velian ecclesiastical hierarchies but also the re-ignition of full-scale conflict between Iranians and Romans,¹⁰ whom with Herakleios' rise scholars arguably call Byzantines. Herakleios personally travelled through Caucasia, including K'art'li, and was eager to pull the region's Christians permanently within the Byzantine-Chalcedonian orbit. Contemporary writers understood the colossal implications of Herakleios standing before Kala, Tp'ilisi's main fortress. Reports of this event are unusually preserved in multiple Georgian sources.¹¹ *The Conversion*, which may just postdate Herakleios' passage through K'art'li, enshrines this new state of affairs. On the one hand, the text emphasises and sometimes exaggerates and fabricates eastern Georgia's direct connections with Constantinople and Jerusalem *at the time of Mirian's baptism in the early fourth century*.¹² On the other hand, the clerical author's silence on Iran and Iranians thinly masks his

are credited with the conversion of neighbouring Caucasian monarchs, including the K'art'velians, Albanians and Abkhaz/Laz.

⁹ In any case, the clerical hierarchies were just taking shape in the fourth century.

¹⁰ For this last conflict between the Romans and Sasanians, see now Howard-Johnston 2010, esp. 436–445. On Herakleios in Armenia, see Greenwood 2009, 337–341.

¹¹ On the possibility of the Georgian accounts being partially derivative from Armenian sources, see Shapira 2007a, 331–346. The siege of Tp'ilisi is also reported by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.11, and Theophanēs, AM 6117.

¹² For 326, see Patariže 2000. An attempt to link Mirian's conversion to the solar eclipse of May 319 is presented in Gigolašvili *et al.* 2007; see also Sauter *et al. forthcoming*. While it is tempting to connect episodes like this with natural phenomena, such efforts rest on the assumption that a given conversion story is literal – and factual – on this and other points.

patent distaste for Zoroastrianism and the Sasanian Empire. The silence is more remarkable when we consider the bold Iranic imagery woven into the fabric of pre-Bagratid historiographies. Unlike the *vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i, Sasanian officials and their agents are not the chief antagonists. Rather, the later *Conversion* is vague about the competition and threats Christianity faced in the K'art'velian kingdom. Upon Nino's arrival, we read only that the holy woman found this Northern land "in error".¹³

The Life of Nino

The Life of Nino is over ten times the size of *The Conversion of K'art'li* upon which it is based. Coming down to us in four closely related witnesses, Nino's *vita* was composed in the ninth/tenth century during the heyday of Tao-Klarjet'i.¹⁴ In this southwestern area, at a time when most of eastern Georgia remained under Arab control, K'art'velian ecclesiastical culture flourished and a local branch of the Bagratid dynasty reinvigorated local political culture and eventually restored indigenous kingship.

While the *vita* undoubtedly incorporates some old traditions not worked into *The Conversion*, it teems with later accretions, including an emphasis on K'art'velian idolatry. As presented, the imminent hazard to fourth-century Christianity was a well-organised indigenous polytheism, not Sasanian Zoroastrianism. The *vita* begins with an account of Nino's childhood in which the future saint, said to be Cappadocian,¹⁵ is endowed with a direct but unlikely link to Jerusalem: with their young daughter in tow, Zabilovn¹⁶ and Susana moved to the holy city.¹⁷ Such retrojections reach their crescendo with the introduction of the Chalcedonian champion Juvenal, the first patriarch of Jerusalem (r. 422–458). But Juvenal actually lived a full century after Nino and Mirian!¹⁸

Reminiscent of *The Conversion*, the footprint of Iran and the Iranians in the *vita* of Nino is intentionally faint. There are two interlocking explanations. First, the substantial temporal distance between the early fourth century and the tradition

¹³ *Conversion of K'art'li*, cap. 8, Abulaže ed., 84_{33–35}, Rapp and Crego trans., 191.

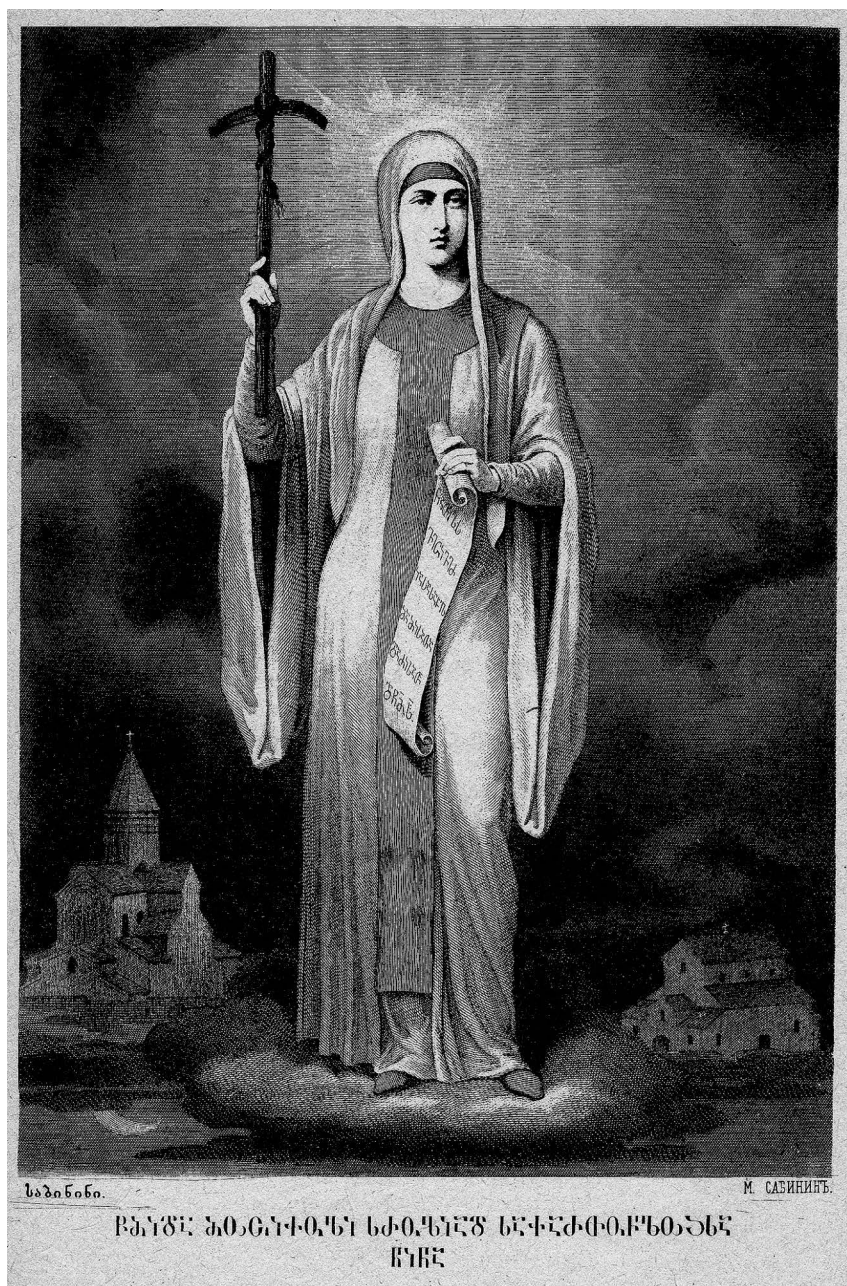
¹⁴ Tao-Klarjet'i was situated southwest of K'art'li along the border with Byzantine Anatolia.

¹⁵ Nino's Cappadocian origin appears to be a later tradition: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 72–73, Thomson trans., 84–86. The intriguing possibility of her provenance in the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands is raised by Thomson 1996b, 28.

¹⁶ Zabilovn is alleged to have Christianised the Branjis (Franks?!): *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 109_{23–24}. Nino thus followed in her father's footsteps, according to Caucasian – and Iranian! – custom.

¹⁷ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 106–107; and *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 72. This is not to deny the important connections between the Holy Land and Eastern Georgia already in the second half of the fourth and certainly in the fifth century.

¹⁸ See, e.g., van Esbroeck 1998, 62–63.



at the heart of *The Life of Nino* obscured the Iranian-Zoroastrian menace. By the time of *The Life of Nino*'s composition, the Sasanian Empire had been defunct for more than 150 years. Second, to the extent that they were aware of it Sasanian officials took little notice of the initial Christianisation of the élites of southern Caucasia. If nothing else, these conversions occurred before the escalation of religious tension between Constantinople and Ctesiphon.

Whereas Iranians are unknown in *The Conversion of K'art'li*, *The Life of Nino* inserts them in a few considered instances. The first occurs when Nino's Christian mentor in Jerusalem, the Armenian Sara Miap'ori,¹⁹ alerted her to a "Northern land [which] is in the mountains of Somxit'i [i.e., Gugark', here probably Armenia] and it is a land of pagans, for it is under the authority of the Greeks and Užiks".²⁰ Užik (უჯიკი) would seem to be a corruption of Xužik (ხუჯიკი), the designation for Medes; compare Armenian Xužastan < Xūzestān.²¹ The allusion is murky, however, and it is doubtful whether a medieval Georgian would have grasped this meaning.

The Life of Nino amplifies the role of the first Christian monarch of the K'art'velians. The earlier *Conversion* does not divulge Mirian's lineage, but the author of Nino's *vita* endows Mirian with a biological link to the Sasanians by making him the uncle of the "great king of the Iranians" (*didisa sparst'a mep'isa*, დიდისა სპარსთა მეფისა).²² By comparison, the Georgian historiographies investigated below describe Mirian as the son of the Sasanian *šāhan šāh* (!). *The*

¹⁹ Alek'size 1996/1997, for *miap'ori*'s connection to Arm. *minawor* (მინაორი), "solitary" < *miawor* (მიაორი), "one, singular, united".

²⁰ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 113₁₂₋₁₅ = Lerner trans., 160: "ჩრდილოდსა ქუეყანად სომხითისა მიუღლ არს, საწარმართოდ ქუეყანად, საკელმწიფოდ ბერძენთა და უჯიკთა" (Šatberdi [C] variant; Čeliši [L] is slightly expanded). Cf. *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 79₄₋₆ = Thomson trans., 89-90: "... a city to the east by the name of Mc'xet'a, the land of K'art'li and of Armenia, a mountainous pagan [land]. But at the present time it has fallen under the authority of the Užiks" ["არს აღმოსავლეთით ქალაქი სახელით მცხეთა, ქუეყანა ქართლისა და სომხითისა – მიუღლეთი საწარმართო, არამედ უამსა ამას უჯიკთა საკელმწიფოდ შექმნილ არს იგი"]. Both English translations cited here – Thomson and Lerner – render Somxit'i, technically the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands, as "Armenia" without comment (the usual form is Somxet'i). Somxit'i and Somxet'i were *sometimes* used as synonyms in Old Georgian, e.g.: *Conversion of K'art'li*, §6, Rapp and Crego trans., 190; and *Royal List II*, §§4 and 20, Rapp trans., 304 and 308.

²¹ Abulaže 1973b, 429 and esp. 565. See also Thomson 1990, 90 (fn. 76). On the association of Media and Xužastan, see Ps.-Sebēos, cap. 42, Thomson trans., 102. For broader connections between Armenia and Xužastan, see Garsoïan 2000, 85-86. James Russell (private communication, 26 October 2011) points out that Arm. *xuž* (ჟუძ) || *xužaduz* (ჟუძაჟუძი), "barbarous, savage", is a pun derived from the designation for the descendants of the Elamites. For the connection of Xužiks and "Nestorians" in Armenian sources, see Garsoïan 1999b, 222-223 *et sqq.*

²² *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 95₁₃.

Life of Nino offers other hitherto unknown insights into this important king, the founder of the Chosroid dynasty. Prior to Mirian's conversion, as Nino prayed near a bramble bush on the outskirts of Mc'xet'a (where now stands the Samt'avro convent, the site of the earlier Zemoy Eklesia, Upper Church), Sasanian Iran and K'art'li launched a joint invasion of the Roman Empire. There are no independent sources to authenticate this curious story which, in fact, was intended to augment Mirian's erroneous ways ahead of his baptism. It also conferred upon the K'art'velian monarchy a direct connection to Constantine and hence to the inception of the Christian Roman Empire. Finally, the episode establishes the superiority of Christianity through Constantine's victory: "Constantine, king of the Greeks, put those kings to flight by the power of Christ and by the guidance of the Cross ..." ²³

Iranians make a muted appearance in the *vita's* account of the Jewish priest Abiat'ar (Abiathar), one of Nino's earliest converts. Abiat'ar recollects how during the reign of Herod the Jewish community of Mc'xet'a had received dreadful news of the capitulation of Jerusalem to the Iranians. A follow-up report clarified that Jerusalem had not fallen; instead, three Iranian magi had brought precious gifts for the infant Jesus. ²⁴ Although the initial report was retracted, we see how the Sasanian sacking of Jerusalem in 614 was telescoped back to the time of Jesus' birth. And so we have another indication of this tradition having taken shape in the first half of the seventh century, after Duin III.

The Life of Nino's most substantial engagement of Sasanian Iran is embedded in a vision witnessed by Nino's female disciples and written down, it is said, by the holy woman's pupil Sidonia. ²⁵ Mts Armazi and Zadeni – which shared their names with idols towering above Mc'xet'a – suddenly collapsed and obstructed the converging Kura/Mtkuari and Aragwi Rivers. Nino explained the catastrophe metaphorically: "... the mountains of unbelief have collapsed in K'art'li". ²⁶ In a second vision, the Sasanian army broke through Mc'xet'a's gates and overwhelmed the royal city. In the midst of the carnage a shout cried out: "The king of the Iranians, the king of kings [*mep'et'-mep'e*], Xuaran-Xuara commands: 'Spare all the Jews from the edge of the sword'". ²⁷ False rumours swirled of Mirian's capture by the Sasanians. Within the vision Nino declared this a sign of the destruction of the polytheists. Facing down the invaders, Nino

²³ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 95 ¹⁴⁻¹⁵: "... ოდეს კოსტანტინე ბერძენთა მეფემან ძალითა ქრისტესითა და წანამდღურებითა ჯუარისათა იოცნა მეფენი ..."

²⁴ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 126; and *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 98.

²⁵ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 112–113. Cf. the association of the original apostles with the four Gospels. Both are deliberate attempts to assert the highest textual authority.

²⁶ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 112 ²⁰ = Thomson trans., 124: "... ურწმუნოებისა მთანი დაირღვეს ქართლს შინა".

²⁷ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 113 ¹⁰⁻¹¹: "მეფე სპარსთა, მეფეთ-მეფე ხუარან-ხუარა ბრძანებს: ყოველი ჰურია განარინეთ პირისაგან მასჯლისა"; and *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 140 ¹²⁻¹⁵.

inquired: “Where are the kings of the Iranians, Xuara and Xuaran-Xuara ...?”²⁸ She acknowledged the formidable army assembled by the Sasanians but insisted upon the superiority of the Christian God. Through Nino’s intercession the Iranian host retreated and peace was restored. Significantly, the names Xuara and Xuaran-Xuara are the loudest surviving Georgian echoes of Middle Persian *xwarrah*, i.e., *farr*, *farrah* or *farnah*, the divine glory adorning legitimate Iranian and Iranic kings.²⁹ With remarkable precision Xuaran-Xuara transcribes Middle Persian *xwarrān-xwarrah*, “glory of glories”.³⁰

The power of healing channelled through the Christian God is a vital theme of the Nino Cycle. One such episode involves an Iranian named Xuara “the chief *mowbed* of the Iranians” (*mogw igi mt’avari sparsi*, მოგვ იგი მოავარი სპარსი), who prior to Mirian’s baptism was afflicted by serious illness.³¹ The *vita* of Nino does not link this *mowbed* Xuara to the aforementioned “kings” Xuara and Xuaran-Xuara. Instead he is identified as a prince from King Mirian’s family, hence his association with legitimising *xwarrah*. If the *mowbed* Xuara represents a historical figure, then he belonged to the same Parthian Mihrānid house as Mirian. In eastern Georgia, then, both royal and Zoroastrian luminaries with conspicuous Parthian backgrounds claimed *xwarrah*. In light of his lofty status and his presence in eastern Georgia, the Parthian Xuara must have been K’art’li’s ranking Zoroastrian priest. The word *sparsi* (სპარსი), “Iranian” (also “Persian”, “Parthian”), is paramount, for the author emphasises what he envisions as the foreign, non-K’art’velian stamp of Xuara’s Iranian Zoroastrianism as opposed to the eastern Georgians’ syncretic polytheism which, as we shall see, had a strong Mazdean core. The recently converted Queen Nana implored Nino to aid the ailing *mowbed*-prince. Meanwhile, the king mocked Nino’s beliefs:

By what god’s power do you perform these cures? Are you a daughter of Armaz
or a child of Zaden? You have come here as a stranger [*uc’xovebay*]³² and felt

²⁸ *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 113₁₉₋₂₀: “სადღა არიან მეფენი სპარსთანი ხუარა და ხუარან-ხუარა ...?”; and *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 140₂₈₋₃₃. *Mok’c’evay k’art’lisay’s Čeliši* (ჟ) variant also gives the corrupted Xovar Xoran (ხოვარ ხორან): *ibid.*, 140₂₉.

²⁹ Bielmeier 1990, 35. See also: Schmitt 1983, 94; and Schmitt 1986, 453. For these terms, see pp. 227–228.

³⁰ Touraj Daryaee (personal communication, 11 January 2011) notes that “[t]his appears to be a claque on *šāhān šāh*, *mowbedān mowbed*, etc.”. See also Vač’naže and Kuc’ia 2003. Similar names occur in Middle Persian, including Xwarrahzād, for which see Greenwood 2008b, 16.

³¹ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 131₁₆–134₃₁; and *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 106₅–108₁₁. The rendition of “chief *mowbed*” in Armenian texts, including Elišē, can closely resemble the Iranian, i.e., *movpetan movpet* (մովպետան մովպետ): Elišē, cap. 3, Tēr-Minasean ed., 62₁₅₋₁₆ = Thomson trans., 113 (and fn. 3).

³² This important theme in early Caucasian hagiographical literature reflects the crucial role foreigners (i.e., “strangers”, *uc’xoeli*, უცხოელი) played in the region’s

sorrow and the graciousness of the gods are upon you; they have endowed you with the power of healing for you to live in a strange land. And may they be glorious [*didebulmc'a*] forever! Remain always in my presence as a nursemaid,³³ respected in this land, but do not speak these strange words and do not proclaim the false faith of the Romans and do not desire to speak it here. For behold the gods, the givers of bountiful fruit, the lords of the world, the enlighteners of sunlight and givers of rain, the growers of the fruits on the earth, [the gods] of K'art'li, Armaz and Zaden, who examine everything hidden. And the ancient gods of our fathers, Gac'i and Ga, let them be foremost for you ...³⁴

Christianisation. The Armenian Arsacid King Trdat is made to describe the Parthian Grigor Lusaworič – Gregory the Illuminator – as a “stranger and foreigner” (“*սյր և օտարական և անաչխարչիկ*”) in Agat'angelos (Aa), §50, Thomson trans., 62–63.

³³ Not *dedamžuze* but *ert'i macovnebelt'agani*, lit. “one from among the healers/curers”.

³⁴ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 131₂₅–132₁₆, Lerner trans., 172: “რომლისა ღმრთისა ძალითა იქმ საქმესა ამას კურნებისასა? ანუ ხარ შენ ასული არმაზისი, ანუ შეილი ზადენისი, უცხოვებით მოხვედ და შეუვრდი, ხოლო მას ზედა-აც მოწყალება, და მიგანიჭეს ძალი კურნებისად, რადითა მით სცხოვნდებოდი უცხოთა ამას ქუეყანასა. და დიდებულმცა არიან უკუნისამდე! ხოლო შენ წინაშე ჩემსა იყავ მარადის, ვითარცა ერთი მაწონებელთაგანი პატივცემულ ქუეყანასა ამას, არამედ უცხოთა მას სიტყუასა ნუ იტყვ, პრომთა მათ შეცთომილთა შჯულსა, და ნუ გნებავენ ყოვლადვე აქა თქუმად, რამეთუ აჰა ესერა ღმერთნი, დიდთა ნაყოფთა მომცემელნი და სოფლის მპყრობელნი, მზის მომფენელნი და წვიმისა მომცემელნი, ქუეყანი[თ] ნაყოფთა განმზრდელნი, ქართლისანი, არმაზ და ზადენ, ყოვლისა დაფარულისა გამომეძიებელნი, და ძუელნი ღმერთნი მამათა ჩუენთანი, გაცი და გა, და თავი შენი იგი იყავნ დასარწმუნოებად კაცთა მიმართ”. Cf. *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 106⁹⁻¹⁸ = Thomson trans., 115: “რომლისა ღმრთისა ძალითა იქმ კურნებასა ამას, ანუ ხარ შენ ასული არმაზისი, ანუ შეილი ზადენისი, უცხოვებით მოხვედ და შეუვრდი ... დიდებულმცა არიან უკუნისამდე! ... არამედ უცხოთა ამას სიტყუასა ნუ იტყვ, პრომთა მათ შეცთომილთა სჯულსა, ნუცა გნებავენ ყოვლადვე თქმად. რამეთუ აჰა ესერა, ღმერთნი დიდნი, სოფლის მპყრობელნი, მზისა მომფენელნი, წვიმისა მომცემელნი და ქუეყანისა ნაშობთა გამომზრდელნი ღმერთნი ქართლისანი, არმაზ და ზადენ, ყოვლისა დაფარულისა გამომეძიებელნი, ძუელნი ღმერთნი მამათა ჩუენთანი, გაცი და გაიმ, – იგინი იყვნენ სარწმუნებელად კაცთა მიმართ”, “By the power of which god do you perform these cures? Are you a daughter of Armaz or a child of Zaden? You came as a stranger [*uc'xoebit'*] and fell among [*us*] ... [Our gods] are glorious forever ... Do not repeat that foreign speech, the religion of the erring Romans, nor desire at all to speak it. For behold, the great gods, the masters of the world, who spread out [the rays] of the Sun, who grant rain and make grow the fruits of the earth, the gods of K'art'li, Armaz and Zaden, who examine everything hidden, the old gods of our fathers, Gac'i and Gaim – these are the ones for men to believe”. Although the closely related passages are not identical, the differences in the translations of Lerner and Thomson should be noted.

Here Mirian underscores the holy woman's status as an outsider and brands her religion as an innovation and an anomaly, in one case, and as a deviation from the K'art'velians' ancestral faith, in another. For the time being, Mirian cast aside his suspicions and promised Nino innumerable riches and the right to dwell within Mc'xet'a's walls if she cured Xuara. The symbolism is compelling: not only was Xuara eastern Georgia's leading Zoroastrian priest but his name indicates an association with *xwarrah* – and at least an acknowledgement of the concept's importance. After asserting the sacred priority of the Christian God and Mc'xet'a (the latter of which was manifested by the presence there of Elijah's mantle and Christ's tunic,³⁵ claims having a special potency following Duin III), Nino consented to meet the princely *mowbed*. Through the holy woman's intercession Xuara was healed and “he and his whole house became disciples of St Nino ...”³⁶ Caucasian Christianity had again triumphed over Iranian Zoroastrianism.

Mirian then allegedly dispatched a delegation to the Roman emperor Constantine to secure a bishop and priests. Although Iranians are afforded no direct role in the episode, Constantine and Helena are made to acknowledge the tensions flaring between the Romans and Iranians, tensions which increasingly were acquiring a religious tone:

... King [Constantine] and his mother Queen Helena were filled with joy. First, because the grace [*madli*] of God extended to all places and under their aegis all K'art'li was to be baptised. And furthermore, they were also joyful because they were assured by King Mirian of the complete destruction of the Iranians and of his firm acceptance of their friendship.³⁷

Rip'sime/Hrip'simē and Nino

The Life of Nino gives several indirect indications of the enduring Irano-Caucasian interface. While the *vita* says nothing about the Sasanian administration and is devoid of allusions to historical *šāhan šāhs*, it describes Nino's companion Gaiane

³⁵ For the tunic's presence in Mc'xet'a, see: Marr 1897; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 314–318. See also the popular account by Gunia 2010.

³⁶ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 134^{25–26}: “და ღაემოწაფა წმიდასა ნინოს იგი და ყოველი სახლი მისი ...”; and *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 108^{10–11}.

³⁷ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 115^{19–24}: “... მაშინ აღივსო სიხარულითა მეფე და დედა მისი ელენე დედოფალი: პირველად ამისთვის, რამეთუ მადლი ღმრთისა მიეფინებოდა ყოველთა ადგილთა და ჰკელსა ქუეშე მათსა ნათელს იღებდა ყოველი ქართლი. შემდგომად ამისთვის განმხიარულდეს, რამეთუ დაიდასტურეს მირიან მეფისაგან სრულიად მოწყუედა სპარსთა და მტკიცედ მიღება სიყუარულისა მათისა”. Thomson trans., 128, inadvertently renders *deda* (დედა), “mother”, as “wife”.

– who was martyred in Armenia Major – as Rip'sime's "foster mother", *dedamžuze* (დედამძუძე).³⁸ As we have seen, the institution of tutors and foster parents was prevalent among élites throughout the Iranian world, including Caucasia (and not just Armenia). In this instance, however, the information has been gleaned directly from the seventh-century *Conversion of K'art'li*. There Rip'sime, one of the holy women martyred by King Trdat IV (r. 298/299–ca. 330), reportedly fled Roman domains with her *dedamžuze*.³⁹ *The Conversion*, in turn, incorporates details transmitted in *Agat'angelos*.⁴⁰

As it happens, the Roman emperor's pursuit of the beautiful Hrip'simē – to use the Armenian spelling of her name – and her subsequent martyrdom, along with the martyrdoms of her female companions including the abbess of her convent Gaianē, is a central episode on the path to King Trdat's conversion.⁴¹ Starting with *The Conversion of K'art'li*, the post-schism Georgian tradition insists upon Nino's attachment to the group of holy women that sought shelter in Caucasia from Roman persecution. Nino's association with Gaianē and Hrip'simē was probably contrived after the Third Council of Duin in order to bolster her memory and to establish the autonomy of the K'art'velian Church from its foundation. It would have exploited the pan-Caucasian popularity and prestige all three women already enjoyed.⁴² Had Nino actually been a companion of Gaianē and Hrip'simē, we would expect the received post-schism witnesses of *Agat'angelos* to have used this as proof of the K'art'velians' ecclesiastical dependence upon the Armenians *from the beginning*.⁴³ But this is not the case. True to form, however, the later Movsēs Xorenac'i makes Nino (Arm. Nunē) subservient to Hrip'simē and Gregory the Illuminator (Grigory Lusaworič').⁴⁴

³⁸ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 115₁₋₂; and *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 80_{10,18}.

³⁹ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §4, Abulaže ed., 83₃₄₋₃₅ = Rapp and Crego trans., 190; cf. Lerner trans., 141, who translates the term "nurse".

⁴⁰ *Agat'angelos* (Aa), cap. 5, §§137ff. For fragments of a medieval Georgian version of *Agat'angelos* (aFg) mentioning Rip'sime (Arm. Hrip'simē), see Blake 1932, 216–221.

⁴¹ So as to preserve the distinction between the Armenian and Georgian traditions, I use the forms Hrip'simē/Gaianē and Rip'sime/Gaiane respectively.

⁴² On the development of the Nino Cycle, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 331–359; cf. Lerner 2004. Whereas the texts associated with Nino's conversion are generally treated as storehouses of information about Nino's time, it is essential not to lose sight of the historical function and purpose of the later individual narratives and the divergent multilayered manuscripts transmitting them. Nino's memory was constantly evolving: it changed over time and was imagined in different ways by various individuals, groups and constituencies at a given moment.

⁴³ Cf. the Greek (Vg) and Arabic (Va) redactions of *Agat'angelos* (Thomson 2010, 437–441 = §§832–834) in which Gregory the Illuminator baptises the (unnamed) kings of the K'art'velians, Albanians and Laz.

⁴⁴ Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.86 and II.91. Fiery debate surrounds the date of the history attributed to Xorenac'i, claimed within the received text to be a fifth-century monument. I remain persuaded by Thomson's eighth-century calculation in his trans. of Xorenac'i (see

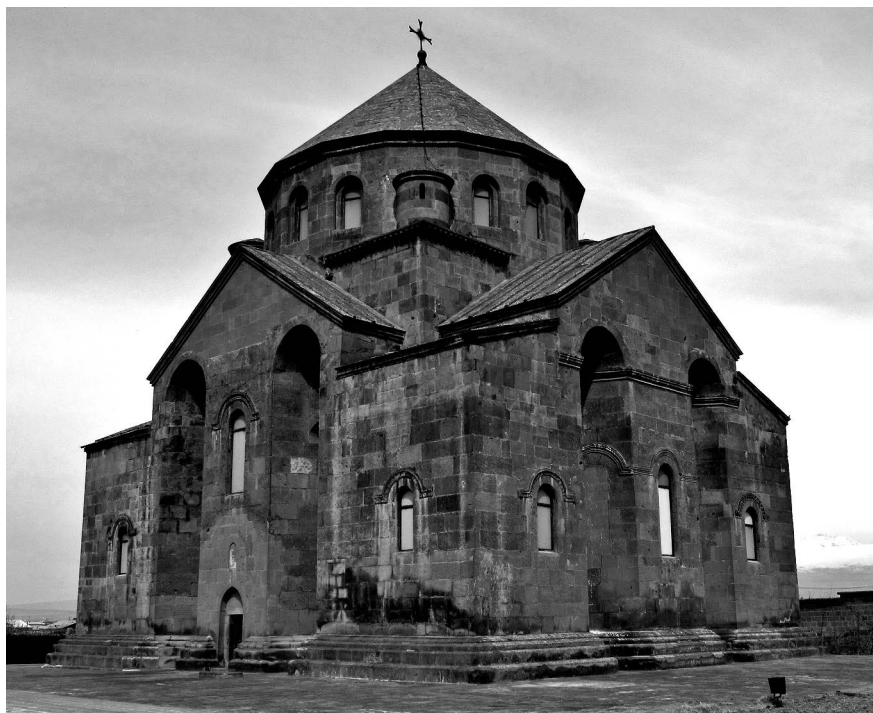


Figure 2.2. Church of St Hrip'simē, Vałaršapat (Ējmiacin), Armenia.

Indeed, the post-schism Xorenac'i takes pains to prove not only the religious but also the political and social subordination of eastern Georgia to Armenia Major. He goes so far as to style Mirian (Arm. Mihran) "prince" and not "king", i.e., *arajñord* (არაჯნორդ) and not *t'agawor* (ტაგაუორ)!⁴⁵ On the religious front, Xorenac'i has Nino dispatch an embassy to Gregory, her superior, requesting guidance once Mirian had embraced Christ.

his introduction). For an alternate view, see T'op'č'yan 2006. In his effort to demonstrate Albanian political and ecclesiastical autonomy, Movsēs Dasxuranc'i acknowledges the missionary activities in Albania of Gregory the Illuminator and his grandson Grigoris, but he tempers this tradition in two ways: first, by emphasising that the Albanian king had "voluntarily submitted" to Gregory and had asked for Grigoris to be consecrated as chief prelate of the Albanians (I.9); and second, by asserting the earlier establishment of Christianity in Albania, entirely independent of the Armenians, by Elišay (Elissaios, Eliseus), who had been dispatched there by the apostle James. This fabulous story also conveniently endowed the Albanian Church with a direct link to first-century Jerusalem (I.6ff.).

⁴⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.86, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 232₂. See also: Thomson in Xorenac'i, 238 (fn. 3); and Thomson 2010, 51–53.

We cannot entirely rule out the possibility of the historical Nino having entered southern Caucasia in the company of the Hrip'simian nuns. After all, the region's Christianisation was an interconnected cross-cultural process.⁴⁶ Yet a cross-cultural experience need not translate into an identical experience for the parties involved. One thing is certain: after Duin III both Armenians and eastern Georgians adjusted and manipulated received traditions of their royal conversions – and created new ones. We must therefore take care to distinguish between the cross-cultural process of Christianisation that actually commenced in the early fourth century and later ethnocentric, triumphalist and polemical traditions that anachronistically retroject autocephaly and strict hierarchical relationships between the embryonic church administrations.

The Hunt

Hunting (*nadirobay* || *nadiri*, ნადირობაჲ || ნადირი), one of the quintessential activities of Iranian and Iranic élites, is a central element of the Nino story. From one end of the Iranian Commonwealth to the other, the royal hunt

... represented the definitive expression of Sasanian epic tradition. Combining the skills of archery and horsemanship, hunting provided the ideal setting for Sasanian elites to display their athleticism and courage. Closely associated with military valor, the hunt typically involved the deployment of large numbers of retainers and noble companions. Sasanian kings, following a long tradition in Near Eastern monarchy, made hunting a central part of their court ritual and royal ideology.⁴⁷

The hunt frequently serves as the literary backdrop for the unveiling of one's destiny in Iranian and Iranic environments.⁴⁸ In the oldest surviving account of Mirian's conversion, which appears in the ca. 400 *Ecclesiastical History* composed in Latin by Rufinus, the unnamed Mirian enters the Christian fold precisely during a

⁴⁶ Agat'angelos speaks of other holy women in the company of Gaianē and Hrip'simē but proffers no details about their identity, confuses their numbers and does not mention Nunē/Nino: e.g., Agat'angelos (Aa), §§149, 165, 201, 207 and 209–210. See also Thomson's commentary in his 2010 trans., e.g., §138, pp. 214–215. The received Georgian tradition awkwardly describes Nino as a solitary, itinerant captive. Perhaps she was a “captive” of the North. Whether or not it is based on reality, such a status reinforced the image of eastern Georgia's unique and independent conversion.

⁴⁷ Walker 2006, 134–135.

⁴⁸ Rapp 2009, 671–672. See also: Gignoux 1983a; and Walker 2006, 131–140. Agat'angelos (Aa), §211, for Trdat's hunting expedition on the Plain of P'arakan Šemak following the martyrdom of Hrip'simē. For the etymology of P'arakan Šemak and its incorporation of *xwarrah* (Arm. *p'ark'*), see Russell 2001, 188 (fn. 6). On the importance of the hunt in an Irano-Christian context, see also: Braund 1994, 253–254; and Allsen 2006.

hunt. While pursuing game in a forest, the Sun vanished and the royal entourage scattered. In desperation the king appealed to the holy woman's (i.e., Nino's) god and the darkness immediately subsided.⁴⁹ Rufinus was not an eyewitness to these events but, as we have seen, he had a well-placed informant: Bakur, the Roman *dux Palaestinae* and *comes domesticorum* and then the hereditary *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands.⁵⁰ Rufinus' narrative mostly corresponds to the earliest received Georgian witness to this particular event, the ninth-/tenth-century *Life of Nino*.⁵¹ The latter text presents Mirian's hunting expedition on Mt T'xot'i as the decisive moment in the king's conversion to Christianity. While its account is more intricate than Rufinus', specialists still debate which segments of the multi-layered *vita* derive from the time of Nino and Mirian and which were added in subsequent centuries.⁵² To take one example: in *The Life of Nino*, when the king was enshrouded in darkness during the hunt, he saw a shining light in the shape of a cross.⁵³ Extant redactions of the seventh-century *Conversion of K'art'li* do not mention the hunting episode at all. They merely report: "[a]nd in the seventh year [after her arrival] [Nino] brought the king to the faith by a miracle performed by Christ".⁵⁴

When they mention secular rulers, Georgian hagiographies tend to ignore the Iranian accoutrements of pre-Bagratid K'art'velian kingship. While it may be tempting to argue that the author of *The Conversion* expurgated the story of Mirian's hunt because of its Iranian imagery, the text as a whole is a succinct and rather underwhelming account of a pivotal episode. If nothing else, a passion for hunting was hardly exclusive to Iranians. But the tradition of Mirian having been moved to accept the Christian God during a hunt is an old one, as Rufinus testifies.

Hunting as a cardinal noble pastime is attested in other early Georgian sources. According to the *vita* of Šušanik, Varsk'en went on a hunt as his wife languished in her cell.⁵⁵ In *The Life of the Kings*, a ca. 800 historiographical text,

⁴⁹ Rufinus, I.10–11, trans. in Lang 1976, 15–19. Nino is likewise unnamed. See also: Braund 1994, 248–250; and Thelamon 1972 and 1981. Mirian and Nino are anonymous, I think, because this event was linked to the monarchy and not to the rival *bidaxšate* of Somxit'i-Gugark' ruled by Bakur-Bakourios.

⁵⁰ On Bakur's identity, see pp. 74–75. See also Braund 1994, 247–248.

⁵¹ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 134₃₂–137₂₈.

⁵² Aspects of the Roman tradition enshrined in Rufinus' account were possibly incorporated back into the Georgian literary canon, for which see Peeters 1932, 32 and 52. But there is no definitive proof of this. See also Braund 1994, 250–251. Because Bakur-Bakourios was stationed in Jerusalem, it is possible that he had been in direct contact with the nascent K'art'velian monastic community, which itself may have been responsible for the earliest written Nino tradition(s).

⁵³ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 153_{15–17}, Lerner trans. 186.

⁵⁴ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §8, Abulaže ed., 84_{37–38}, Rapp and Crego trans., 191: “და მეშვესა წელსა მეფესა არწმუნა სა[ს]წაუღიოთა ქრისტესმიერითა”.

⁵⁵ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, chap. 7, Abulaže ed., 18_{2–3}.



Figure 2.3. Ateni Sioni.



Figure 2.4. Hunting scene, exterior wall of Ateni Sioni.

the first K'art'velian monarch P'arnavaz (r. 299–234 BC) discovered an immense treasure while he was hunting, a literary incident establishing both his possession of *xwarrah* and the reputed antiquity of Tp'ilisi, the scene of the story.⁵⁶ The hunt also found visual representation, sometimes in religious contexts. A well-known

⁵⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 21–22 = Thomson trans., 30.

example is the hunting scene on the exterior western wall of the seventh-century Ateni Sioni church near Gori.

Sabastani

The Conversion of K'art'li and *The Life of Nino* say nothing about the geography of Iran, though this is to be expected since they pay little heed to the Sasanian Empire. The one conceivable direct reference to the Sasanian domains is ambiguous. According to her *vita*, Nino had a vision of the Sasanian army invading eastern Georgia from Sabastani (საბასტანო).⁵⁷ This place is unattested elsewhere in early Georgian literature.⁵⁸

Sabastani's identification can be resolved if we proceed from the premise that an earlier manuscript or lost written source composed in the *nusxuri* script was misread or miscopied. The accidental transposition of *b* (ბ) and *g* (გ) in *nusxuri* is not uncommon as we see, for example, in *Royal List II*.⁵⁹ Sabastani (საბასტანო) may therefore be a misreading of *Sagastani (*საგასტანო), that is to say, Sagastān/Sagestān,⁶⁰ an otherwise undocumented Georgian rendering of Sakastan (< OIr. Sakā, Inner Asian “Scythians”; Arm. Sakstan, Sagistan⁶¹ and Sagastan⁶²; Gk. Segistanē, Σεγιστανή, and Sakastanē, Σακαστανή). Sakastan corresponds to the eastern Iranian region of Sīstān and, more broadly, portions of eastern Iran, southern Afghanistan and western Pakistan. But this interpretation is at odds with Nino's vision if we accept the toponyms literally, for a huge distance separates Sīstān and Caucasia. It is possible that Sabastani actually intends Sīstān, in which case it represents an exotic faraway land in much the same way that “India” and “Sindia” are deployed in *The Life of Vaxtang*.⁶³ Distance remains an issue, however.

There is a better explanation. In Armenian, Šakašēn (Ճակաշէն) is a district south of the Kura/Mtkuari River within the Armeno-Albanian marchlands.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 140_{33–34}; and Sin.Geo.N.50, 55r, facsimile ed., 181 = Alek'size ed., 361, for *nusxuri* სსბასტანო.

⁵⁸ John Fine (personal communication, 7 June 2011) raises the possibility of Sabastani's equation with Sebasteia in Armenia Minor.

⁵⁹ See below, p. 162 (fn. 264). The transposition is possible in *asomt'avruli* (ა, ბ) but less likely in *mxedruli* (ბ, გ).

⁶⁰ E.g., KKZ, V.14.

⁶¹ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Sakstan/Sagistan/Sistan”, 489; and Marquart 1901, “Sakastan”, 35–36. See also Hübschmann 1897, 71.

⁶² Elišē, cap. 2, Tēr-Minasean ed., 48₃ = Thomson trans., 99 (and fn. 1). Other references are found, e.g., in: Ps.-Sebeōs, cap. 42; and Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.55.

⁶³ See p. 293.

⁶⁴ Eremyan 1963, 73; and Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Šakašēn”, 488. It is encountered, e.g., in: the fifth-century *Epic Histories*, V.xiii, 1883 ed., 177₁; the seventh-century geography of Anania Širakac'i, V.21 and V.22.9 (short recension), Hewsens trans., 59A and 65A; and *The*

According to Robert Hewsen, “Šakašēn formed a separate principality within Armenia ruled by the Princes Daštakaran ... Its name is supposedly connected with that of the *Saka* or Scythians who invaded Urartu in the seventh century B.C. and are believed to have left certain enclaves within the future Armenia ...”⁶⁵ Known to Ptolemy and Strabōn as Sakasēnē (Σακασηνή),⁶⁶ the area probably reverted to Albanian control following the ca. 387 partition of Armenia. The Greek term shows the possibility of transposing *s* and *š*.⁶⁷ Armenian exhibits a similar phenomenon: consider Šakašēn; the Armenian word for giant, *hskay* (հսկայ), literally “a good Saka”; and the name Paroyr Skayordi (“son of the Saka”), a legendary Scythian ancestor.⁶⁸ In my view, the elusive term Sabastani/*Sagastani is the Georgian designation for Šakašēn/Sakasēnē. The fictive Sasanian invasion of Mc’xet’a consequently proceeded from the east, from the Albanian border.⁶⁹

Aryan K’art’li

Other local toponyms have some relevance to the Iranian imperial core. The most remarkable example occurs in two tenth-century witnesses of the *vita* of Nino: Sin.Geo.N.50 from St Catherine’s monastery on Mt Sinai and the Šatberdi Codex (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts S-1141) from Tao-Klarjet’i. Both are executed in the *nusxuri* script. In them we encounter the enigmatic *არქი* *არქი*, Arian K’art’li (არქი *ქართლი* in *mxedruli*).⁷⁰ In Sin.Geo.N.50’s rendition, “Arian” (*არქი*) is written above “K’art’li”.⁷¹ Because the main text and the amended *Arian* appear to be in an identical hand, the same scribe apparently corrected an oversight. This suggests medieval unfamiliarity with the unusual term. Arian K’art’li and its people are also attested in the successive

History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (whose earliest material derives from the seventh century), II.19 and III.12, Arak’elyan ed., 178₂₂ and 312₁₀, Dowsett trans., 114 and 203. See also Hewsen 2001, 40–41 and 58.

⁶⁵ Hewsen in Anania Širakac’i, esp. 262 (fn. 172A). For the broader cross-cultural context, see Rostovtzeff 1922.

⁶⁶ Ptolemy V.12.4; and Strabōn XI.8.4 and XI.14.4, which identifies Sakasēnē as a borderland of Albania.

⁶⁷ For Geo. A[r]šušā[y] transcribed as Gk. Ousas, see below, p. 124.

⁶⁸ Russell 1986–1987, 267.

⁶⁹ Another possibility is S.T. Eremyan’s reconstructed *Sabostano (*საბოსტანო), the region around Rust’avi that had once been called Bostan-k’alak’i. See Eremyan 1963, “Ostan k’alak’”, 75 and 120.

⁷⁰ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 120₂₋₃. For the Georgian text, see p. 145 (fn. 195). This “Arian” is entirely unrelated to the later Arian controversy named after the theologian Arius (d. 336). Arian K’art’li is not attested in any of the components of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*. The phrase’s absence in the corpus’s pre-Bagratid texts may reflect the strict royalist and “K’art’velocentric” perspectives of their historians.

⁷¹ *Vita Nino* (MK’) in Sin.Geo.N.50, 34r, facsimile ed., 139 = Alek’size ed., 349.

components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* devoted to pre-Christian history; these are uniquely preserved in the Šatberdi variant. *The Primary History of K'art'li* mentions Arian K'art'li and *Royal List I* alludes to Arian K'art'velians (*arian k'art'velni*, *არქა-ქართელი*).⁷²

The origin, meaning and location of Arian K'art'li are disputed. Toumanoff equates it with the Aranē of Ptolemy and the Harrana of the Hittites.⁷³ Others situate this polity to the southwest of K'art'li.⁷⁴ For example, Guaram Mamulia specifically links it with the “proto-Georgian” Saspeires/Sasperi tribe and their territories in Mesxet'i and the Čoroxi Gorge.⁷⁵ Whatever its location, Arian K'art'li designates *aryān* K'art'li, that is to say, Aryan or Iranian K'art'li.⁷⁶ Transcribed forms of *aryān* are attested in other Caucasian languages. Thus, the Armenian *Epic Histories* deploys Arik' (*Արիკ*) and Parsk' (*Պարսկ*), “Aryans/Iranians” and “Persians” respectively, although the former tends to occur in epic contexts. Early Armenian historians often distinguish between Aryans and non-Aryans and sometimes apply Iranian turns of phrases such as *arik' ew anarik'* (*արիკ և անարիკ*), “Iran and non-Iran”.⁷⁷ In addition, the adjective *ariakan* (*արիական*), “Aryan/Iranian”, means “valiant, heroic, manly, strong”.⁷⁸

Because Aryan K'art'li appears in conjunction with Alexander's installation of Azoy as the first monarch based at Mc'xet'a (Azoy is said to be the son of an existing but unidentified king of Aryan K'art'li), the toponym almost certainly refers to an Achaemenid client in the vicinity of the subsequent K'art'velian kingdom. Aryan K'art'li might have been situated to the southwest of K'art'li

⁷² *Primary History of K'art'li*, §§7–8, Abulaže ed., 81_{29,32} = Rapp trans., 258; and *Royal List I*, §1, Abulaže ed., 82₄ = Rapp trans., 259. See also the following section. Arsen Iqalt'oeli's metaphrastic version of *The Life of Nino*, written in the late eleventh/early twelfth century, affords priority to the tradition enshrined in *The Primary History* and *Royal List I*. Thus, Iqalt'oeli highlights “... Azove [i.e., Azoy], son of the king of the Arian K'art'velians” (“... აზოვე, ძე არიან ქართველთა მეფისაჲ”) and then says “... this Azove is the first king of the K'art'velians” (“... ესე აზოვე არს პირველი მეფე ქართველთაჲ”). Iqalt'oeli contends that the K'art'velians are the descendants of the Arian K'art'velians, that the languages of the two peoples are one and the same, and that the kings of K'art'li are descended from the kings of Arian K'art'li. See Arsen Iqalt'oeli, *Metaphrastic Vita Nino*, Abulaže ed., 47_{1,8-9} and Lolašvili ed., 391.

⁷³ Toumanoff 1963, 89–90 (fn. 124); and Ptolemy V.6.18.

⁷⁴ E.g., K'avt'aria G. 2000, 70. See especially Kavtaraze 1997, 357, for a southwestern location but with doubts about the antiquity of the toponym Arian K'art'li.

⁷⁵ Mamulia 1979, 189. Toumanoff 1963, 321–322, for the identification of Sper (*სპერი*) and Speri (სპერი) with Gk. Syspiritis (Συσπῖρις). Many scholars have postulated a linkage of the toponyms Speri and Iberia, including Marr 1933, 22 (fn. 3), 112 and 225; see also Toumanoff 1963, 61 (fn. 58).

⁷⁶ Rapp 2009, 657–658; Rapp 2003, 250–252; Rapp *forthcoming A*; and Bielmeyer 1990, 33.

⁷⁷ Łazar P'arpec'i, caps. 26, 45, 46, 85 and 87; Elišē, cap. 1; and Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.26. See also Garsoïan in her *Epic Histories*, “Arik'/Aryans”, 350–351.

⁷⁸ On Arik', see Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Arik'/Aryans”, 350–351. For *ariakan*, see: Thomson in Ps.-Sebeōs, 13 (fn. 90); and Bedrossian 1875–1879, 73.

proper, but I am tempted to connect it with the impressive Achaemenid-like structures at Gumbat'i in Kaxet'i and at Qaracamirli and Saritəpə across the border in what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan. Finally, it is possible, albeit unlikely, that Aryan K'art'li is a later invention corresponding coincidentally to the Achaemenid satrapy extending into southern Caucasia.

Although Achaemenid inscriptions do not mention eastern Georgia explicitly, their third-century Sasanian counterparts situate K'art'li within the sphere of Iranian hegemony. But this epigraphical evidence is tinged with disagreement about Caucasia's status: did the lands and peoples of the isthmus belong to Ērān or were they part of Anērān (Non-Ērān), the world beyond?⁷⁹ The ca. 262 Great Inscription of Šāpūr (ŠKZ) on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam locates Wiruzān/Wručān (*wlwc'n*)⁸⁰ within Ērān. By contrast, the inscription of Kerdīr (KKZ), also carved on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt, boasts about the chief *mowbed*'s expansion of Zoroastrianism into non-Ērān. Among the places he specifies is Wrwčān.⁸¹ The later *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* refers to the Wērōy-pahr, "the K'art'velian Guard".⁸²

How can we be certain that Wiruzān, Wručān, Wrwčān and related forms correspond to K'art'li? First and foremost, ŠKZ's Greek text confirms the identification by translating Wiruzān/Wručān as Iberia (Ἰβηρία). The most detailed surviving description of the Sasanian domains also sheds light on the matter. In his *Geography* (*Ašxarhac'oyc'*), the seventh-century Armenian polymath Anania Širakac'i records the division of the empire into four "sides" or sectors.⁸³ Middle Persian *kūst-i Kapkōh* (cf. *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*), "the Caucasus Side", rendered by Širakac'i as K'usti Kapkoh⁸⁴ (*Քուստի Կապկոհ*), encompassed Varjan (K'art'li/eastern Georgia), Armenia and Albania.⁸⁵ Varjan is clearly

⁷⁹ For Armenia, see: Garsoïan 1981, 29–35; and Garsoïan 1976, 6–7 (and fn. 17). For Šāpūr I as *šāhan šāh* of Ērān and Anērān, see Canepa 2009, ch. 4, 53–78.

⁸⁰ ŠKZ, §2, Huyse ed. and trans., 22–23. See also: Maricq ed., 47–49; and Sprengling trans., 14 (and n. 2) and 21–22.

⁸¹ KKZ, V.15, MacKenzie trans., 58, Gignoux trans., 71, and Sprengling trans., 51–52.

⁸² *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, #18, Daryaee ed. and trans., 14 and 18. See also Nyberg 1974, 213–214: "the Gruzinian Guard", the old name of the fortress Darband at the pass with the same name".

⁸³ For "side", see: Marquart 1931, 25; Gyselen 2001, 13–14; and Gyselen 2000, 214–215. See also: Adontz/Garsoïan 1970, 167–169; and Daryaee in *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 40.

⁸⁴ Ir. Kapkoh, faithfully transcribed *Կապկոհ*, is employed by Ehišē, cap. 3, Tēr-Minasean ed., 78₃ = Thomson trans., 129 (and fn. 1). The usual Armenian term is Kawkas (*Կապաս*) = Geo. Kavkasi (კავკასი) or Kavkasia (კავკასია).

⁸⁵ Anania Širakac'i, V.29, Soukry ed., 40, Hewsen trans., 72. Cf. Greenwood 2008b, 28, who emends the Armenian: "Kust i Atrapatakan, which is the side of the Caucasus mountains, in which there are thirteen provinces: Armn [which is] Hayk' [i.e., Armenia] ...", "*Քուստի Կապկոհ, որ է Կողմն Կապասու լեռանց, յորումն աշխարհ երկբառասան. Ատրապատական, Արմն (որ է) Հայք ...*" For echoes of *kūst-i Kapkōh* in the Islamic period, see Tēr-Ghewondyan 1968.

a transcription of a Middle Iranian designation for eastern Georgia, which in Armenian is normally called Virk' (**Վիրք**).

From an administrative point of view, early Sasanian political figures could count southern Caucasia as part of Ērān. But Kerdīr (correctly) perceived Caucasia as a space where orthodox Iranian Zoroastrianism lived a tenuous existence. His religious topography accordingly consigns Caucasia to non-Ērān. The identification of the isthmus as a principal target of Kerdīr's missionary endeavours is noteworthy, for it implies that the indigenised, heterodox and syncretic forms of Mazdaism entrenched in Caucasia⁸⁶ were not fully or correctly Zoroastrian in the eyes of the Iranian religious establishment, especially among hardliners like Kerdīr.

Finally, we must consider the testimony of a Greek-inscribed signet from the necropolis at Armazis-q'evi. Its owner was *Ousas pitiaxēs Ibērōn Karchēdōn* (Οὔσας πιτιάξης Ἰβήρων Καρχηδών), "Ousas pitiaxēs [i.e., *Bidaxš* Aršušay] of the *Karchēdoi* Iberians".⁸⁷ The meaning of *Karchēdoi* is puzzling. Toumanoff read the cryptic genitive plural Καρχηδών as "Carthaginians", emphasising the description of the Sasanians as Kark'edovmayi (**Կարքեդովյայի**), "Carthaginians", by the seventh-century Armenian historian known as Sebēos.⁸⁸ In his translation of Ps.-Sebēos, Robert Thomson verifies the association of Kark'edovm and Iran through the former's appearance in the Armenian version of the *Seventh Vision of Daniel*.⁸⁹ For his part, Giorgi Kavtaraze dates the gem to the early Sasanian period and links "Carthaginian" with Iran and, more concretely, with Ousas' (Usa's, i.e., Aršušay's) claimed descent from Mihrdat, a satrap of the Achaemenid Great King Darius. Kavtaraze hypothesises that "Carthaginian" was applied to the area south of the Kura/Mtkuari River where Armazis-c'ixe was situated.⁹⁰ While the precise meaning and origin of *Ibērōn Karchēdōn* remain unresolved, the phrase intended Irano-K'art'velians of some kind. If Kavtaraze's analysis is correct, we must wonder whether "Carthaginian Iberia" is a muddled memory of Aryan K'art'li.

⁸⁶ This has been established by archaeological materials and surviving written accounts of K'art'velian polytheism, especially the etymologies of the names of the principal idols, for which see pp. 142–160. Indigenised forms of Mazdaism were also popular in Armenia, for which see the publications of Russell, especially Russell 1987b. The Mazdaisms practised in eastern Georgia, Armenia and Albania must have shared many traits.

⁸⁷ Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999, 13.

⁸⁸ Ps.-Sebēos, cap. 7; and Toumanoff 1963, 188–189.

⁸⁹ Thomson in Ps.-Sebēos, 1 (fn. 3). See also: Thomson in Movsēs Xorenac'i, 104–105 (fn. 8); and Greenwood 2002, 385, for "this rare word establish[ing] an important connection" between Ps.-Sebēos and the apocalyptic *Seventh Vision of Daniel*.

⁹⁰ Kavtaraze 2007.

The North

The Nino Cycle periodically refers to Caucasia and especially the K'art'velian kingdom as “the North”, *črdiloy* (ჩრდილო), and “the land of the North”, *črdiloysa k'ueqanay* (ჩრდილოვან ქუეყანად).⁹¹ The conventional Georgian rendition of “north” is *črdiloet'i* (ჩრდილოეთი), which proceeds from the root *črdili* (ჩრდილი), “shadow, shade”, with the standard geographical suffix *-et'i*, thus “the land of shadow/shade”.⁹²

Having evaded the clutches of the pre-baptism Trdat, *The Conversion of K'art'li* reports Nino's escape from Armenia Major to “the environs of the Northern mountains”. In due course the holy woman reached the Kura/Mtkuari River and Mc'xet'a, where she took up residence.⁹³ Later, as Nino prayed outside the walls of the royal city, she grieved: “For this land of the North I have found in error”.⁹⁴ Similarly, in *The Conversion's* Čeliši witness (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts H-600) of the thirteenth/fourteenth century, the newly converted King Mirian ordered the construction of a stone church on the edge of Mc'xet'a, “this Northern city”.⁹⁵ In the expanded *Life of Nino*, the Northern land is a prominent motif. A passage attesting the hegemony of the Užiks (Medes) speaks of the “Northern land [that] is in the mountains of Somxit'i and it is a land of pagans ...”⁹⁶ Elsewhere Nino's *vita* mentions “this royal Northern land, the realm of the kings of Mc'xet'a”;⁹⁷ “the Northerners, the inhabitants of Mc'xet'a”;⁹⁸ “the error of the land of the North” (a phrase culled from *The Conversion*);⁹⁹ and in the Čeliši and Sin.Geo.N.50 variants “the mountains of the North”.¹⁰⁰

⁹¹ None of the three Georgian scripts mixes majuscule and miniscule characters. I have capitalised “North” since it designates a more or less discrete region, though the extent of its imagined area was variable and its borders porous.

⁹² The medieval Armenian adaptor of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* can render north as “shady”, *cmakayin* (Շակային): *Life of the Kings in Patmut'wn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 6₂₁ and 24₈. See also Thomson 1996a, 4 (fn. 12).

⁹³ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §7, Abulaže ed., 84₁₂₋₁₄ = Rapp and Crego trans., 190: “... მთათა კერძო ჩრდილოვანათა ...”

⁹⁴ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §8, Abulaže ed., 84₃₃₋₃₅ = Rapp and Crego trans., 191: “... ‘და [მე] ვპოვევ ცთომანა შინა ჩრდილოვანა ესე ქუეყანად”.

⁹⁵ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §15, Abulaže ed., 87₁₄ = Rapp and Crego trans., 192: “... ჩრდილოვან აშ[ა]ს ქალაქსა შინა ...”

⁹⁶ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 113₁₂₋₁₄.

⁹⁷ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 98₃₃₋₃₄: “... ესე სამეფოვო ქუეყანად ჩრდილოვანად, მცხეთისა მეფეთა სამეფოდ ...”

⁹⁸ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 112₁₇, “... ჩრდილოთა, მცხეთელთა ...”

⁹⁹ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 120₅₋₆: “... ცთომათა მათოვს ქუეყანისა ჩრდილოვანათა ...”

¹⁰⁰ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 116₁₆, “მთათა ჩრდილო[ვ]ს[ა]თა”; and Sin.Geo.N.50, 29r, facsimile ed., 129 = Alek'size ed., 346: “*მთათ: [ძი]ჯ[ი]რთასხეთ: .*”. The Šatberdi variant lacks this passage.

The North, *hiwsi* (Հիւսիս), is frequently encountered in early Armenian texts, including Koriwn and Agat'angelos in the fifth century, *The Primary History of Armenia* (perhaps fifth/sixth century),¹⁰¹ the historian known as Sebēos in the seventh century, and Movsēs Xorenac'i in the eighth century.¹⁰² Koriwn says that the renown of Maštoc' spread to the Roman Empire from "the Northern regions" (*i hiwisakan kotmanc' ,ի Հիւսիսական կողմանց*),¹⁰³ that is, from Caucasia. Among the examples in the extant Armenian (Aa) witness of Agat'angelos are the heathens "of the Northern regions" (*kotmanc' hiwisakanac' ,կողմանց Հիւսիսականաց*) and the "inhabitants of the Caucasus Mountain[s], ... the Northern regions" (*i bnakič's lerinn Kawkasu, i kotmans hiwisoiy, ի բնակիչս լերինն Կաւկասու, ի կողմանս Հիւսիսոյ*).¹⁰⁴ Xorenac'i evokes the North on several occasions. In remote times, the eponymous forefather Hayk took up residence in Caucasia, "the Northern region" (*i kotmn hiwisoiy, ի կողմն Հիւսիսոյ*).¹⁰⁵ Much later, in the seventh century, Herakleios' voyage through "the Northern regions" en route to Karin (Theodosiopolis) and Duin is reported by Ps.-Sebēos.¹⁰⁶

The North features in Movsēs Daxuranc'i's *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, a composite text written in Armenian whose received core probably belongs to the second half of the tenth century. Here, however, its meaning is more usually restricted to the highlands of the central chain of the Caucasus Mountains. This signals a shift in usage among medieval Caucasian writers. In a purported letter to the Armenians, the chief of the Huns calls his domain the world's "northernmost end" (*i cags hiwisaynoc's, ի ծագս Հիւսիսայնոց*).¹⁰⁷ Other regional sources sometimes use the North in this sense. According to Xorenac'i, under the

¹⁰¹ See Thomson in Movsēs Xorenac'i, 53–56. In surviving manuscripts, *The Primary History of Armenia* immediately precedes the text attributed to Sebēos. But the two are unrelated. See also Hewsen 1975.

¹⁰² See also Thomson 1980, 142–143. Cf. the Armenocentric interpretation of the North claimed by Maisuraže 2010, 259. Armenian sources sometimes referred to Georgian lands as the North, e.g., Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.6, Abelean and Yartut'iwnean eds., 262₈₋₉ = Thomson trans., 258, for the appointment of "Mihran, prince of Virk' [i.e., eastern Georgia] and bdeāšx of Gugark', as sparapet of the Northern army" ("Միհրան առաջնորդ Վրաց և Գղեաշխ Գուգարացաց, սպարապետ Հիւսիսային զօրուն").

¹⁰³ Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc'*, cap. 16, Abelean ed., 64₂₁.

¹⁰⁴ Agat'angelos, §§175, 741–742 and 780.

¹⁰⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.11, Abelean and Yartut'iwnean eds., 34₄₋₅. But in its analogous account, *The Primary History of Armenia* (Thomson trans., 359) has Hayk cross "the Northern regions" on his way to Ararat. As Thomson reminds us in Movsēs Xorenac'i, 85 (n. 5), this is "where the Ark settled ... [and is] not to be confused with the Armenian province of Ayrarat". For other allusions to "the Northern regions", see *ibid.*, I.11, which includes Bēl-Nimrod's description of Hayk's abode as "the icy cold". See also I.17.

¹⁰⁶ Ps.-Sebēos, cap. 38, Thomson trans., 81.

¹⁰⁷ Movsēs Daxuranc'i, e.g., I.4 and I.12, quote from II.44, Aṛak'elyan ed., 263₁₃, Dowsett trans., 169. Daxuranc'i's North frequently denotes northern Caucasia, which is not surprising given the proximity of Albania to the major passes through the Caucasus

Armenian king Valarš II (r. ca. 180–191) “the hosts of Northern peoples united, I mean the Khazars and Basilk’ ...” (... *miabaneal amboxut’iwn hiwsisakanac’*, *zXazrac’ asem ew zBaslac’*, ... *միաբանեալ ամբոխութիւն հիւսիսականաց, զԽազրաց ասեմ’ և զԲասլաց*).¹⁰⁸ These peoples passed through the Čor (Č’oġay) Gate near Darband (var. Derbend, Derbent) and were led by a certain Vnasep Surhap.¹⁰⁹ Xorenac’i even employs the phrase “North Caucasia”.¹¹⁰

The fact remains that the North, as it is used in early Caucasian sources, often and simultaneously intends the sedentary populations of the Armenian Plateau, the K’art’velian lowlands and Albania. In Georgian texts this is particularly clear in the Nino Cycle. In their Armenian counterparts this notion is voiced by Xorenac’i, who at the end of his history grieves the appalling state into which Armenia had fallen. He nevertheless pronounces his homeland “superior to all the Northern [lands]” (*hanurc’ hiwsisakanac’ vehagoyñ*, *հանուրց հիւսիսականաց վեհագոյն*), which implies Armenia’s association with the North and Armenia’s detachment from it.¹¹¹

All of this begs the question: what is the North’s geographical point of reference? Back in the fifth century BC, Herodotus reported that Colchis reached to “the Northern Sea”,¹¹² that is to say, the Black Sea, his cartographic vantage radiating from the eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Thomson emphasises the “the classical division of Asia into northern and southern regions on either side of the Taurus ...” But in terms of Caucasia’s association with the North, “[t]he biblical notion of Ararat being in the North (of Assyria) may have also played a part here”.¹¹³ Korneli Kekelize and others have emphasised the Aramaic-Semitic tradition of Caucasia belonging to the North, an idea that can be traced back to Japheth’s connection to the area and peoples north of the Holy Land.¹¹⁴ This is a compelling explanation in light of the Syro-Palestinian connection of early Caucasian Christianity and the hypothesised Palestinian provenance of *The*

Mountains. The same circumstance applies to eastern Georgia. See: Kavtaraze 2000, 195ff.; Braund 2000; and Braund 1994, 44–46 *et sqq.*

¹⁰⁸ Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.65, Abelean and Yarut’iwnēan eds., 200₅₋₆ = Thomson trans., 211, the last of whom observes that the Basilk’ were Hunno-Bulgarians (*ibid.*, fn. 12). See also Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.84–85 (for a battle waged between these “Northern peoples” and the Armenians in the Plain of Gargar northeast of Lake Sevan), and III.12.

¹⁰⁹ On the Čor/Č’oġay Gate, see Movsēs Daxuranc’i, II.39. On the name Wīnāsp, see Justi 1895, 368. See also Thomson in Movsēs Xorenac’i, 211 (fn. 14).

¹¹⁰ Movsēs Xorenac’i, III.9, Abelean and Yarut’iwnēan eds., 266₄.

¹¹¹ Movsēs Xorenac’i, III.68, Abelean and Yarut’iwnēan eds., 358₁₀₋₁₁ = Thomson trans., 350.

¹¹² Herodotus, IV.37, Godley ed. and trans., vol. 2, 236–237: “δὲ Κόλχοι κατήκοντες ἐπὶ τὴν βορρῆϊν θάλασσαν ...” Godley observes (p. 237, fn. 1) that Herodotus elsewhere refers to the Mediterranean as “the Northern Sea”.

¹¹³ Thomson in Agat’angelos, 471–472 (§175, n. 1). Strabōn, XI.1.4–5, for the lands “north” of the Taurus Mountains encompassing Armenia, K’art’li and Albania.

¹¹⁴ Kekelize 1957d, 258–259; and Rapp and Crego in *Conversion of K’art’li*, 201.

Conversion itself.¹¹⁵ Direct evidence of this bond is found in the opening passage of *The Primary History of K'art'li*, the first of the short non-ecclesiastical components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*. Its “land of Qedar” (*kedarsa mas k'ueqanasa*, კედარსა მას ქუეყანასა) has sometimes been interpreted as “the land of darkness” or, more creatively, “the land of midnight”.¹¹⁶ *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*'s recension of *The Life of Nino* contains an additional reference in which “the mountains of Qedar” are comprehended within “the darkness of the North”.¹¹⁷ Qedar (var. Kedar) is based on the Semitic root *qdr* and can render both “dark” and “north”.¹¹⁸

In some instances, the description of Caucasia as the dark North is more metaphor than reality. A section of *The Life of Nino* spuriously credited to the holy woman's disciple Sidonia, daughter of the converted Jewish priest of Mc'xet'a, downplays geographical direction and physical darkness in favour of spiritual distance from the enlightened centres of the Judaeo-Christian Near East:

It happened that God mercifully looked upon this forgotten Northern land of Caucasia [*k'ueqanasa amas davicqebulsa č'rdiloysasa kavkasiat'a*], the highlands of Somxit'i,¹¹⁹ whose mountains are covered with clouds and whose fields – with the fog of error and ignorance. And this Northern land was [deprived] of the Sun and the truth of the advent of God's acceptance,¹²⁰ and it was rightfully called Northern. It is not because it lacked sunlight then or lacks it now. Every man living under Heaven sees it and it illuminates all. And although it deprives several lands of heat, it sheds its light on all places. It was not for this reason that the land was called Northern; but it was because so many years had passed,

¹¹⁵ On *The Conversion*'s possible origin in the Holy Land, see, e.g., Lerner 2004. For the broader connections of early Christian K'art'li and Jerusalem, see the publications of Mgaloblišvili and especially her meticulous study of the Klarjet'ian *mravalt'avi* (*polykephalon*). The various Armenias also had close connections to the Levant in Late Antiquity.

¹¹⁶ *Primary History of K'art'li*, §1, Abulaže ed., 81 = Rapp trans., 257 (and commentary, 263–264), and T'aqaišvili's Rus. trans., ch. 1, “в полуночную страну”. The folios addressing the pre-Christian history of eastern Georgia are missing in the Sin.Geo.N.50 and Čeliši witnesses. There can be little doubt that they were deliberately removed by overzealous Christians who found them offensive: Rapp 2003, 169–196. For Qedar in this context, see also Shapira 2007a, 325–326. Cf. *Vita of Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), cap. 4, which describes Peter's homeland as “the famous country of the Iberians, those Northerners set toward the rising sun who are constantly fighting against the Romans and the Persians” (Horn and Phenix Jr ed. and trans., 4–7).

¹¹⁷ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 140₃₈–141₁, Lerner trans., 178: “... ბნელთა ჩრდილოებათა, მთათა მათ კედარისათა”.

¹¹⁸ Lerner 2004, 82–83.

¹¹⁹ As we have seen, Somxit'i normally designates the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands but it can also render Armenia. In this instance, the intended meaning is unclear; Armenia is most likely.

¹²⁰ Cf. Ps.-Yovhannēs Mamikonean, Avdoyan trans., 58.

and so many peoples, from Noah and Eber¹²¹ and Abraham. And among them was Job the Noble, examined by Joseph the Examiner; Moses; Jesus; priests and judges; and then in the order as we know it from the Holy Scriptures ...

... [L]ater there came to our land the priest [k'adagi] of truth, Nino, our queen [dedop'ali], as the dawn glows in the darkness and forms a rainbow, after which the great ruler [mp'lobeli] of the day arises.¹²²

Biblical notions of the North reverberate in *The Life of the Kings*, an early Georgian historiographical work composed at the turn of the eighth/ninth century. One example involves Togarmah (T'argamos), the great-grandson of Noah and father of the Caucasian peoples:¹²³

To the north of the Caucasus [Mountains] was not the lot [xuedri] of Togarmah, nor was there any man north of the Caucasus. That land was uninhabited from the Caucasus as far as the great river [i.e., the Volga] which flows into the Sea of Daruband [i.e., Darband; the Caspian Sea].¹²⁴

¹²¹ Genesis 10.21–25, for Eber.

¹²² *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 124₂₃–125₂₂ = Lerner trans., 168: “და იყო ოდეს მოხედა ღმერთმან წყალობით ქუეყანასა ამას დავიწყებულსა ჩრდილოდსასა კავკასიათა, სომხითისა მთეულსა, რომლისა მთანი დაეფარნეს ნისლსა და ველნი არმურსა ცთომისა და უმეცრებისასა, და იყო ქუეყანაჲ ესე ჩრდილო მზისაგან სიმაღლისა, ძისა ღმრთისა მოსლვისათუს და ცნობისა, ვითარცა სახელი ერქუა სამართლად ჩრდილოდ. არაჲ თუ ამის მზისა ნათლისაგან დაკლებულ იყო, ანუ აწ არს დაკლებულ მისგან, ყოველი ცასა ქუეშე მყოფი იხილავს და ყოველსა ჰხედავს იგი, და რომელსა სიცხითა მიჰრიდის, ნათლითა ყოველსა ადგილსა მიხედის. ესე არა თუ ამისთუს ერქუა ქუეყანასა ამას ჩრდილო, არამედ იყენეს ესოდენნი წელნი და ესთენნი ნათესავნი ნოვესითგან და ებერისითგან და აბრაჰამისითგან. და მუნ შინა იყო იობ აზნაური, განცდილი განმცდელისაგან ვითარცა იოსებ, მოსე, ისუ, მდღელნი და მსაჯულნი და შემდგომითი-შემდგომად, რომელი-იგი ვიცით სმენილი წიგნთაგან საღმრთოთა ... შემდგომად მოივლინა ქუეყანასა ჩუენსა ქადაგი ჭეშმარიტებისად ნინო, დედოფალი ჩუენი, ვითარცა ბნელსა შინა მთიები რაჲ აღმოჰჰდის და ცისკარი აღიღის, და მისა შემდგომად აღმოვალნ დიდი იგი მფლობელი დღისად”.

¹²³ Genesis 10.3, for Togarmah's lineage from Noah through Japheth and Gomer. Cf. Til-garimmu: Toumanoff 1963, 53.

¹²⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 5_{16–18} = Thomson trans., 6: “ხოლო კავკასიათა ჩრდილოთ არა იყო ხუედრი თარგამოსისა, არამედ არცა იყო კაცი კავკასიასა ჩრდილოთ; და უმკუდრო იყო ქუეყანა იგი კავკასიითგან ვიდრე მდინარემდე დიდად, რომელი შესდის ზღუასა დარუბანდისასა”.

Togarmah subsequently “destroyed all the cities of Ararat and Masis and of the North”.¹²⁵ The linkage of Togarmah and the North has a biblical basis in Ezekiel’s apocalyptic oracles about Gog and Magog, the great Northern enemy:

Prophecy against [Gog] and say: Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Mesech and Tubal;¹²⁶ I will turn you around and put hooks into your jaws, and I will lead you out with all your army ... Persia, Ethiopia, and Put are with them, and all of its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remotest parts of the north with all its troops – many peoples are with you.¹²⁷

The Life of the Kings thus seems to divorce eastern Georgia from the extreme North in the first instance but may comprehend K’art’li and its neighbours within the North in the second. This shows the variability, flexibility and complexity of the received tradition. Similarly, but at a much later time, *The Life of the Kings* reports the putting to flight of an unspecified Sasanian *šāhan šāh* prior to the enthronement of Mirian by “the Armenians, K’art’velians and peoples of the North [č’rdilosa nat’esavt’a] ...”¹²⁸ This last group consisted of highlanders and pastoralists who lived among – and perhaps to the north of – the principal chain of the Caucasus Mountains.¹²⁹ Elsewhere in the same text is conveyed: “To Bizintios [Alexander] gave Greece and K’art’li, and assigned to him the lot of the North [kerzo č’rdilosa]”.¹³⁰ Here K’art’li is closely associated with Sabērznēt’i (საბერძნეთი), Greece, the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire where Greek culture and language predominated.

Given Caucasia’s longstanding association with Iran, we must consider whether Caucasian notions of the North proceed in part from a conceptualisation

¹²⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’iṣvili ed., 11₂₂–12₁ = Thomson trans., 14: “... და შემეუსრნეს ყოველნი ქალაქნი არარატისანი და მასისისანი და ჩრდილოისანი”.

¹²⁶ These are often connected with “proto-Georgian” peoples, here Musxi/Mόσχοι/Mesxians and Tabal/Τιβάρτοι/Tibareni: Toumanoff 1963, 55–65.

¹²⁷ Ezekiel 38.2–6 (NSRV, 1235). For Beth-togarmah, see also Ezekiel 27.14.

¹²⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’iṣvili ed., 60: “... სომეხთა და ქართველთა და ჩრდილოისა ნათესავთა ...” The Armenians won a victory against “the army [i.e., camp] of the North” (*banaki č’rdiloysa*, ბანაკი ჩრდილოისა): *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’iṣvili ed., 47. A similar usage is observed in the ca. 800 history of Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’iṣvili ed., 219₅ and 220₇.

¹²⁹ E.g., the Alans-Ovis (cf. mod. Ossetians), Leks and “Khazars”, who late antique Caucasian writers frequently thrust backward in time. The Alans (Arm. Alank’) are an Irano-Sarmatian people attested from the early first century AD: Josephus, *Jewish War*, VII.4. Josephus describes the Alans as “a race of Scythians”, “ἔθνος ὅτι μὲν εἰσι Σκύθαι”. See also: Bachrach 1973, 4–6; Bosworth A.B. 1979; Garsoīan in *Epic Histories*, “Alank’/Alans”, 345; and Alemany 2000.

¹³⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’iṣvili ed., 20₁ = Thomson trans., 27: “და ბიზინტიოსს მისცა საბერძნეთი და ქართლი, და უჩინა კერძო ჩრდილოისა”.

of the known world in which Iran was the epicentre.¹³¹ Parallelling the Semitic inclusion of Caucasia within the Northern land of darkness, the Avestan tradition imagined the North as the dominion of dark and cold, the abode of demons. The *Greater Bundahišn* conveys that Ahura Mazdā's opponent Ahriman "was abased in slowness of knowledge and the lust to smite. The lust to smite was his sheath and darkness his place. Some call it Endless Darkness".¹³² Accordingly, in its story of Gregory the Illuminator's destruction of "pagan" shrines and temples, Agat'angelos reports the escape of beleaguered demons to the Caucasus Mountains, explicitly identified as "the Northern regions" in the Armenian (Aa) witness.¹³³ This reminds us of the tale, allegedly deriving from the late third century, in which a demon inhabiting an idol queried St Eugenios of Trebizond about his antipathy for idolatry. The holy man responded by driving the denizen of darkness to a desolate, uninhabited place in the Caucasus Mountains.¹³⁴ Addressing primordial times, Movsēs Xorenac'i locates the Northern territories of the Caucasian progeny of Togarmah "in the icy cold" (*i meḡ c'rtut'ean sarnamaneac', ի մէջ ցրտութեան սարնամանեաց*).¹³⁵ So potent was the image of the dark, cold North that we find instances in Iranian literature of authors dodging the Middle Persian word *abāxtar*, "the North" (lit. "unlucky"), a place associated with demons. In its stead they substituted the toponym Ādurbādagān (Geo. Adarbadagan; Arm. Atrpatakan; cf. mod. Azerbaijan), the northwestern Iranian province spilling into southeastern Caucasia.¹³⁶

The various Armenians and eastern Georgians – not to mention Jews, Syrians, Iranians and others – thus located Caucasia within the mysterious, cold, dark and uncivilised lands of the North. From the Caucasian perspective, the basic point of reference was the Irano-Semitic Near East,¹³⁷ a combination reflecting Caucasia's long-term membership in the Iranian world and the region's association with Judaism and Christianity. Significantly, the tradition of Caucasia as the North was perpetuated by Muslim writers. From the end of

¹³¹ *Primary History of Armenia*, Thomson trans., 363–364, for the submission of "all nations of the East and North" (capitalisation added) to the Parthian Arsacid Aršak the Great.

¹³² *Greater Bundahišn*, ch. 1, trans. in Boyce 1990, 45. See also: Boyce 1990, 147; and Russell 1984, 481–482.

¹³³ Agat'angelos, §780, Thomson 2010 trans., 375–377.

¹³⁴ Conybeare 1896, 12, cited by Thomson in Agat'angelos (2010 trans.), 375–376 (n.). Boyce 1990, 58, for an excerpt of the Kusti Prayers in which Drug/Druj – the Demon of the Lie – disappeared in the North.

¹³⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.11, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 34_{6–7}, Thomson trans., 86. Consider also an excerpt from *Hādhox̄t Nask* for a foul-smelling wind blowing from the North: Boyce 1990, 82.

¹³⁶ Gyselen 2001, 12–13.

¹³⁷ The mid-north of the interconnected "southwest Asian Mountain Arena": Fowden 1993, esp. 4, 15–19 and 102–104.

the seventh century the “Umayyad North” encompassed Jazīra, Mosul, Armenia, Albania (Arrān), Azarbayjān and sometimes eastern Georgia (Jurjistān).¹³⁸

Caucasia’s identification as the North played out in other ways, too. Early Christian Caucasians applied Judaeo-Christian notions of the North to their rustic forebears. Mourning the condition of ancient Armenians prior to the reign of Artāšēs, Xorenac’i brands his ancestors as neglectful of the arts and sciences, ignorant of navigation and agriculture, and “[i]n the manner of the Northern regions they lived by eating carrion and similar food”.¹³⁹ Georgian texts cloak early K’art’li in comparable imagery. At the beginning of its tale of Alexander’s (imagined) invasion of Caucasia,¹⁴⁰ *The Life of the Kings* conveys:

This Alexander conquered all ends of the Earth. He came from the West, entered from the South, went up by the North, crossed the Caucasus [Mountains], and came to K’art’li. He found all the K’art’velians [living] by the most foul religion of all peoples. For in marriage and fornication they paid no attention to family relationship, they ate everything that was living, they ate corpses like wild beasts and animals; the description of their way of life is inexpressible. He saw that these wild pagan peoples which we call Bunt’urk’s and Qivč’aqs were settled on the Mtkuari River in its winding. Alexander was astonished because [other] peoples did not live thus.¹⁴¹

The related account in the succinct *Primary History of K’art’li* has Alexander encounter “savage tribes” of Bunt’urk’s settled along the Kura/Mtkuari River who “ate every sort of meat [indiscriminately], and [because] they consumed their dead they did not employ graves”.¹⁴² The anonymous historian emphasises

¹³⁸ E.g.: Spellberg 1988; Bates 1989; and Bonner 1994, esp. 18–19.

¹³⁹ Movses Xorenac’i, II.59, Abelean and Yarut’iwnean eds., 188^{16–17} = Thomson trans., 201: “აქ ესთ იქნასიქ ჯიასიასიანსაჲს სიოდნსჲს ჯაფიასიხოქმხაძე ს აქიოქ აქაყიხიხოქ სხესაქ.”

¹⁴⁰ For which see Kavtaraze 2000, “Apocryphal Alexander the Great and the Emergence of the Iberian Kingdom”, 187–195.

¹⁴¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 17^{6–13} = Thomson trans., 23: “ამან ალექსანდრე დაიპერნა ყოველნი კიდენი ქუეყანისანი. ესე გამოვიდა დასავლით, და შევიდა სამკრით, შემოვიდა ჩრდილოთ, გარდამოვლნა კავკასი და მოვიდა ქართლად. და პოვნა ყოველნი ქართველნი უბოროტეს ყოველთა ნათესავთა სჯულთა. რამეთუ ცოლ-ქმრობისა და სიძვისათჳს არა უნდა ნათესაობა, ყოველსა სულეირსა ჭამდეს, მკუდარსა შესჭამდეს, ვითარცა მკეცნი და პირუტყუნნი, რომელთა ქცევისა წარმოთქმა უკმ არს. და იხილნა რა ესე ნათესავნი სასტიკნი წარმართნი, რომელთა-იგი ჩუენ ბუნთურქად და ყიფნაყად უწოდოთ, მსხდომარენი მდინარესა მას მტკუარისასა მიხვევით, დაუკრდა ესე ალექსანდრეს, რამეთუ არა რომელნი ნათესავნი იქმოდეს მას”.

¹⁴² *Primary History of K’art’li*, §§1–2 = Rapp trans., 257, and for the quoted passage Abulaze ed., 81^{10–12}: “... ყოველსა ჳორციელსა ჭამდეს და სამარე მათი არა იყო, მკუდარსა შემჭამდეს”.

Alexander's astonishment when he learned of the descent of these barbarians from the Jebusites of ancient Israel. The identification of the Bunt'urk's has been the subject of numerous hypotheses,¹⁴³ but for our purposes the symbolism is paramount: these "original" Turks (*Bun-*, ბუნ- < Middle Iranian *bun*, "base, foundation")¹⁴⁴ represent the heterogeneous peoples residing along eastern Georgia's Kura/Mtkuari basin in the first millennium BC. "Scythians" may be intended. At any rate, T'urk' is a flagrant anachronism for the time described, Qivč'aq (Qipchaq, Kipchak) even more so.¹⁴⁵ The fantastic allusion to the Jebusites (Geo. Ieboselni, იებოსელნი), the inhabitants of Jerusalem before King David's conquest, endowed K'art'li with an unequivocal link to the Holy Land long before the advent of Christianity.¹⁴⁶

Gog, Magog and Alexander's Gate

These "unclean" peoples of the North have many correspondences in Near Eastern and Mediterranean literature.¹⁴⁷ Syriac texts are particularly rich in this regard, and the common tradition preserved in *The Life of the Kings* and *The Primary History of K'art'li* ultimately derives from them. The Syriac *Book of the Bee*, a thirteenth-century narrative drawing on earlier Syriac sources, relates:

... [Alexander] saw in the confines of the East those men who are the children of Japhet[h]. They were more wicked and unclean than all [other] dwellers in the world; filthy people of hideous appearance, who ate mice and the creeping things of the Earth, and snakes and scorpions. They never buried the bodies of their dead [but consumed them] ...¹⁴⁸

While East has replaced North, as is typical for the period, the uncivilised character of its peoples remains constant. Iovane Sabanis-ze's *Passion of Habo*, a Georgian *vita* of the eighth century, reveals another dimension. In the course

¹⁴³ Melik'išvili 1959, 37. See also Lerner 2004, 61 and esp. 224–225.

¹⁴⁴ MacKenzie 1986, 20; Schmitt 1986, 452; and Daryaei in *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 71 (for the foundation of a city). See also Perikhanian in *Mādigān ī hazār dādistān*, "Bun", 345–346, for "the principal [one]".

¹⁴⁵ See: Golden 1984 and 1996; and Pritsak 1996. Qivč'aqs, i.e., the Cumani Kipchaks (Qipchaqs), must have been introduced into the text when it was edited in the eleventh century by Leonti Mroveli: Rapp 2003, 150.

¹⁴⁶ Rapp 2003, 206–207.

¹⁴⁷ All these accounts harken back to the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Leviticus 11.41–43, where the consumption of swarming creatures is prohibited, and Deuteronomy 14.1–21, for dietary restrictions.

¹⁴⁸ *Book of the Bee*, excerpted in Budge's trans. of *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 265. Cf., e.g., Edessene Apocalyptic Fragment, 100r, Palmer trans., 246.

of recounting the flight of the K'art'velian *erist'avi* Nerse to Khazaria (Geo. Xazaret'i), Sabanis-ze writes:

And the Lord saved him from the hands [of the Saracens], and he passed through the Ovset'i Gate [i.e., the Gate of Alania, the Gate of the Alans], which is called Darial. Among the three hundred men of his escort [*eri*] was Habo, the blessed slave of Christ. But Nerse came as a refugee from his own land to the land of the North [*k'ueqana č'rdiloysa*], which is the camp [*sabanakē*] and station [*sadguri*] of the sons of Magog, who are called Khazars [*Xazarni*]. [They are] wild men, fearsome of face, savage in character, drinkers of blood; [they] do not have religion except that they recognise God the Creator. And when the *erist'avi* Nerse appeared before the king of the Khazars,¹⁴⁹ the latter greeted him graciously, as a stranger¹⁵⁰ and refugee from his enemies, and he gave [Nerse] and all his people food and drink ...¹⁵¹

Putting aside the delicious irony of the peoples of the North proffering their infamous cuisine to an exiled K'art'velian aristocrat,¹⁵² visions of the savage North remained alive and unwell in the eighth century, though in this case the K'art'velian hagiographer concentrates the negative image upon the pastoralists of northern Caucasia.¹⁵³

Biblical influence is indisputable. To the ancient Hebrews, the North was a dangerous land from which nomadic invasions of Palestine often erupted as is evident in Jeremiah 1.13, 4.6, 5.15–17, 6.1–5 and 6.22. This is taken a step further in Ezekiel 27 and 38–39 (the so-called oracles of Gog and Magog) and in

¹⁴⁹ Some manuscripts read “King of the Pagans” (მეფისა მის წარმართთასა): Iovane Sabanis-ze, *Vita Habo*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., *apparatus criticus*, 58₄₀.

¹⁵⁰ For strangers, see above, pp. 112–114. In Nerse's case the tables have been turned; the K'art'velian is the outsider.

¹⁵¹ Iovane Sabanis-ze, *Vita Habo*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 58_{3–14} = Lang trans., 118: “... და უფალმან დაიცვა იგი ჰელთაგან მათთა, და განვლო მან კარი იგი ოვსეთისაჲ, რომელსა დარიალან ერქუმი. და რაჟამს განვიდა, იყო მის თანა ერისაგან მისისა ვითარ სამას ოდენ მამაკაც. და მათ თანავე იყო სანატრელიცა ესე მონაჲ ქრისტესი პაბო. ხოლო ნერსე, ელტოლვილი ქუეყანით თუსით, შევიდა ქუეყანასა მას ჩრდილოესასა, სადა-იგი არს სადგური და საბანაკჳ ძეთა მაგოგისთაჲ, რომელ არიან ხაზარნი, კაც ველურ, საშინელ პირითა, მკვეცის ბუნება, სისხლის მჭამელ, რომელთა შჯუღი არა აქუს, გარნა ღმერთი ხოლო შემოქმედი იციან. და რაჟამს მივიდა ნერსე ერისთავი მეფისა მის ხაზართასა, შეიწყნარა იგი უცხოებისათჳს და ელტოლვილებისათჳს მტერთა მისთაჲსა და სცა მას და ყოველსა ერსა მისსა საზრდელი და სამოსელი”.

¹⁵² Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.14, Dowsett trans., 99, for complaints about the food eaten by Turkic peoples visited by the Albanian *katholikos* Viroy. Some of their drinking vessels had been plundered from Tp'ilisi. I am grateful to Tim Greenwood (personal communication, 3 October 2011) for drawing my attention to this passage.

¹⁵³ For the Khazars in *Vita Habo*, see Peeters 1934.



Figure 2.5. The Caucasus Mountains and Mt Šxara from Ušguli, Svanet'i.

a considerable corpus of apocalyptic literature, all of which identify Gog and Magog with the terrifying Northern menace. In Byzantine apocalyptic literature, Gog and Magog are associated with the Last Emperor who would surrender his power to God, thus bringing the Roman Empire to its pre-ordained end.¹⁵⁴ Other sources adopted and extended this imagery. According to Revelation 20.7–10, at the end of time Satan's release would lead to the liberation of Gog and Magog, who would wreak havoc upon the sedentary world.¹⁵⁵ In the Qur'ān's *al-Kahf*, Dhūl-Qarnayn – probably Alexander the Great – travelled in the interstitial space between “East” and “West” until he came “between Two Mountains and found a people who could hardly understand a word. ‘Dhūl-Qarnayn’, they said, ‘Gog and Magog are ravaging this land. Build a rampart between us, and we will pay you tribute ...’”¹⁵⁶ Jews, Christians and Muslims all believed the “civilised” world had been temporarily inoculated against this greatest of “barbarian” hazards by the construction of an enormous wall in northern Caucasia.¹⁵⁷ The concept of a great northern wall was inspired by the Greater Caucasus range itself, which extends along a roughly east-west axis from the Caspian to the Black Sea. At least seven of its peaks exceed 5,000 metres in height.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander 1985, esp. 151–184; and Reinink 1988.

¹⁵⁵ At various times in its history, Caucasia has been associated not only with the end of the world (Gog and Magog) but also with the beginning of humanity (the fossilised hominid remains found at Dmanisi, the oldest of which dates to 1.8 million years ago) and the Garden of Eden (located in the region by Reginald Aubrey Fessenden, radio pioneer and one-time engineer of Thomas Edison). See: Gabunia *et al.* 2000; and Fessenden 1923–1933.

¹⁵⁶ Qur'ān, *al-Kahf* 18.83–99. See also Qur'ān, *al-Anbiyā* 21.96.

¹⁵⁷ Anderson 1932; Alexander 1985, esp. 185–192; and van Donzel and Schmidt 2009. In the various Alexander romances, the world conqueror is said to have trekked to the Land of Darkness in search of the Water of Life, for which see Casari 2012.

The earliest known association of Alexander with Gog and Magog is found in Josephus' *Jewish War*, written in the last quarter of the first century AD. In his treatment of the Alans of northern Caucasia, Josephus mentions "the pass which King Alexander had closed with iron gates".¹⁵⁸ In Late Antiquity and the early medieval epoch, the tale of Alexander's gate and wall was particularly developed in Christian Syriac literature.¹⁵⁹ A homily ascribed to Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) – though probably somewhat later – is specially devoted to Alexander's Gate. *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, created sometime between the fifth and seventh century, also prophesies the opening of Alexander's Northern gate in the final days and the ensuing the rampage of the evil hordes of Gog and Magog.¹⁶⁰ Most influential was the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. According to Matthias Henze:

The Gates of the North made their entry into Syriac apocalyptic literature via the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. The *Alexander Legend* provides a detailed account of the building of the Gates, their measurements, and even their materials. After the erection of the Gates is completed, Alexander orders an inscription engraved on them in which he predicts their future fate...¹⁶¹ The *Syriac Alexander Legend*, composed around 629/630 in northern Mesopotamia, served as the source for subsequent Syriac apocalyptic literature of the seventh century in which Alexander's Gates of the North played a prominent role.¹⁶²

The Syriac Alexander Legend seemed to be confirmed by the impressive walls and fortifications in what is now eastern Dagestan, including Darband. Just to the south another wall stretched from the mountaintop fortress of Çirax-qala in northeastern Azerbaijan to the Caspian Sea. However, these structures had nothing to do with Alexander. In actuality, both were constructed under the later Sasanians.¹⁶³

To the second half of the seventh century belongs the famous apocalyptic tract of Ps.-Methodios (Ps.-Methodius). Originally written in Syriac, it draws

¹⁵⁸ Josephus, *Jewish War*, VII.245, Thackeray ed. and trans., 574–575: "... ἢν ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος πύλαις σιδηραῖς κλειστήν ἐποίησε".

¹⁵⁹ Henze in *Apocalypse of Daniel*; and van Donzel and Schmidt 2009.

¹⁶⁰ *Apocalypse of Daniel*, Henze trans., §14.

¹⁶¹ In the Georgian historiographical tradition, cf. Herakleios' evacuation of Syria and Palestine and his setting up of a pillar with the inscription "Farewell, Mesopotamia and Palestine, until seven weeks have passed", "მშვიდობა შეამდინარეო და ფილისტიმო, ვიდრემდის წარჰდეს შვიდნი შვიდეულნი": Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 230₇₋₈, Thomson trans., 238.

¹⁶² Henze in *Apocalypse of Daniel*, 12–13.

¹⁶³ Gadjeiev 2008. For the series of defensive walls raised under Xusrō I, see Daryaei 2009, 29. On the Sasanian walls built from the eastern edge of the Caucasus Mountains to the Caspian Sea, see Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.11, Dowsett trans., 83, newly trans. by Tim Greenwood in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 210. For defensive walls in northern Iran, see Sauer et al. 2013. See also Howard-Johnston 2012.



Figure 2.6. Ruins of the fortress of Çirax-qala, northeastern Azerbaijan.

upon the *Syriac Alexander Legend*. Ps.-Methodios' influential composition was translated and adapted into several languages, in whole or in part, including Greek and Armenian but apparently not Georgian. It served as a source for many texts, among them the aforementioned *Syriac Book of the Bee*. The "historical" section of Ps.-Methodios underscores the legend of Alexander's Gate:

And [Alexander] marched round the Earth and descended to the East and went as far as the sea called Fire of the Sun. And he saw there nations filthy and ugly to look at, who were sons of Japheth. And when he saw the abominable deeds which they were doing – they ate the vermin of the earth, mice and dogs and kittens, and they did not enshroud and bury their dead, and the embryos which the women aborted they ate as if it were some delicacy – and when Alexander saw their abominable deeds, he called God to his aid. And he assembled and expelled them and their wives and their sons, and all of their camps he expelled from the East. And he placed them and enclosed them from the ends of the North inside the entrance which is the gate of the world from the North, and there is no other entrance nor outlet from the uttermost part of the world from East to West. And King Alexander prayed before God and God hearkened unto him. And God commanded the mountains called Sons of the North, and they drew near each other to a distance of no more than twelve cubits. And he [Alexander] made a gate of brass and anointed it on the inner side with Tāseqtis ...

But at the end of the ages, as was the saying of the prophet Ezekiel which was prophesied concerning them, saying: in the end of times, at the end of the world, the followers of Agog and Magog will come out upon the land of Israel.¹⁶⁴ These are the people whom Alexander imprisoned inside the gates of the North: Ogug and Magog and Joel and Agag and Ashkenazu and Dipar and Puṭio and Lydians and Huns and Persians and Daqlaie and Tebelie and Darmetaie and Kaukebaie and Emrataie and Garmidmaie and Man-Eaters who are called Cynocephali and Thracians and Alani and Pīsilie and Deshie and Saltraie. These twenty-two kingdoms were imprisoned inside the gates of the North.¹⁶⁵

What is most important for us is the pervasive fusion of three ideas: the “unclean peoples” of the North; the apocalyptic Gog and Magog; and Alexander’s Gate. While early Georgian texts display no acquaintance with the legend of Alexander’s Gate, the notion of Alexander having fought against the evil, unclean and uncivilised peoples of the North features prominently.¹⁶⁶ Their complete silence on Gog-Magog¹⁶⁷ and the Northern gate is, I think, evidence of these Georgian narratives having taken shape prior to the ecumenical popularity of Ps.-Methodios from the early eighth century.

Before the reorientation of élite Georgian political and ecclesiastical culture towards Byzantium during the Bagratid “Golden Age”, Georgian writers still applied the North to the Caucasian arena. But self-reflexive references to the North had already begun to fade in the autumn of Late Antiquity. In the ninth and tenth centuries we detect a directional shift. From that time Georgian narrative sources could designate K’art’li, Tao-Klarjet’i and other Georgian entities as “the East”, *aymosavlet’i* (აღმოსავლეთი). The point of reference had been deliberately repositioned to the Byzantine Empire and, in particular,

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Edessene Apocalyptic Fragment, 100r, Palmer trans., 246: “Then the gates of Armenia will be opened, and the descendants of Gog and Magog shall issue forth: they were twenty-four tribes, with twenty-four languages”.

¹⁶⁵ Ps.-Methodios, Alexander trans., 40–41.

¹⁶⁶ Gog and Magog – in the forms Ag and Magug – and their ostensible homeland Maguget’i are mentioned in the ca. 800 *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 163, but only in the context of the scattering of peoples following the destruction of the Tower of Babel.

¹⁶⁷ As we have seen, the eighth-century hagiographer Sabanis-ze refers to Khazars as “sons of Magog” but is silent about Gog and Alexander’s Gate. The eleventh-century historian Sumbat Davit’is-ze, cap. 20, refers to “the descendants [lit. ‘sons’] of Oroz-Moroz” (ორზ-მორზის ძეთათჳს): Araxamia ed., 46₁₈ = Rapp trans., 356. The construction Oroz-Moroz may well have been inspired by Gog-Magog but their identity remains unresolved. A connection with the Alano-Aors, an Iranian tribal confederation of Late Antiquity, is an attractive explanation: Rapp in Sumbat Davit’is-ze, 385–386.

to Constantinople.¹⁶⁸ The East often accentuates the Bagratid *intitulatio*.¹⁶⁹ An inscription from the Kac'xi church in Georgia's west-central Čiat'ura region carved sometime between 1010 and 1014 styles the first all-Georgian monarch Bagrat III "... king of the Ap'xaz and K'art'velians, of Tao, and of the Ranis and Kaxet'ians, and the great *kouropalatēs* of all the East" (... *ap'[xa]zt'[a da k'art']v[e]lt'a m[e]p'ē, tao[y]sa, da rant'a, k[a]xt'a da q[ov]lisa aym[o]s[a]v[a]lisa d[i]di k[u]r[a]p[ala]ti*, აფხაზთა და ქართველთა მეფე, ტაოისა, და რანთა, კახთა და ყოვლისა აღმოსავლისა დიდი კურაპალატი).¹⁷⁰ The parading of a high Byzantine honorific should be noted. By the early twelfth century, especially once Davit' II Aymašenebeli positioned himself as an equal to the Byzantine emperor (*basileus*),¹⁷¹ the East came to modify the core *intitulatio* more directly. In a succinct Greek inscription on an icon at St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai, King Davit' is "the pious *basileus* of all the East" (*pisto[s] basil[eu]s pas[ēs] anatol[ēs]*, ΠΙΣΤΟ[Σ] ΒΑΣΙΛ[ΕΥΣ] ΠΑΣ[ΗΣ] ΑΝΑΤΟΛ[ΗΣ]).¹⁷² Under Davit's great-granddaughter Queen T'amar, the Georgian Bagratids commanded a pan-Caucasian empire. Their *intitulatio* reflected the unprecedented territorial scope by celebrating the emperor as suzerain of "East and West" (*aymosavlet'i da dasavlet'i*, აღმოსავლეთი და დასავლეთი).¹⁷³ Even after the empire crumbled and Georgia's political unity with it, the East remained central to the Bagratid dream of restoration.

As the "Golden Age" Bagratids cast their hegemony over much of northern Caucasia, a more narrowly conceived North made its way into the *intitulatio*. In a royal charter to the Šio Mywme monastery dated 1170, T'amar's father Giorgi III is "king of the Ap'xaz, K'art'velians, Ranis and Kaxet'ians, *šarvanša[h]* and *šahanša[h]*, and master of the East and the North" (... *ap'xaz't'a, k'art'velt'a, rant'a da kaxt'a mep'isa, šarvanša da šahanša da aymosaval[i]sa da črdiloisa mp'lobelisay*, ... აფხაზთა, ქართველთა, რანთა და კახთა მეფისა, შარვანშა და შახანშა და აღმოსავლ[ი]სა და ჩრდილოისა მეფლობელისა).¹⁷⁴ In this context, *šahanša[h]* is not a usurpation of the Sasanian *šahan šāh* but was the title granted

¹⁶⁸ This is one of many barometers of Byzantine reorientation. Allusions to the East are particularly numerous in Giorgi Mc'ire's eleventh-century *vita* of Giorgi Mt'acmideli produced at the Ivērōn monastery on Mt Athos, caps. 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 23 and 24. Movsēs Dasxuranc'i uses the East and Easterners in the sense of Albania (sometimes to distinguish it from Armenia), Caucasia and perhaps the Christian Near East, e.g., I.9 and I.23.

¹⁶⁹ On Bagratid *intitulatio*, see Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 569–583. For compass points in Bagratid royal titulature, see Surgulaže M. 1993 and 1997.

¹⁷⁰ Silogava 1980, #36, 55–56. This inscription is erroneously associated with Kaxet'i in Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 569.

¹⁷¹ For the Bagratids' self-equalisation with the Byzantine emperor, see: Rapp 1997, vol. 2; and Rapp 2001.

¹⁷² Kldiašvili 1989, 109.

¹⁷³ E.g., in royal charters to the important monastic establishments at Gelat'i and Šio Mywme, for which see Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 576.

¹⁷⁴ Enuk'ize *et al.* 1984, #11, 67.

by Muslims to the Armenian Bagratids beginning with Ašot Erkat' (r. 919–928/929).¹⁷⁵ Giorgi's sway over the East and North and, for that matter, over all four cardinal compass directions is emphasised in *The Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned* of the thirteenth century.¹⁷⁶

Thus, in the early medieval period the North was adjusted so that it no longer encompassed Georgia proper.¹⁷⁷ Instead it was consciously restricted to the highlands of the main chain of the Caucasus Mountains and the steppe just beyond.

Mogut'a: Mc'xet'a's Iranian Quarter

In the environs of Mc'xet'a, the *vita* of Nino mentions a place called Mogut'a (მოგუთა).¹⁷⁸ According to the first reference, the recently arrived Nino shadowed residents as they bought provisions and worshipped before their idol Armaz.

When they arrived at the city of Mc'xet'a, they stopped at the bridge beyond Mogut'a. St Nino saw the magism [*moguebay*] and error of those people who worshipped fire; and St Nino wept over their destruction and lamented her own foreignness.¹⁷⁹

A historiographical text from the turn of the eighth/ninth century sheds light on the meaning of Mogut'a. *The Life of the Kings* relates how the K'art'velian monarch P'arnajom (109–90 BC) set up an idol named Zaden and then

... adopted the religion of the Iranians, fire-worship [*c'ec'xlis msaxureba*]. He brought from Iran fire-worshippers and magi [*moguni*]¹⁸⁰ and installed them at Mc'xet'a, in the place which is now called Mogut'a ...¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, LXI.5, Maksoudian trans., 212.

¹⁷⁶ *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 3_{4–5} and 62_{9–12} respectively.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Surgulaže M. 1993.

¹⁷⁸ A toponym entirely unrelated to Magog. Other Caucasian place names, including Arm. Gugark'/Gk. Gogarēnē, also have no etymological relation to Gog and Magog: Bøe 2001, 208–210, but note the imprecise description of Gugark' as an "Armenian province".

¹⁷⁹ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 88_{5–8} = Thomson trans., 97: "ხოლო ვითარ-იგი მიიწივნეს ქალაქად მცხეთად, წიად მოგუთასა ჳიდსა ზედა, და დადგეს მუნ. და ხედვიდა წმიდა ნინო ცეცხლის მსახურთა მათ ერთა მოგუებასა და ცთომასა; და ტიროდა წმიდა ნინო წარწემებასა მას ზედა მათსა, და იგლოვდა უცხოებასა თჳსსა".

¹⁸⁰ Variant spelling of *mogwni*.

¹⁸¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 29_{5–7} = Thomson trans., 42: "ამისა შემდგომად შეიყვარა სჯული სპარსთა, ცეცხლის მსახურება, მოიყვანნა სპარსეთით

Performing baptisms near the bridge where the Kura/Mtkuari narrows on the western side of the royal city makes sense. But there is a dual meaning here: this locale was in immediate proximity to Mc'xet'a's Iranian quarter. The *vita's* symbolism is persistent and clear: Christianity had triumphed over Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism.

K'art'velian Polytheism

The religious environment on the eve of Mirian's baptism remains poorly understood, a problem stemming first and foremost from our later sources.¹⁸⁷ Even the oldest specimens of original Georgian literature were composed approximately 150 years afterwards and are preserved in yet later manuscripts. The first Georgian script, *asomt'avruli*, was created by Christians at the turn of the fourth/fifth century. All surviving Georgian texts and manuscripts, including those incorporating pre-Christian traditions, are therefore transmitted through Christian filters.

The received image of K'art'velian polytheism as it existed prior to Mirian's conversion principally derives from three sets of narrative sources: first, *The Life of Nino*, recensions of which are found in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* and *K'art'lis c'xovreba*; second, *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's Primary History of K'art'li* and *Royal List I*; and third, *K'art'lis c'xovreba's Life of the Kings*, a historiographical composition that attained its received form around the year 800.¹⁸⁸ Archaeological evidence is sparse and does little to clarify the picture.

The image of K'art'velian polytheism and its attendant vocabulary are remarkably consistent across these texts. This suggests a common origin for

მტკვარი, და ეპოისკოპოსმან შემზადა ადგილი ერთი, მიწურვით ჰიდისა კარსა მოგუეთისასა, სადა ყოფილ იყო სახლი ელიოზ მდღელისა, და მუნ ნათელს-ცემდა წარჩინებულთა თვითსა. და ეწოდა ადგილსა მას მთავართა სანათლო", "Following [the baptism of the royal family] they blessed the Mtkuari River, and the bishop prepared a place at the approach to the bridge by the gate of Moguet'i, where the house of the priest Elioze was. There he baptised the nobles individually. And he called the place 'the Illumination of Princes'".

¹⁸⁷ The plentiful scholarly literature is divided roughly into studies devoted to the descriptions of idols in hagiographical and historiographical sources and those examining the polytheistic beliefs and practices of the highlanders of northeastern Georgia, including the inhabitants of Xevsuret'i and P'šavet'i. See, e.g.: Marr 1902; Javakhišvili 1979, 78–187; Ceret'eli M. 1935; von Wesendonk 1924 and 1925; Allen 1932, 36–39, and Allen 1959; Karst 1948, 103–194; Bardaveliže 1957; Charachidzé 1964 and 1968; Kiknaže 1996; Gvelesiani 2003; and Vacaže 2007. Accessible overviews in: van Esbroeck 1990; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 286–304. See also Tuite 1996a.

¹⁸⁸ Movsēs Xorenac'i's eighth-century depiction of idolatry in Mc'xet'a (II.86), including a reference to "Aramazd, god of thunder" (for which see further), is derivative from earlier sources.



Figure 2.7. Modern fresco of Nino toppling the idols, Antiok'ia (Antioch) convent, Mc'xet'a.

the tradition. In it, Nino confronts an organised indigenous idolatry whose focal point was the monarchy and the royal city. Through the holy woman's intercession, the Christian God toppled Mc'xet'a's idols (sing. *kerpi*, კერპი < *Mr. kirb*; cf. Arm. *kerp*, *կերպ*). Only one other early source alludes to idolatry among the Georgian peoples. According to *The Passion of the Children of Kolay*, when newly converted girls and boys were beaten by their "pagan" (*carmart'uli*, წარმართული) parents they cried out "We are Christians and must not eat or drink that which is offered to idols".¹⁸⁹ Nothing else is said about the alleged idolatry practised in the Kolay (Kola) Valley, now located in northeastern Turkey. Certain early Georgian narratives make vague references to polytheism without mentioning idols. For example, the heavily redacted *vita* of Iovane Zedazneli refers to a tower (*godoli*, გოდოლი) on Mt Zedazeni, near Mc'xet'a, built by "pagans" for sacrificial rituals.¹⁹⁰ Significantly, the most ancient written accounts of the Christianisation of the K'art'velian monarchy, *The Conversion of*

¹⁸⁹ *Vita Children of Kolay*, cap. 2, Abulaže ed., 185₄₋₅: "ჩუენ ქრისტეანენი ვართ და არა ჯერ-არს, ვითარმცა ეჭამეთ და ვსუთ ნაგები კერპთაჲ". Cf. Lang trans., 42.

¹⁹⁰ *Vita Iovane Zedazneli*, Abulaže ed., 202₄₋₂₁. See also Ceret'eli M. 1935, 49–50.

K'art'li as well as earlier accounts by Gelasios and Rufinus in Greek and Latin respectively, say *nothing* about idolatry in K'art'li itself. All three narratives are brief and unadorned, but their collective silence demands explanation.

Resistance to Nino's mission is reported in the triumphalist *Conversion of K'art'li*, which attained its received form hundreds of years after Mirian's baptism and shortly after the schism with the Armenian Church in the early seventh century. This information probably belongs to the earliest layer of the text and was subsequently integrated into *The Life of Nino*. We read that the holy woman and her entourage met hostility from highlanders inhabiting the southeastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. Ultimately, the Mt'eulelis, Čart'alelis, P'xovelis and Cilkanelis were persuaded to surrender their idols.¹⁹¹ This is the solitary reference to idolatry in extant variants of *The Conversion*. Antagonism towards Christianity was likewise exhibited by some illustrious subjects of the K'art'velian king, including P'eroz, Mirian's son-in-law and Mihrānid *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands (P'eroz's eventual conversion is reported under Mirian's successor Bak'ar). Resistance also arose within Mc'xet'a's Jewish community.¹⁹²

The Life of Nino paints a far more intricate and gripping portrait, but we must not forget the later provenance of this ninth-/tenth-century monument. Just preceding Mirian's conversion, the K'art'velians reportedly possessed a uniform and regimented polytheistic religion, a local idolatry anchored at Mc'xet'a that was regulated, to a significant extent, by the crown. This indigenous idolatry is depicted as the principal threat to incipient Christianity.¹⁹³ In Mirian's time, according to Nino's *vita*, the K'art'velians venerated three main idols: the chief deity Armaz and the lesser Gac'i and Ga, the last of which was also called Gaim. These capped the jagged hills above the city. The hagiographer describes the scene from Nino's perspective:

... and the mountains were covered with banners and the people were as numerous as flowers. And I hastened up to the fortress of Armaz [i.e., Armazis-c'ixe] and placed myself near the idol in the bay of the city wall. And I saw an incomprehensible and terrifying sight. The tongue will not tell of the horrifying fear in which the king and all his people stood. I saw a terrible statue [*dgomay*]. Behold, there stood a man, made of copper, a golden coat of armor upon his body and a golden helmet, and his shoulder-pieces were of silver and beryl, and he held in his hand a sharpened sword, shining brightly and swinging in his hand, so that if one were to touch it, he would be doomed

¹⁹¹ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §19, Abulaže ed., 88–89 = Rapp and Crego trans., 193; and *Vita Nino (K'C')*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 125^{15–20}, which specifies the Čart'alelis, P'xo[v]elis, Cilkanelis and Gudamaqrelis.

¹⁹² *Vita Nino (K'C')*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 116–117 and 126. On the Jewish diaspora in eastern Georgia and its role in the area's Christianisation, see Mgaloblišvili and Gagošize 1998.

¹⁹³ Similar imagery is deployed in *The Life of the Kings*.

to death. And they said, “Woe to me, if I did not praise the great god Armaz sufficiently, or sinned with a word spoken to the Jews, or if I ever hearkened to the fire-worshippers, or to those ignorant ones who talk of some great god in heaven.¹⁹⁴ May [Armaz] not find flaw in me nor slay me with his sword, which the whole world fears”. And in fear, everyone worshipped him.

At its right hand was another idol, of gold, and its name was Gac'i, and at its left hand was an idol of silver, and its name was Ga, and these were god to your fathers in Aryan K'art'li.

Then I wept and sighed to God, because of the error of the land of the North, for the light was hidden and darkness ruled. I saw the powerful king and all the princes [mt'avaris] swallowed up alive by Satan, as if they were the dead of Hell. And they called stones and trees their creators; and they worshipped copper, iron, and brass and forged [metal] as gods. And they regarded them as the creator of Heaven and Earth.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity all had a historical presence in eastern Georgia at this time.

¹⁹⁵ *Vita Nino (MK')*, Abulaze ed., 119₄–120₁₆, Lerner trans., 164–165: “... და აღივსნეს მთანი იგი დროშადთა და ერთთა, ვითარცა ყუავილითა. ხოლო მე შეუსწრვე ციხედ არმაზდ და დავდეგ ახლოს კერპისა მის ნაპრალსა ზღუდისასა, და ვხედვედი საკურველებათა და საშინელსა, რომელი თქუმად ენითა ვერ ეგებოს, ვითარ-იგი იყო ზარის აღსაჰდელი შიშით და ძრწოლით მეფეთა მათ და ყოვლისა ერისაჲ. და საზარო დგომად ვიხილე. და აჰა დგა კაცი ერთი სპილენძისაჲ, და ტანსა მისსა ეცუა ჯაჭვ ოქროსაჲ, და ჩაფხუტი ოქროსაჲ, და სამკარნი ესხნეს ფრცხილი და ბივრიტი, და ჰელსა მისსა აქუნდა კრძალი ღესული, რომელი ბრწყინვიდა და იქცევოდა ჰელსა შინა, რეცა თუ რომელი შეეხებინ, თავი თუკი სიკუდიდ განიწირის. და იტყუნ: ‘ვაჲ, თუ და-სადა-ვაკლო რაჲ დიდებასა დიდისა ღმრთისა არმაზისსა და შე-რასმე ვსცთე სიტყუასა ებრაელთა თანა, გინა მოგუთა სმენასა ოდენ დახუდომიდ ვიყო, მზის მსახურთა. და რომელნიმე იტყუნ უცებნი დიდსა ვისმე ღმერთსა ცათასა, და ნუ-უკუე პოვოს რაიმე ჩემ თანა ბიწი და მცეს მახული იგი მისი, რომლისაგან ეშინის ყოველსა ქუეყანასა’. და შიშით თაყუანის-სცემდეგ ყოველნი. | და მარჯულ მისა დგა კერპი ოქროსაჲ და სახელი მისი გაცი, და მარცხლ მისა – კერპი ვეცხლისაჲ და სახელი მისი გა, რომელნი-იგი ღმრთად ჰქონდეს მამათა თქუენთა არიან ქართლით. | მაშინ გვიროდე და სულთ-ვითქუემდ ღმრთისა მიმართ ცთომათა მათთვის ქუეყანისა ჩრდილოისათა, დაფარვასა ნათლისასა და დაპყრობასა ბნელისასა. ვხედვედი მეფეთა მათ ძალ დიდთა და ყოველთა მთავართა, რამეთუ ცოცხლივ შთაენთქნეს ეშმაკსა, ვითარცა მეუღარნი ჯოჯოხეთსა. და იტყოდეს დამბადებელად ქვათა და ძელთა, და სპილენძსა და რკინასა და რვალსა, გამობერვით განჰკედილსა, ღმრთად თაყუანის-სცემდეგ. ესენი იცოდეს ცისა და ქუეყანისა შემოქმედად”. Cf. *Vita Nino (K'C')*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 89₃–90₈ = Thomson trans., 98–99: “და აღივსნეს მთანი იგი დროშებითა და ერთთა, ვითარცა ველნი ყუავილითა. | ხოლო წმიდამან ნინო შეუსწრო ციხედ არმაზად, და დადგა იგი მახლობელად კერპისა მის ნაპრალსა ზღუდისასა. და ხედვიდა საკურველებასა მიუწდომელსა და ენითა გამოუთქმელსა, ვითარდა იყო ზარის აღსაჰდელი იგი შიში მეფეთა, მთავართა

In this manner *The Life of Nino* endows the polytheistic K'art'velians of the late third and early fourth centuries with a trinity of anthropomorphic idols. Elsewhere in the text we encounter Zaden, an important fourth idol. The anonymous author singles out Armaz and Zaden as “the gods of K'art'li” (ღმერთნი ქართლისანი).¹⁹⁶

The only other Georgian narratives supplying independent information about Armaz are *The Life of the Kings* – the longest surviving historiographical source for eastern Georgia's pre-Christian history – and the succinct *Royal List I*. Several idols ostensibly venerated by the K'art'velians are enumerated in their pages: in addition to the aforementioned Gac'i, Gaim, Armaz and Zaden are Aynina/Ainina, Danana and Danina.¹⁹⁷ *The Life of Nino* adds It'rujan, “god of the Chaldaeans” and enemy of Armaz.¹⁹⁸ The text's medieval Armenian adaptation mentions “T'rujan, the god of the Persians”.¹⁹⁹ Kekelize associates It'rujan with Avestan *ātar* and Middle Persian *ādur*, “[sacred] fire”, and then attempts to connect It'rujan and Georgian *atrošani* < Middle Iranian **ātarōšan-*, “[the place] of burning fire”. More convincingly, Mariam Gvelesiani and Vlas Vacaže equate

და ყოვლისა ერისა წინაჲჲ კერპთა მათ წარმოდგომილთა. და იხილა წმიდამან ნინო, რამეთუ დგა კაცი ერთი სპილენძისა, და ტანსა მისსა ეცუა ჯაჭვ ოქროსი, და თავსა მისსა ჩაბალახი მყარი, და თუალნი ესხნეს ზურმუხტი და ბივრილი, და კელთა მისთა აქუნდა კრმალი ბრწყინვალე, ვითარცა ელვა, და იქცეოდა კელთა შინა ... | და კუალად იყო მარჯუენით მისსა კაცი ოქროსი და სახელი მისი გაცი; და მარცხენით მისსა უდგა კაცი ვეცხლისა, და სახელი მისი გაიმ, რომელნი-იგი ღმერთად უწნდეს ერსა მას ქართლისასა ... | რამეთუ მიხედნა მეფეთა მათ დიდძალთა და ყოველთა მთავართა, რომელნი ცოცხლებით შთაენთქნეს ჯოჯოხეთსა, დაეტევა დამბადებელი, და ქუათა და ძელთა, სპილენძსა და რვალსა განჭკედილსა ღმერთად თაყუანის-ცემდეს ...”, “The mountains were covered with banners and with people, like fields and flowers. When St Nino reached the Armazi fortress, she stood close to the idol on the steep wall and watched the incomprehensible wonder, inexpressible in words, the attitude of fear and terror of the sovereigns, nobles, and all the people standing in front of their idols. St Nino saw a man of bronze standing; attached to his body was a golden suit of chain-armour, on his head a strong helmet; for eyes he had emeralds and beryls, in his hands he held a sabre glittering like lightning, and it turned in his hands ... [T]o his right was a man of gold whose name was Gac'i; and to his left a man of silver whose name was Gaim. These the people of K'art'li regarded as gods ... [N]ino saw that their powerful kings and all the princes [*mt'avaris*] were swallowed up alive in Hell; they had abandoned the Creator and worshipped as god[s] stones and wood, copper and thick brass ...”

¹⁹⁶ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 106._{16–17}.

¹⁹⁷ For these idols, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 289–290. *The Life of the Kings* adds Aphrodite, explicitly said to be an importation.

¹⁹⁸ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 91₁₈–92₁ and 106₂₁–107₁.

¹⁹⁹ *Vita Nino* in *Patmut' iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 103_{4–5} = Thomson trans. 117.

It'rujan with the Mazdean concept of *druj*, “evil, chaos”, and the Mazdean Druj/Drug, Demon of the Lie.²⁰⁰

According to *The Life of the Kings*, the earliest K'art'velian idols, Gac'i and Gaim, had been introduced by Azon the Macedonian, the despotic viceroy of Alexander the Great: “Now Azon abandoned the religion [based on the belief in a creator god] given by Alexander, and he began to worship idols. He made two idols of silver, Gac'i and Gaim”.²⁰¹ The first indigenous K'art'velian king P'arnavaz, who assumed the royal mantle after vanquishing Azon, is credited with the establishment of the cult of Armaz:

This same P'arnavaz made a great idol named after himself. This is Armaz, because P'arnavaz was called Armaz in Persian. He erected this idol Armaz at the entrance to K'art'li, and from then on it was called Armazi because of the idol. And he celebrated a great feast of dedication [*satp'ureba*]²⁰² for the idol which he had erected.²⁰³

Despite the fanciful etymology, the association of the names P'arnavaz and Armaz with Persian, and hence with Iran and the Iranian Commonwealth, could not be clearer. Similar information is preserved in *The Primary History of K'art'li* and *Royal List I*. In the former, Alexander appointed Azoy, “son of the [existing] king of Aryan K'art'li”, as the first K'art'velian monarch to rule in Mc'xet'a (cf. P'arnavaz in *The Life of the Kings*). There Azoy worshipped the idols Gac'i and Ga.²⁰⁴ At the beginning of the subsequent *Royal List I*, its second king P'arnavaz “erected a great idol on the ledge of a mountain and gave it his [own] name Armaz”.²⁰⁵ This may be a muddled memory of the temple excavated in Armazis-

²⁰⁰ Kekelize 1956d, “B. It'rujani”, 266–270; Gvelesiani 2003; and Vacaže 2007, 53–84 and 144–147.

²⁰¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 20₇₋₈: “ხოლო ამან აზონ დაუტევია სჯულის აღუქსანდრეს მოცემული, იწყო კერპთმსახურებად, და შექმნა ორნი კერპნი ვეცხლისანი: გაცი და გაიმ”. For the alleged “adoption” of Azon's descendants by P'arnavaz, an act exemplified by the deliberate perpetuation of Azon's deities Gac'i and Gaim, see Mamulia 1979.

²⁰² In a Christian framework, this unusual term possibly denoted Encaenia, a multiday festival for the dedication of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre: Abulaže 1973b, 372–373.

²⁰³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 25₁₀₋₁₃: “და ამანვე ფარნავაზ შექმნა კერპი დიდი სახელსა ზედა თესსა: ესე არს არმაზი, რამეთუ ფარნავაზს სპარსულად არმაზ ერქვა. ამართა კერპი იგი არმაზი თავსა ზედა ქართლისასა, და მიერთიგან ეწოდა არმაზი კერპისა მისთვის. და ქმნა სატფურება დიდი კერპისა მისთვის აღმართებულისა”.

²⁰⁴ *Primary History of K'art'li*, §8, Abulaže ed., 81–82 = Rapp trans., 258–259. For Azoy, see also Gugušvili 1936, 109–111.

²⁰⁵ *Royal List I*, §2, Abulaže ed., 82₆₋₇ = Rapp trans., 259: “ამან აღმართა კერპი დიდი ცხვ[რ]სა ზედა, და დასდვა სახელი მისი არმაზი”. In other sources,



Figure 2.8. Foundation of the temple at Armazis-c'ixe.

c'ixe (mod. Baginet'i), a site perched above Mc'xet'a roughly half way up the peak on which Armaz supposedly stood. The textual evidence also speaks of a pair of idols called Ainina and Danana. *The Life of Nino* does not know these deities, but in *The Life of the Kings* Saurmag, P'arnavaz's son and successor, "made two idols, Ainina and Danana, and set them up along the Mc'xet'a Road".²⁰⁶ *Royal List I* splits the foundation of these idols: Saurmag established Aynina and his successor Mirvan – Danina.²⁰⁷ Nothing else is said about them.

Competing theories have attempted to demystify the received image of K'art'velian idolatry, an image based entirely on later Christian texts. Some interpretations are too willing to accept uncritically what the narratives say. Others rocket away from the literary sources, completely discounting their testimony and sometimes tumbling into a bottomless sea of speculation. Already in 1902 Nikolai Marr published his Russian-language "Bogi iazycheskoi Gruzii po drevne-gruzinskim istochnikam", "The Gods of Pagan Georgia According to Old Georgian Sources", in which he articulated two influential arguments: first, extant Georgian texts are not trustworthy for pre-Christian religion as it actually existed; and second, the names of all the reputed deities are of Iranian and, to a lesser degree, Semitic origin. Accepting the tendentiousness of the sources, Ivane Javaxišvili expanded Marr's position, adding greater context and analysis and showing the received documentary images to be hagiographical conventions and not literal fact.²⁰⁸

The names and limited descriptions of the alleged idols have prompted a host of other explanations. Particularly noteworthy is "The Asianic (Asia Minor) Elements in National Georgian Paganism" published by M. Ceret'eli (Tseretheli) in 1935. Ceret'eli reminds us of the long-term interconnections drawing together Caucasia and Anatolia, cultural zones that substantially overlapped.²⁰⁹ While Anatolian religious influences in eastern Georgia may not have been as pervasive as Ceret'eli perceived,²¹⁰ he nevertheless shows that some of the deities (or their names, at least) have Anatolian analogues and perhaps origins. An inescapable flaw of Ceret'eli's otherwise splendid inquiry is its insistence upon an organised "national Georgian paganism", which is precisely the image the authors of these

especially *The Life of the Kings*, P'arnavaz is portrayed as the first indigenous king of the K'art'velians. He gained his position through a successful revolt against the Macedonian Azon. This story has been integrated into the modern master narrative of Georgian history.

²⁰⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 27¹³⁻¹⁴: "და მან შექმნა ორნი კერპნი, აინინა და დანანა, და ამართნა გზასა ზედა მცხეთისასა".

²⁰⁷ *Royal List I*, §§3–4, Abulaže ed., 82 = Rapp trans., 259.

²⁰⁸ Javaxišvili 1979, 78–187 and 216–240. For another attempt to reconstruct pre-Christian K'art'velian religion, see Surgulaže I. 2003, esp. 187–211.

²⁰⁹ Melik'išvili 1959, for the broad sweep of Caucaso-Anatolian relations in antiquity. See also Ličeli 2011.

²¹⁰ The overlap between Caucasia and eastern Anatolia was considerable; in many respects the two were part of the same cultural world.

carefully crafted sources hoped posterity would accept. Furthermore, even if an idol's name can be traced to a particular language and/or place, it by no means necessarily establishes direct, wholesale diffusion of a physical idol or religious idea. And it certainly does not account for the cosmopolitan condition of Caucasia, Anatolia and the entire Near East, an arena in which religious traditions often commingled, particularly in the syncretic environments of the Hellenistic Age and Late Antiquity.²¹¹

K'art'velian Mazdaism

Caucasia's enduring membership in the Iranian world requires us to consider whether aspects of Mazdaism, including its deities, lurk behind the received image of K'art'velian idolatry. Many specialists have rightly emphasised the close resemblance of the names Armaz and Ahura Mazdā.²¹² The onomastic connection is most apparent through the Parthian form of Ahura Mazdā. Aramazd was adopted directly into Armenian and is encountered, for example, in Agat'angelos and Movsēs Xorenac'i.²¹³ In Xorenac'i's account of Mirian's conversion, Nino (Arm. Nunē) "destroyed the image"²¹⁴ of Aramazd, the god of thunder, which stood outside the city ..."²¹⁵ Aramazd and the later variant Ormizd undoubtedly represent Ahura Mazdā in Armenian literature, but it should be remembered that Xorenac'i was writing in the eighth century and that he was reliant on other (ultimately K'art'velian, perhaps oral) sources for his manipulated tale of K'art'li's conversion.

The Life of the Kings and *The Life of Nino* describe Armaz as an idol with a special connection to the royal family. It was perched for all to see on one of the small peaks overlooking Mc'xet'a, in or just above the royal palace complex

²¹¹ E.g., Russell 1987b, 29, who notes the sharing of many attributes between the Zoroastrian Vərəθraγna/Verethragna (Arm. Vahagn) and the Anatolian-Mesopotamian weather deity Teišeba (i.e., Tešub/Tešup), for whom see further. Cf. Ceret'eli M. 1935, 35–36.

²¹² Even if the idolatry described in the received sources is severely corrupted or is an outright fabrication, there is no reason to doubt the relationship of the *names* Armaz and Ahura Mazdā. For these names, see: Andronikašvili 1966, 25–26; and Bielmeier 1990, 40.

²¹³ Agat'angelos (Aa), Thomson trans., §§53, 68, 127 and 785–790, §785 for "... Zeus-Aramazd, called the father of the gods", "... *Ջեսս զիցն Արամազդայ, հօրն անուանեալ զիցն ամենայնի*". For "Aramazd", see Schmitt 1986, 453. The Armenian adaptation of Sōkratēs' *Ecclesiastical History* also equates Zeus and Aramazd: Sōkratēs (Arm.), cap. 106. For the Armenian Aramazd, see Russell 1987b, 153–187.

²¹⁴ For "image" (*patker*, պատկեր) as "idol" in the Armenian adaptation of K'art'lis c'xovreba (*Patmut' iwn Vrac'*), see Thomson 1996, 36 (fn. 45).

²¹⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.86, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 233₂₋₃ = Thomson trans., 239: "*Եւ իսկոյն կարծանեաց զամբարոպայն պատկերն Արամազդայ, որ կայր մեկուսի ի բազաբէն ...*"

in Armazis-c'ixe. Both *The Life of the Kings* and *Royal List I* insist upon the idol's local provenance: it was created by and named after King P'arnavaz. This is a fanciful connection and etymology, to be sure, yet the association of P'arnavaz (and hence Armaz!) with Ahura Mazdā is clear from the root of the king's name, *p'ar[n]-*, the transcribed Old Georgian anlaut of *xwarrah* (variants *farnah*, *farr* and *farrah*).²¹⁶ The depiction of Armaz as a warrior may echo Ahura Mazdā's reputation as the battlefield general of those who combat evil.²¹⁷ In his 1924 "Über georgisches Heidentum", O.G. von Wesendonk explained Armaz's sword as a manifestation of the "Scythian sword cult", "skythischen Schwertkult", that may have influenced the K'art'velians through the neighbouring Alans/Ovsis, close relatives of the Scythians.²¹⁸ Notwithstanding the validity of this hypothesis, von Wesendonk reminds us of the dynamic flows of culture and ideas within the Iranian Commonwealth, including those conjoining sedentary and nomadic communities.

There are other indications of a strong connection between Mazdaism and K'art'velian polytheism. Armaz reportedly was the most prominent of three idols standing above Mc'xet'a. The grouping of Armaz, Gac'i and Ga/Gaim is reminiscent of the Zoroastrian triad consisting of Ahura Mazdā, Miθra and Anāhīd.²¹⁹ *The Life of the Kings* adds that P'arnajom had built a fortress nearby. He called it Zadeni and inside installed an idol by the same name.²²⁰ On rather flimsy grounds, Marr equates this deity Zaden with Miθra (Mithra);²²¹ similarly, von

²¹⁶ As we shall see in Part II, *p'ar[n]-* also prefixes other K'art'velian royal names, including P'arnajom and P'arsman. However, some linguists do not regard *p'ar-* as a Georgian transcription of *xwarrah*: Bielmeyer 1990, 43–44.

²¹⁷ Russell 1987b, 154. Cf. Ceret'eli M. 1935, 32–38.

²¹⁸ Von Wesendonk 1924, 82. *The Life of the Kings* attests several important connections between the early K'art'velian monarchy and northern Caucasia. The wife of P'arnavaz and mother of his successor Saurmag hailed from Duržuket'i, a forerunner of Ingushetia and Chechnya. The king of the Alans/Ovsis was Saurmag's cousin through his father. See *The Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 38. The name Saurmag may be East Iranian; see below, p. 222.

²¹⁹ Russell 1987b, 177. But Giorgaže 1985 detects a Hittite-Anatolian influence. Bielmeyer 1990, 38–39, for a possible Semitic background of the names Gac'i and Gaim. Strabōn, XI.4.7, for the special reverence of the Sun, Zeus and the Moon by the neighbouring Albanians.

²²⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 29. P'arnajom is also credited with starting the construction of Nekresi in Kaxet'i, which in Late Antiquity was successively the site of a Zoroastrian temple, a large early basilica and an important hilltop Christian monastery. But this king reportedly abandoned the local religion to which he had contributed and instead adopted Iranian Zoroastrianism.

²²¹ Marr 1902, 6–8. Despite the lack of direct documentary evidence, there can be no question of Mithraism's influence throughout southern Caucasia.

Wesendonk makes Zaden a sun god.²²² Marr further identified the K'art'velian idols Ainina/Aynina and Danana/Danina – a tandem set up on the main road – as distortions of the Mazdean yazata Anāhīd (Anahit), daughter of Ahura Mazdā.²²³ We should note the similarity of the names Nana (Mirian's queen-consort, who preceded the king in conversion) and Nino (Arm. Nunē), on the one hand, to the goddess Nanā/Nanē, on the other. Nanā/Nanē was a lesser divinity with whom Anāhīd “shared in the fertility attributes of the Great Mother of the East”.²²⁴ Syncretic forms of the ancient Sumero-Akkadian Nanā were venerated as far away as Central Asia.²²⁵ In Caucasia, Agat'angelos reports the destruction of Nanē's temple at T'il by Gregory the Illuminator.²²⁶ The same account describes Nanē as the daughter of Aramazd, and Agat'angelos' Greek “Vg” witness equates Nanē and Athena.²²⁷ At the very least, Iranian and Iranic echoes abound.

Not only was Mazdaism adapted to local conditions, but its ideas and rituals co-existed alongside – *and blended with* – homegrown religions and other faiths based chiefly elsewhere, especially eastern Anatolia. Having scrutinised the received accounts, Ceret'eli was convinced that Armaz had been patterned upon the Anatolian-Mesopotamian weather deity Tešub/Tešup. Toumanoff accepted this explanation.²²⁸ For his part, M. Tarnishvili linked Armaz's name to the Luvian/Luwian *arma*, “Moon”, and hence likened Armaz to the Luvian-Hittite Moon god.²²⁹ There can be no question that the Moon was specially revered in Caucasia. Strabōn speaks of a first-century Moon (Gk. Selēnē) cult in Albania whose temple was “near Iberia”.²³⁰ And lurking within the Georgians' conception of St George may be a Moon deity, as is evidenced *inter alia* by the saint's nickname: *t'et'ri Giorgi* (თეთრი გიორგი), “white George”.²³¹

Although sharing a name with Ahura Mazdā, Armaz was a synthesis of sacral elements from multiple origins, a situation we would expect in Caucasia's cosmopolitan crossroads. There can be no question of the integration of aspects of Anatolian religions into K'art'velian polytheistic beliefs. Anatolian

²²² Von Wesendonk 1924, 83–85. The author speaks of “Iranisch beeinflusster Polytheismus”, “Iranian-influenced polytheism” (*ibid.*, 77 *et seq.*).

²²³ Marr 1902, 9ff. See also Allen 1932, 39.

²²⁴ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Anahit”, 347. See also Russell 1987b, 235–260.

²²⁵ Azarpay 1976.

²²⁶ Agat'angelos (Aa), §786.

²²⁷ Agat'angelos, Thomson 2010 trans., 384.

²²⁸ Ceret'eli M. 1935, 30–45; and Toumanoff 1963, 100–101 (fn. 151).

²²⁹ Tarnishvili 1961; and Toumanoff 1963, 100 (fn. 151). For Arma, see Houwink ten Cate 1961, 131–134.

²³⁰ Strabōn, XI.4.7. See also Melik'išvili 1959, 408.

²³¹ Javakhišvili 1979, 88–99; and Javakhišvili 1912 (in English). See also: Tarnishvili 1963; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 305–306. Others have positioned Miθra as the forerunner of St George: Tsetskhladze 1992, 115–124. The two positions are not mutually exclusive, for we are dealing with a syncretic and pluralistic environment. For St George in the religions of highland northeastern Georgia, see Tuite 2004, 487–488.

connections and influences may be hinted at in the tenth-century Šatberdi and Sin.Geo.N.50 witnesses of *The Life of Nino*:

At [Armaz's] right hand was another idol, of gold, and its name was Gac'i, and at its left hand was an idol of silver, and its name was Ga, *and these were gods to your fathers in Aryan K'art'li*.²³²

If, as several scholars have postulated,²³³ Aryan K'art'li was located to the southwest of K'art'li, then Aryan K'art'li would have served as a cross-cultural conduit with neighbouring Anatolia.

The considerable antiquity of the Georgian word Armaz is beyond question. It is attested as the toponym Armazi and the related Armazis-c'ixe, "the fortress of Armaz", the walled royal site above Mc'xet'a on the opposite bank of the Kura/Mtkuari.²³⁴ Now called Baginet'i, Mc'xet'a's acropolis is mentioned in several foreign sources: Strabōn calls it Harmozikē (Ἀρμोजική), Ptolemy – Harmaktika (Ἀρμάκτικα), and Pliny the Elder – Hermastus.²³⁵ But the application of Armaz's name to an (*alleged*) idol may not have transpired until the seventh or eighth century AD. Regardless of the language in which they were composed, all surviving sources mentioning this idol, including the Armenian history of Xorenac'i, were produced during or after this time. What is more, the received picture of an organised, indigenous "paganism" resulted, at least in part, from the schism of the Armenian and K'art'velian Churches beginning in the early seventh century. Shortly thereafter K'art'velian ecclesiastics launched a concerted effort to create distinctive written traditions of their own Christianisation. A strictly structured, ethno-linguistic Christianisation – like that portrayed in the consequent *Conversion of K'art'li* – required a cohesive, menacing and distinctly K'art'velian "pagan" counterpart over which to triumph.²³⁶ Meanwhile, the embryonic K'art'velian "national" church was fostering real and imagined connections to

²³² Emphasis added. For the Šatberdi variant, see *Vita Nino*, Abulaze ed., 119₃₆–120₃: "და მარჯულ მისა დგა კერპი ოქროსად და სახელი მისი გაცი, და მარცხლ მისა – კერპი ვეცხლისად და სახელი მისი გა, რომელნი-იგი ღმრთად ჰქონდეს მამათა ოქუენთა არიან ქართლით". See also: Sin.Geo.N.50, 33v–34r, facsimile ed., 138–139; and Alek'size ed., 349. Cf. *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 89₁₇–90₂, which specifies K'art'li but not Aryan K'art'li.

²³³ See p. 122.

²³⁴ And Armazis-q'evi.

²³⁵ Strabōn, XI.3.5; Ptolemy, V.10.2; and Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI.11.29. See also: Marr 1902, 4–5; Ceret'eli M. 1935, 42; and Toumanoff 1963, 89 (fn. 121). On Strabōn's Harmozikē, see Lort'k'ip'anize O. 2000, 272–274.

²³⁶ Early Christians certainly faced many obstacles and perils. My comments pertain to the received narrative. On a larger scale, Markus 1990, 28: "Unlike Christianity, with its growing world-wide cohesiveness, 'paganism' was a varied group of cults and observances. It never constituted a single coherent religious movement analogous to either Christianity or Judaism".



Figure 2.9. Ruins of Armazis-c'ixe and the peak above associated with the idol Armaz. Mc'xet'a is located below to the right; Juari is situated on an opposite hill.



Figure 2.10. Armazis-c'ixe, including a six-columned hall (lower walled structure) from the second to first century BC.

the Holy Land in order to bolster its autocephaly and Chalcedonian standing.²³⁷ If nothing else, biblical stories of the tireless battles waged against idolatry, stories commonly repeated in all manner of ecclesiastical works, were the expected backdrop for (the later telling of) Christianity's victory in eastern Georgia.

The purpose of *The Conversion* and the dependent *Life of Nino* is not to impart a dispassionate, historically accurate account of Mirian's Christianisation. Rather, these are meticulously crafted narratives based on a selective application of received and supposed facts deriving from the early fourth century. They simultaneously reflect the values, desires and aspirations of the K'art'velian Church in the post-schism age. This having been said, the idols and what they represent were not suddenly and completely concocted out of thin air at the end of Late Antiquity. But their origin, context and meaning were made and remade, and many of the original polytheistic elements were obliterated, transformed and forgotten across several centuries of Christianisation. As Marr and others have expertly shown, some and perhaps many and even all of the names were inspired by non-K'art'velian religious traditions.²³⁸ The total absence of an organised local idolatry not only in *The Conversion of K'art'li* but also in Gelasios and Rufinus can be explained in only one way. Insofar as its formal structures are described in *The Life of Nino* and other later Georgian texts, this idolatry never existed.²³⁹

At the same time, the names of the idols embody a critical facet of the Irano-Caucasian nexus. In light of eastern Georgia's enduring membership in the Iranian Commonwealth, Marr, Javaxišvili and their supporters were right to associate them with the Iranian world.²⁴⁰ While the religious atmosphere of third- and fourth-century K'art'li was undoubtedly syncretic and cosmopolitan, hybrid forms of Mazdaism prevailed locally as they did in neighbouring Armenia and presumably Albania.²⁴¹ It must be stressed, however, that the orthodox Zoroastrianism championed by the Sasanian Empire always took a backseat in this region, even before Mirian's conversion. K'art'velian and Armenian strains of Mazdaism not only featured devotion to Miθra, thanks in large measure to the presence of indigenised Parthian Mihrānids in southern Caucasia, but they also adapted – or paralleled – aspects of religions practised in eastern Anatolia, as

²³⁷ Consider, also, legends of Jebusite origins and the conveyance of Christ's tunic to eastern Georgia.

²³⁸ If this is indeed a later tradition, we must consider whether the importation of foreign names was a deliberate ploy to disassociate (Christian) eastern Georgians from their "pagan" past.

²³⁹ This is not to deny that some manner of idol worship existed in ancient and late antique K'art'li. We must also treat with caution allusions, e.g., to an idol of Aphrodite established by Sep'elia, the "Greek" wife of the K'art'velian Arsacid King Rev (r. 189–216; *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 58₂₋₄), and a statue of Heracles venerated in eastern Georgia (Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.31).

²⁴⁰ The overall trend is valid even if particular etymologies are invalid.

²⁴¹ See especially the detailed investigation of Russell 1987b.

Ceret'eli's research shows.²⁴² The creative combination of foreign elements and the inclusion of local ones should not be forgotten, for the K'art'velians and other Caucasian peoples did not adopt Iranian Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism wholesale but creatively adapted it to their particular socio-cultural environment and *actively contributed to it*.²⁴³ This adaptive quality helps to explain Mazdaism's success in Caucasia.

Finally, surviving narrative elaborations of a systematised, coordinated and ominous K'art'velian idolatry serve another vital purpose. Unlike the historiographical *Life of the Kings*, the sources transmitted in the ecclesiastical corpus *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* intentionally curtail and obscure K'art'li's active participation in the Iranian Commonwealth. While polytheistic rituals and beliefs may have been forgotten, the clerical architects of the received tradition endeavoured to obliterate the memory of Mazdaism, which had prevailed in eastern Georgia over the *longue durée*. As the fourth century progressed, more and more Christians identified Mazdaism and especially Zoroastrianism exclusively with the Sasanian Empire. In the Iranic Georgian milieu this attitude became especially widespread only after Duin III and particularly under the Bagratid regime which, with the allied K'art'velian Church, encouraged the Byzantinisation of élite society to an unprecedented degree.²⁴⁴ But the presence of Mazdaism had been so pervasive that residual memories were bound to survive. Some prominent Mazdean elements, especially Armaz-Ahura Mazdā, could not be easily expunged and were remembered – with progressive and perhaps deliberate imprecision – by Christian K'art'velians even centuries after Mirian's conversion. Fading memories of Mazdaism are evident at the end of *The Life of Nino* when the dying King Mirian voices instructions to his son and successor:

And where you find those abominations, the idols of fire[-worship] [*igi c'ec'xlisani kerpni*], destroy them by fire and make those who hope in them drink the ashes. Instruct your children likewise, because I know that [the idols] will disappear among the [northern] Caucasians.²⁴⁵

²⁴² As noted, we must take care not to exaggerate the distinction between what was Caucasian and Anatolian, for the two regions were closely connected and in many respects were part of the same cross-cultural zone. Kevin Tuite (personal communication, 30 August 2011) is less apt to see “specifically ‘Anatolian’ features, as distinct from elements of a common-Caucasian religious system which may have parallels with the belief systems of the Bronze-Age Circumpontic region”.

²⁴³ Bentley 1993, for cross-cultural patterns and the role of “social conversion” and syncretism.

²⁴⁴ *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* was compiled during early Bagratid rule in the early tenth century.

²⁴⁵ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 130₁₋₃, Thomson trans., 145: “და სადა პოვნე ვნებანი იგი ცეცხლისანი კერპნი, ცეცხლითა დაწუნე, და ნაცარი შეასუ რომელნი მათ ესვიდენ. და ესე შვილთაცა შენთა ამცენ, რამეთუ მე ვიცი იგი, რომელ კავკასიათაცა შინავე დაიღუვიან”. Cf. *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaze ed.,

An addition is incorporated into the *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* recension: "... it is fitting that those mountains [of Armazi and Zadeni] were destroyed by fire ..." ²⁴⁶

Mirian's alleged words are based on a certain reality. Although archaeology has yet to reveal a single shred of evidence implying the existence of the idolatry as described in early Georgian sources, it has identified the remains of several Mazdean "fire temples" from the Hellenistic and Parthian Arsacid eras. A sacred hearth was unearthed within the extensive Dedop'lis Mindori complex some fifty kilometres west of Mc'xet'a. ²⁴⁷ It perhaps belonged to a private sanctuary for the K'art'velian royal family and other political luminaries. Mazdean temples at Nekresi, Samadlo, Up'lis-c'ixe, C'ixiagora, Yart'iskari (Ghartiskari) and elsewhere were active as late as the third/fourth century AD and possibly beyond. ²⁴⁸ Material remains confirm the coexistence of a local type of Mazdean temple and structures of a more conventional Iranian design. ²⁴⁹

Other textual evidence substantiates beyond any doubt the presence of Mazdaism and Sasanian Zoroastrianism in late antique eastern Georgia. As we have seen, Zoroastrian Iranian expatriates were clustered at Mogut'a/Moguet'i on the western side of Mc'xet'a under King Mirian. But these Mazdean communities were neither monolithic nor static: they comprised K'art'velians, Iranian colonists and others. Branches of Parthian aristocratic houses that had transplanted themselves in Caucasia, most notably the Mihrānids, fostered their own brands of Mazdaism before and, as the case of P'eroz implies, even after Mirian's conversion. In this regard, we must bear in mind that:

162²⁸⁻³⁵ = Lerner trans., 192–193: "აწ სადაცა ჰპოვნე ქუეყანასა შინა შენსა ვნებასა იგი ქართლისანი მაცთურნი კერპნი, ცეცხლითა დაწუენ და ნაცარი მათი შეასუ მათ, ვინ მათ ეგლოვდის. და ესე ამცენ შეილთა შენთა, რამეთუ მე ვიცი იგი, მწრაფლ კაცკასითა შინა ვერ დაილევიან", "[From] now [on] where you find in your land these idols which tempt the K'art'velians, burn them with fire and make those who mourn over them drink the ashes. And announce this to your sons, for I know that [the idols] will not disappear quickly among the [northern] Caucasians". Standard contemporary usage urges that "Caucasians" are not the sedentary populations of the south but the highland pastoralists and nomads of the north. Thus, Mirian refers to "pagan" survivals among the highlanders; Nino was active there after Mirian's conversion. Finally, it is curious that in the *K'art'lis c'xovreba* recension Mirian seems to equate idolatry and Mazdaism because earlier in the same text the hagiographer is careful to distinguish them: *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 119–120.

²⁴⁶ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 158¹¹⁻¹² = Lerner trans., 190: "... და ღირსცა არიან მთანი იგი ასპოლვად ცეცხლითა ..."

²⁴⁷ Gagošize 2001, 265–266.

²⁴⁸ Ximšiašvili and Narimanišvili 1995–1996; Kipiani 2004; Kkitišvili 1995; Knauss 2006, 86–92; and Rapp 2009, 659. For Nekresi, see also the recent articles by Gvetaže and Gvetaže 2010 and 2011. Gagošize 1992, 46, hypothesises a direct link between the seven temples at Dedop'lis Mindori and the seven deities worshipped by Mirian, for which see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 65¹⁵⁻¹⁶.

²⁴⁹ Ximšiašvili and Narimanišvili 1995–1996, 316.



Figure 2.11. Mazdean temple, Nekresi.

The predominant form of religiosity during the Sasanian era in the northern and northeastern regions of Iran (*kūst-i ādurbādagān* and *kūst-i khwarāsān*) ruled by the Parthian dynastic families, was not the orthodox Zoroastrianism propagated by the Sasanian *mōbads*, but popular religious customs that betray strong currents of Mihr worship.²⁵⁰

In the decades following Mirian's baptism, both K'art'velian Mazdaism²⁵¹ (which was by no means monolithic) and Iranian Zoroastrianism²⁵² atrophied in eastern

²⁵⁰ Pourshariati 2008, 368, as well as 378–379 and 386–392, a discussion that must be extended to all of southern Caucasia.

²⁵¹ Along with the Zoroastrianism imported by Parthian settlers.

²⁵² To the extent it had been established there. Needless to say, Sasanian Zoroastrianism was also heterogeneous. For the distinction between “Mazdean” and “Zoroastrian”, see Appendix I.

Georgia.²⁵³ The privileging of Christianity by the crown and leading aristocratic houses, and the redirection of resources towards the new faith, accelerated the stagnation and decline. But Mazdaism/Zoroastrianism did not suddenly disappear: it maintained a presence in Caucasia even as the Sasanian Empire lay in ruins. But throughout southern Caucasia, Sasanian-supported Zoroastrianism had eclipsed the already dwindling local Mazdaisms by the fifth century. In mid-century *The Life of Vaxtang* reports that Barzabod, the ranking Sasanian official in Albania (Geo. Rani), arranged for the installation of new Zoroastrian priests in Mc'xet'a. He resorted to this act not only because Mazdaism's presence there had been greatly reduced at the expense of Christianity but also because he wanted to promote the specifically imperial strain of Zoroastrianism.²⁵⁴

Manichaeism and the Mobidān Affair

Another faith of Iranian provenance gained a foothold in Caucasia. Owing to its appropriation and repackaging of Christian elements, Manichaeism was envisioned by some contemporaries as a Christian sect or heresy. This was the case in the K'art'velian kingdom, where the religious pluralism of Late Antiquity was still untainted by an obsession with heretics and infidels. In a recent publication, T'amila Mgaloblišvili and I gathered what we believe are compelling data for the influence and activity of Manichaeans in eastern Georgia.²⁵⁵ Fragments of Manichaean texts, including missionary histories preserved in the faraway desert of eastern Turkestan, yield the most direct proof. M216b, M2230 and T II K X 9 U237 + D = U297 attest a Manichaean mission to Waručān/Waruzān, a land governed by King Haḡzā/Hamazasp.²⁵⁶ Third-century Sasanian inscriptions and the seventh-century geography by the Armenian Anania Širakac'i conclusively demonstrate the identification of Waručān/Waruzān with K'art'li.²⁵⁷ Haḡzā/Hamazasp is almost certainly the Hamazāsp mentioned in the Great Inscription of Šāpūr I at Naqš-e Rostam; both it and the Manichaean fragments must refer to Amazasp III (r. 260–265), a Sasanian-backed pretender to the K'art'velian throne.²⁵⁸

Early Georgian literary sources say nothing explicitly about Manichaeism but contain oblique references which, when taken together, imply the influence and physical presence of Manichaeans. In the course of its account devoted to

²⁵³ In the sixth century, Abibos, the Syrian monk and bishop of Nekresi, waged war on Zoroastrianism in Kaxet'i. See pp. 99–103.

²⁵⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 144–145; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 443.

²⁵⁵ Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011. For Armenia, see Russell 1998b.

²⁵⁶ Zieme 1975, §21, 50–52; Sundermann 1986, 61; Henning 1944; Lieu 1985, 106 (and fn. 138); Klimkeit 1982, 215; and Boyce 1960, 16.

²⁵⁷ See also: Henning 1944; and Ceret'eli *unpub.* See above, pp. 123–124.

²⁵⁸ Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 272–275. For the pretender, see Toumanoff 1969a, 18–19.

King Arč'il (r. 411–435), *The Life of Vaxtang* relates the curious tale of Mobidān (Geo. Mobidan):

And after Basil, Arč'il appointed a bishop named Mobidān. He was an Iranian by birth, and he [outwardly] professed orthodoxy [*mart'l-madideblobay*]. But [in fact] he was an impious *mowbed* [*mogwi*] and subverter of the church order. King Arč'il and his son, however, were unaware of Mobidān's impiety [*usjulobay*] and thought he was a believer. And he did not reveal the preaching of his religion out of fear of the king and the people, but secretly he wrote books of total deceit. After his time the true bishop Mik'ael burned all his writings ...²⁵⁹

The only other early Georgian text to address this period is *Royal List II*. Although it is closely related to *The Life of Vaxtang*, it is unacquainted with Mobidān.²⁶⁰ We must wonder whether *Royal List II*'s compilation in a priestly environment led to the excision of the unflattering Mobidān Affair.

One of the principal themes of *The Life of Vaxtang* is the growing Zoroastrian threat emanating from the Sasanians' tireless effort to collect Christian Caucasia under its control. It describes Mobidān as a *mogwi*, i.e., *mowbed* or “magus”. On this point alone, it is tempting to identify him as a Zoroastrian high priest. As it so often does, however, context sharpens the picture. Ivane Javaxišvili and T'edo Žordania, and now Mgaloblišvili and I, understand Mobidān to have been a Manichaean priest feigning Christian affiliation.²⁶¹ In the cosmopolitan setting of late antique K'art'li, an adherent of Mani could have masqueraded as a Christian²⁶² with minimal effort thanks to Manichaeism's wide adaptation of Christian ideas, symbolism and vocabulary. Together, *mogwi* and Mobidān's spurious name may have been employed as a means to emphasise his Iranian extraction and unusual brand of “Christianity”.²⁶³ Even in the absence of his deceptive acts, an individual caught in Mobidān's circumstances could have been perceived as a Christian. And there is another tantalising clue: we would expect a Manichaean cleric

²⁵⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed. 142,^{15–21} = Thomson trans. 157: “და ბასილისა შემდგომად ამანვე არჩილ დასუა ეპისკოპოსი, რომელსა ერქუა მობიდან. ესე იყო ნათესავად სპარსი, და აწუენებდა იგი მართლ-მადიდებლობასა. ხოლო იყო ვინმე მოგვ უსჯულო და შემშლელი წესთა, და ვერ უგრძნა არჩილ მეფემან და ძემან მისმან უსჯულოება მობიდანისი, არამედ ჰგონებდეს მორწმუნედ. და ვერცა განაცხადებდა ქადაგებასა სჯულისა მისისასა შიშისაგან მეფისა და ერისა, არამედ ფარულად წერდა წიგნებსა ყოვლისა საცთურებისასა, რომელი შემდგომად მისსა დაწუა ყოველი წერილი მისი ჭეშმარიტმან ეპისკოპოსმან მიქაელ ...”

²⁶⁰ *Royal List II*, §§9–10, Abulaže ed., 92,^{32–39} = Rapp trans., 305.

²⁶¹ Javaxišvili 1979, 342–348; Žordania 1892, 47–48 (fn. 98); and Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 276–278. See also Ceret'eli *unpub.*, 234. For Mobidān as a “Nestorian” priest, see Brosset 1849, 174.

²⁶² Cf. the confusion of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism: Durkin-Meisterernst 2012.

²⁶³ For Geo. *mobidan* as a priestly office, see below p. 292.

to emphasise the written word. Mobidān did just this, although he operated clandestinely to avoid detection.

If Mobidān was not a Manichaean, then we must accept his literal portrayal as a *mowbed*. In this case, it is possible that Mobidān was engaging in religious espionage as a Zoroastrian informer deliberately implanted in the K'art'velian ecclesiastical administration. Beyond this, there is little more we can say about this enigmatic but fascinating figure. As noted, *Royal List II* is unacquainted with Mobidān. But this short text refers to a curious circumstance at the time he would have been in eastern Georgia. The imperial *bidaxš* Borazbod, the *šāhan šāh*'s representative in this part of Caucasia, personally appointed Archbishop Glonok'or²⁶⁴ to the office of *erist'avi*, thus merging civilian and religious authority.²⁶⁵ But the motivations of Borazbod's reported actions are not at all clear.

Linguistic Connections

The Iranian character of Caucasia's syncretic polytheisms and, more broadly, its population's active long-term involvement in the Iranian Commonwealth left a strong linguistic imprint on the Georgian language. The Nino Cycle introduces other Iranian loans and parallels beyond those already catalogued from the *vitae* of Šušanik and Evstat'i. For instance:

ABJARI (აბჯარო), "armour, arms" < MPers. *abzār*, "weapon, arms", via an undocumented Parth. word²⁶⁶

ČEŠMARITI (ჭეშმარიტო), "true, correct, right" < MPers. *čašmāid*, via Arm. *čšmarit* (ճշմարիտ)²⁶⁷

DROŠAY (დროშა), "banner, flag, standard" < Parth./MPers. *drafš*, "banner"; Arm. *drōšm* (դրօշմ)²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Glonok'or's received name may be corrupted. The Čeliši witness gives Bolnok'on: *Royal List II*, §10, Abulaže ed., 92₃₆. The difference arises from a confusion of the *nusxuri* characters *b* (ბ) and *g* (გ), and *r* (რ) and *n* (ნ). *Asomt'avruli b* (Ⴀ) and *g* (Ⴂ) can also be mistaken.

²⁶⁵ *Royal List II*, §10. On Glonok'or, see Kekeliže 1955e.

²⁶⁶ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 126₂₈, and variant reading in *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 98. See also *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 6₂₄. For the term, see Andronikašvili 1966, 216–217.

²⁶⁷ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 87₄, 94₆, 102₁₆, 104₁₆, 105₇, 111_{10,20}, 113₁₈, 115₂₄, 117₁, 118₂₄ (variant reading), 119_{11–12}, 122₄ and 125₁₃. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 21; Andronikašvili 1966, 407–408; Schmitt 1983, 87; and Schmitt 1986, 450.

²⁶⁸ *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 119₅. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 27; Andronikašvili 1966, 315; Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, "Drōšm", 522; Schmitt 1983, 90; and Schmitt 1986, 451.

GUNDI (გუნდი), “entourage, contingent, host” < Parth./MPers. *gund*, “gathering, detachment, troop(s)”; Arm. *gund* (գუნդ)²⁶⁹

GUNDRUKI (გუნდრუკი), “incense” < MPers. *kundur*; Arm. *kntruk* (կնտրուկ)²⁷⁰

KOŠKI (კოშკი), “tower, pavilion”²⁷¹ < MPers. *kōšak* > *kōšk*, “palace”²⁷²

PASANIKI (პასანიკი), “guard, servant” < MPers. *pasānīg*; Arm. *pasanik* (պասանիկ)²⁷³

SPILENŽI (სპილენძი), “bronze” < Parth. *plinj*; MPers. *brinj*; Arm. *plinj* (սպիლენძ)²⁷⁴

VEŠAPI (ვეშაპი), “dragon”, perhaps < Mir. **vēšāp*; cf. Av. *višāpa*-; Arm. *višap* (վիշապ)²⁷⁵

The profusion of Iranian and Iranic words observed in the oldest original works of Georgian literature thus continues in *The Conversion of K’art’li* and *The Life of Nino*.

The most visible signatures of the Iranian world in *The Life of Nino* are the names of eastern Georgian notables. The name of the king featured in *The Conversion* and the *vita* of Nino, Mirian (var. Mirean), is the K’art’velian analogue of Iranian Mihrān. This alone is compelling evidence for Mirian’s extraction from the Parthian Mihrānid house, which strongly favoured the name. In another instance, *The Life of Nino* alludes to a young K’art’velian prince Amasaspān, who

²⁶⁹ *Conversion of K’art’li*, §3, Abulaže ed., 83_{22–23} = Rapp and Crego trans., 190; *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 159₃₂ (Čeliši [ლ] variant) and 163₁₈. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 38; Nyberg 1974, 86; Andronikašvili 1966, 229; and Garsoiān in *Epic Histories*, “Gund”, 529. Another instance is found (e.g.) in the *vita* of Grigol Xanzt’eli.

²⁷⁰ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 126₃₁; and *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 98₉. For the term, see: Sulxan-Saba Orbeliani, *Sitqvis kona*, Abulaže ed. (1965–1966), 183; and Andronikašvili 1966, 305.

²⁷¹ For *koški* as “pavilion”, see *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 161₂₀.

²⁷² *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 130₃₁. See also *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 28₁₂. For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 51; Nyberg 1974, 119; and Andronikašvili 1966, 333–334.

²⁷³ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 128₃₆; and *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 99₉. For the term, see: Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 284 (attested in Manichaean MPers.); and Andronikašvili 1966, 261–262.

²⁷⁴ E.g., *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 89₉ (for the passage, see p. 146 [fn. 195]). For the term, see: MacKenzie 1986, 105; Durkin-Meisterernst 2004, 275 (attested in Manichaean Parth.); and Andronikašvili 1966, 361–362. The undeciphered *s-* prefix also occurs in Sparset’i, “Iran”.

²⁷⁵ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 133₁₇. For the term, see especially Gippert 1993a, “*Vešap*–”, 317–329. See also: Andronikašvili 1966, 238–239; and Russell 1987b, 205–213. *Vešapi* is commonly encountered in Georgian sources. On its hagiographical deployment, see Vač’naže 1998, 246–278.

after eight years of paralysis was cured through the dual intercession of Nino and the miraculous pillar of the first church built in Mc'xet'a's royal garden.²⁷⁶ Amazasp is related to Middle Persian Hamazāsp, a relatively common name in late antique Caucasia (Geo. Amazasp; Arm. Hamazasp).²⁷⁷ The *vita* is acquainted with P'eroz (Mīr. Pērōz), the powerful *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark' and Mihrānīd son-in-law of King Mirian. One of Nino's female pupils was Perožavri Sivneli ("of Siwnik"). Along with Salome Ujarmeli ("of Ujarma"), Perožavri is said to have recorded Nino's dictations.²⁷⁸ And we have already encountered Xuara and Xuaran-Xuara, both of which faithfully transcribe Middle Persian *xwarrah*.

Finally, the witnesses of *The Life of Nino* in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* – but oddly not the recension of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, whose pre-Bagratiid historiographical texts are saturated with Iranic imagery – put an entire Persian sentence into the mouth of King Mirian.²⁷⁹ Its rendition fluctuates only slightly within the surviving versions, thus illustrating their close relationship. Once the idols of Mc'xet'a had been demolished by a divine storm in answer to Nino's supplications, the tenth-century Šatberdi manuscript relates:

... ღუ: თქაჲ: შიჟოქმეფი ჯმოქმოთო: “უი, უი, ძესამიერჯას ჯაჯეთ სთაჯენაჲს
ძიხაჲთ ყბეძიხიჭ”. ჯოთოთ თქაჯმეფიერჯეს ებე რძიხ: “შიქმოთხე: უაჲ,
უჯდნიქიძა ღუჯაჲთოთ ღუ: შაჲტქაჲთოთ ძიხე: მიქმოთხეა”.²⁸⁰

... and the king said tearfully: “Hē, hē, rayt' meboy xojat' st' abanub rasul p' sarzed”.
And this is translated: “Truly you speak, fortunate [*bedniero*] queen and apostle
of the Son of God”.

The Čeliši witness of the thirteenth/fourteenth century, also composed in *nusxuri*, further corrupts the transcription and lacks a translation into Georgian. But it abruptly acknowledges the phrase's foreign extraction:

²⁷⁶ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 115₅₋₁₃. This is the site of the present-day cathedral of Sveti-c'xoveli (mod. Sveti-c'xoveli), “the living pillar”. For pillar and tree worship, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 299–304.

²⁷⁷ In eastern Georgia, e.g., Amazasp I (r. 106–116), Amazasp II (r. 185–189) and the pretender Amazasp III (r. 260–265). For the name, see: Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, 378–379; and Andronikašvili 1966, 422–423. See also the Epitaph of Amazaspos and the inscription of Vespasian (mentioning Iamasaspos): Qauxč'išvili, T'. 1999–2000, #229, 251–252.

²⁷⁸ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 127.

²⁷⁹ *The Life of the Kings* spuriously describes Mirian as a first-born Sasanian prince who assumed the K'art'velian throne. In reality, however, he was a member of the Parthian Mihrānīd house and the founder of the Chosroid dynasty, for which see pp. 243–249.

²⁸⁰ Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts S-1141, 230r. See also: *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 121₃₄–122₁ (Šatberdi [C] variant); and Šatberdi Codex, Gigineišvili and Giunašvili eds., 335₄₁–336₃ = Lerner trans., 166.

...Տէ. արաբ: ծղղղթի: “աի, աի, ղիսի: ժռեւովիսղը լռչեւ սռչւհարչ ժռեւորս
 քռեւ-ժռչծ” (Եղաւ ղիհւս).²⁸¹

And the king said: “He he, thus: *rasat’wimeb xajas t’abanog ras-ol p’asa-rajd*”
 ([this is in] a different language).

The most accurate rendering of the Persian sentence is preserved in the tenth-century Sin.Geo.N.50:

... “աղղղ ժռեւիսղըս ղաչեւ սռչւհարչ ժռեւորս քռեւիւծ”.

... “*hehe, rast’mebay xojas t’abanog rasul p’saradz*”.²⁸²

Sin.Geo.N.50’s scribe neither explains nor translates the phrase.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the gifted Marr deciphered the transliterated words as Persian, reconstructing them as: *rāst mīgōyī xujāsta bānūg, rasūl-i pūsar-i izad*.²⁸³ The phrase, newly translated by Touraj Daryae, reads: “You tell the truth, O auspicious lady, the messenger of the son of god”.²⁸⁴ Marr, Alek’sandre Gvaxaria, Jost Gippert and others have drawn attention to the presence of Arabic/New Persian *rasūl*, a signal of this passage having attained its received form – or having been originally composed – no earlier than the seventh century. Gippert identified an additional New Persian feature: *mīgōyī*, a second-person present indicative with the verbal prefix *mī-/mē-*.²⁸⁵ According to Zaza Alek’size, a leading expert of the “new” Sinai collection of Georgian manuscripts, the language of the sentence is characteristic of the transition between Middle and New Persian.²⁸⁶ However, the implications of a New Persian influence cannot be overlooked. In the words of Gippert:

It goes without saying that the presence of an early New Persian sentence in a legend which deals with the 4th century A.D. does not speak in favour of the reliability of the source in question. It may rather represent a later addition, all the more since the secondary variants of the legend do not contain anything comparable and there are other indications of the text being a compilation. But even as a later insertion, it clearly indicates that the usage of Persian continued to be regarded as a characteristic feature of the royal court of ancient Georgia.²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ *Vita Nino* (MK’), Abulaže ed., 121.^{34–36} (Čeliši [Գ] variant) = Lerner trans., 166 (fn. 76).

²⁸² Sin.Geo.N.50, 36r, facsimile ed., 143 = Alek’size ed., 350.

²⁸³ Marr 1897, 72 (fn. 1).

²⁸⁴ Dr Daryae’s translation was made specifically for this project. I am grateful for his permission to publish it here for the first time.

²⁸⁵ Gippert 2004, 110–111.

²⁸⁶ Gvaxaria 2001, 481–482; Gvaxaria 1987a, 10–12; Gabašvili 1983, 10–12; Alek’size 2002, 15; and Rapp 2003, 263–264.

²⁸⁷ Gippert 2004, 111. See also: Gvaxaria 1987a; and Gvaxaria 1987b, 44–47.

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PART II

Historiographical Texts

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Chapter 3

K'art'lis c'xovreba and the Historiographical *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*

Christianisation and the Writing of History

Through the labours of Gregory the Illuminator, Nino and countless other women and men whose contributions have vanished in the mists of time, Christianity was firmly implanted throughout southern Caucasia in the first half of the fourth century. The faith's spectacular public successes were achieved under the dual patronage of the crown and the aristocracy, two companies of dynastic Iranic élites that endeavoured to counteract Sasanian and Roman interference. Meanwhile, Christian leaders, missionaries and ascetics were thrust into – and seized for themselves – positions of considerable social power in this fluid era before the entrenchment of rigid ecclesiastical hierarchies, inflexible orthodoxies and *ethnie*-privileging “national” churches.

Unfettered Christianisation gave rise to new tools and methods, not least of which was the creation of scripts for the principal languages of southern Caucasia at the turn of the fourth/fifth century. Although these scripts were devised by Christian clerics with the express purpose of religious consolidation and expansion,¹ their potential was soon realised by other constituencies. Within a hundred years of the invention of the Armenian script, distinguished *naxarar* families began to cultivate carefully crafted historiographical texts as prestige-enhancing instruments within Armenia's competitive élite society. Aristocratic narratives of this kind dominate the initial stage of Armenian historiography. Thus, in the fifth century, the anonymous author of *The Epic Histories* along with Łazar P'arpec'i championed the Mamikonean house. Later, in the eighth century Movsēs Xorenac'i celebrated the rival Bagratid clan, his patrons, in the first known comprehensive history of the Armenians. So as to augment Bagratid power and to certify the authoritativeness of his impressive antiquarian work, Xorenac'i represents his *tour de force* as a fifth-century monument, a claim that has stoked countless intellectual battles in our own time.²

¹ Their invention may have been partly inspired by the creation of new scripts in Iran under the late Parthian Arsacids, on which see Häberl 2006.

² For the authorship and historical circumstances of the production of these texts, see the introductions to the translations by Garsoïan (*Epic Histories*) and Thomson (P'arpec'i and Xorenac'i). See also Thomson 1996c. Xorenac'i recasts and sometimes fabricates

The Georgian and Albanian scripts resulted from the same pan-Caucasian effort as the Armenian, yet their literary priorities and models could diverge substantially. For Albania the evidence is sparse. Until recently, the only known contemporaneous specimens of Albanian writing were short, fragmentary inscriptions belonging perhaps to the seventh century. Most came to light during archaeological excavations in the vicinity of Mingaçevir (Mingachevir) in the Republic of Azerbaijan.³ But while probing a cache of Georgian manuscripts found after a fire at St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai in 1975, Zaza Alek'size identified Albanian writing in the lowest layers of two palimpsests. Fragments of a lectionary and the Gospel of John are preserved in the Albanian underwriting of Sin.Geo.N.13 and Sin.Geo.N.55.⁴ These Albanian texts were produced between the late seventh and early tenth century, the date of the upper Georgian layers marking the *terminus ad quem*.⁵ The Albanian language and script were definitely used to communicate biblical and other ecclesiastical writings; however, we do not presently have any material evidence for original narrative works in that medium.⁶ For its part, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians* attributed to Movsēs Daxuranc'i (alternately called Kałankatuac'i) was originally written and is preserved exclusively in Armenian. The narrative core belongs to the second half of the tenth century, though it is based upon earlier materials, some of which derive from the seventh century. Ultimately, both the extent of written Albanian and the literary priorities of Albanian authors cannot be reliably gauged with available materials.

The origin and development of Georgian literature are more extensively documented. As we have seen, the earliest K'art'velian authors favoured the hagiographical genre. With regards to *received* texts, the writing of history is intertwined with the socio-cultural transformations of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, including the stronger and sustained assertion of K'art'velian ecclesiastical autonomy; the formal schism between the K'art'velian and Armenian Churches; the K'art'velians' acceptance of the christology of Chalcedon and closer relations with the Byzantine Empire; the political catastrophe of the end of the sixth century, when the Sasanians suppressed the eastern Georgian monarchy; the collapse of the Sasanian Empire; the subsequent

early Bagratid history by inserting the family into pivotal moments of Judaeo-Christian antiquity. For the early Bagratids, see Toumanoff 1948.

³ For an overview, see Trever 1959, "Epigraficheskie pamiatniki: albanskije nadpisi", 335–339. Excavations at Mingaçevir yielding Albanian inscriptions were carried out by S.M. Kaziev in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

⁴ Sin.Geo.N.13, whose upper layer is in Georgian, contains both Albanian and Armenian underwriting. Descriptions of these texts are provided in Alek'size *et al.* 2005, 385–387 and 415. See also: Alek'size 1998; and especially Alek'size 2003.

⁵ Gippert *et al.* 2008. The Albanian lectionary may be as old as the fifth century: Alek'size 2003.

⁶ Cf. the nationalist explanations of Buniatov 1965 and Mamedova 2005.

Arab conquest and colonisation of much of southern Caucasia; and, finally, the birth of a new K'art'li – what we might call “neo-K'art'li” – in Tao-Klarjet'i along the frontier with Byzantine Anatolia, an enterprise enabled by the partnership of the nascent “national” church (with its strong monastic backbone) and a branch of the Bagratid dynasty. A systematic historiography proved an effective instrument for staking claims in the present and for promulgating a desired future. It commemorated a carefully sculpted past, appealed for the restoration of the K'art'velian monarchy, and assuaged clamourings of ecclesiastical primacy emanating from the Armenian Church and the patriarchates of Antioch and Constantinople.⁷

In the Georgian case, *received* historiography is an outgrowth of hagiography to a significant degree.⁸ Both genres are advocative and are products of Christian times. An important link between the two was forged in the wake of Duin III. In 607 the Armenian Church condemned and excommunicated the leadership of its eastern Georgian counterpart. As the preceding century had come to a close, K'art'velians pushed their ecclesiastical organisation from the protectorate claimed by the Armenian Church. In subsequent decades, the increasing autonomy of the K'art'velian Church inspired the elaboration of narrative traditions in defence of self-regulation and the recent commitment to Chalcedon – and the closer relationship with Constantinople that went along with it. One of the most important literary monuments produced at this time is *The Conversion of K'art'li*, a laconic narrative repackaging old traditions about Nino and the Christianisation of the royal family. In a departure from existing Georgian *vitae*, *The Conversion* has a dual focus: an exemplary Christian holy woman and the K'art'velian monarch.

Beautiful in its simplicity and remarkable in its age, *The Conversion of K'art'li* is nonetheless a stark and unadorned textual icon lacking the literary accoutrements necessary to serve as a long-term foundational narrative and to thwart rival traditions, domestic and foreign. As local political power languished during the *interregnum* and with much of southern Caucasia falling under Arab hegemony, K'art'velian Christianity began to transform itself into a sophisticated all-Georgian Orthodox Christianity with its own “national” church. Meanwhile, ecclesiastical rivalry with the Armenians escalated. After Duin III some Armenian clerics meticulously recast aspects the Gregory Cycle – the traditions associated with Agat'angelos about Gregory the Illuminator – to reinforce their hierarchical

⁷ Antioch's claims over the Georgian Church are well known at a later time, especially the eleventh century. In its initial centuries, the Church in K'art'li may have technically fallen under the jurisdiction of the Antiochene patriarchate. However, the canons of the ecumenical councils are vague on this subject: Nicaea I, canon 6; Nicaea I, canon 35 (for Antioch's rights over the bishops of Iran); and Constantinople I, canon 2 = *Acts of the Ecumenical Councils*, Percival ed., 15, 47 and 176–177.

⁸ The two categories were also enmeshed in Armenian literature, e.g., Agat'angelos.

and theological position.⁹ *The Conversion*'s limitations became painfully clear to the K'art'velians. Consequently, in the ninth and certainly by the early tenth century the short text was superseded by the expanded *Life of Nino*.

K'art'lis c'xovreba

Despite its constraints, *The Conversion* of K'art'li illuminated the possibilities of the emergent historiographical genre.¹⁰ At the time of its composition, K'art'velian society faced enormous uncertainty owing to the suppression of the monarchy by the Sasanians, the last war between the Sasanian and Roman Empires, and the Arab conquest. But K'art'velian culture and literature were soon reinvigorated in Tao-Klarjet'i, a region mostly beyond the immediate reach of the Arabs. The formation of the K'art'velian "national" church as well as the rise of extensive monastic foundations in Tao-Klarjet'i and their incorporation into the network of K'art'velian monastic communities abroad proved instrumental. Also contributing to the cultural revival was the presiding principate (*erismt'avrobay*, ერისმთავრობა), which from 813 was administered by K'art'velised Bagratids. Towards the end of the century these Bagratids restored K'art'velian kingship and would go on to dominate the political life of Georgia for a thousand years.

The earliest surviving historiographical works were produced in this context, between ca. 790 and the accession in 813 of Ašot I. Within the span three "pre-Bagratid" narratives took shape: the anonymous *Life of the K'art'velian Kings*, the anonymous *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* and its untitled continuation traditionally attributed to a certain Juanšer Juanšeriani (although there is good reason to doubt this authorship, hence "Pseudo-Juanšer"). All are uniquely preserved within the medieval historiographical corpus K'art'lis c'xovreba.¹¹

K'art'lis c'xovreba (Initial Components)

C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a, suite traditionally ascribed to Leonti Mroveli

- 1 *The Life of the Kings*, ca. 790–813
- 2 *The Life of Nino*, ninth/tenth century
- 3 *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, after 813, perhaps by Mroveli in the mid-eleventh century

⁹ Adjustments are evident, e.g., in the V recension of Agat'angelos.

¹⁰ For the possibility of an earlier Georgian historiographical literature not reaching us, see the Epilogue. Insofar as received texts are concerned, *The Conversion* exerted tremendous influence.

¹¹ Overviews: Grigolia 1971; Lort'k'ip'anize 1989; Rapp 1997; and Rapp 2003

*C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasli*a, suite traditionally ascribed to Juanšer Juanšeriani

4 *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*, ca. 790–813

5 Untitled continuation by Ps.-Juanšer, ca. 790–813

K'art'lis c'xovreba's most ancient manuscript is a copy of its Armenian-language adaptation, called *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*. The "a" or "Arm/A" redaction (Matenadaran 1902) was produced sometime between 1274 and 1311.¹² By contrast, the oldest Georgian-language witness, the Anaseuli or "Queen Anne" redaction (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts Q-795), was created at some point between 1479 and 1495. Analyses of the surviving versions of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* have demonstrated the inclusion of as many as thirteen distinct medieval texts. Additional components were added down to the early modern period when, at the command of King Vaxtang VI, the entire corpus was comprehensively re-edited. This occurred at the turn of the seventeenth/eighteenth century.¹³ In the mid-nineteenth century pathfinding Kartvelologist M.-F. Brosset published a French translation of the Vaxtangiseuli recension under the title *Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle*. It should be noted that the well-known *Description of the Kingdom of Georgia* (Aycera samep'osa sak'art'velosa) by Vaxušti (d. 1778), illegitimate son of Vaxtang VI, essentially constitutes another late – but expanded – recension of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, hence its somewhat misleading publication under this rubric by Simon Qauxč'išvili. Because of their considerably later origin and their dependence upon earlier sources, the primary historiographical value of the Vaxtangiseuli recension of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and Vaxušti's *Description* is for the early modern epoch.

Though perhaps not known by this name, an archetype of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* may have been assembled already in the first half of the ninth century. It would have consisted of *The Life of the Kings* (probably in a longer form than has reached us), *The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer's continuation. All three were written at the end of the pre-Bagratid period and were completed by 813. Modern scholarship, however, usually acknowledges the eleventh-century Leonti Mroveli – Leonti, archbishop of Ruisi – as the author of the corpus's initial section, the tripartite suite called *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*. This suite commences with *The Life of the Kings*.¹⁴ (*The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer's untitled continuation belong to another suite titled *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasli*a). But Mroveli's association with the textual triptych has now been clarified: he was a talented editor of received narratives and perhaps the initial compiler of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* in the form we

¹² *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*'s autograph has not survived.

¹³ See especially Grigolia 1954. See also: Lort'k'ip'anize 1989, esp. "Vaxtang IV komisiis sak'mianoba", 53–66; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 22–32, and vol. 2, Excursus B, 712–728.

¹⁴ The corpus's translated title is "Life of the K'art'velian Kings". So as to minimise confusion, titles of corpora are transliterated and those of specific texts are translated.

know it today.¹⁵ At a minimum, Mroveli assembled C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a, the corpus's initial suite.

The keystone of C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a, the ca. 800 *Life of the Kings*, is entirely devoted to the pre-Christian dynastic monarchy. Ending abruptly within Mirian's reign, on the eve of the king's conversion in the 320s or 330s, it is followed by a witness of *The Life of Nino* that closely parallels the versions preserved in the manuscripts of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay. *The Life of Nino* was composed in the ninth/tenth century, well before Mroveli's *floruit*. In this case, too, the archbishop was a creative editor, not the original author. The final untitled section of C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a, which I term *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, begins with the Christian Bak'ar I (r. 363–?380) and continues to Mirdat IV (r. 409–411), whose death in Ctesiphon is the first act of the subsequent *Life of Vaxtang*. In its received state, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* was produced in the tenth or eleventh century.¹⁶ It might have been collated by Mroveli himself on the basis of existing traditions – perhaps *Royal List II* and/or a common but lost source¹⁷ – in order to bridge the irritating gap between Mirian III and Mirdat IV.¹⁸ I favour this explanation. Whatever the case, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* contains decidedly less information about the Sasanian Empire and Caucasia's active participation in the Iranian Commonwealth than the three pre-Bagrattid texts.

The Historiographical Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay

The Life of the Kings, *The Life of Vaxtang*, Ps.-Juanšer's continuation and, to a lesser extent, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* are the principal Georgian historiographical sources for the Sasanian Empire. There exist, however, four additional but significantly shorter historiographies contributing to the subject. *The Primary History of K'art'li* and three *Royal Lists* have come down to us exclusively within Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay, whose ecclesiastical elements – *The Conversion of K'art'li* and *The Life of Nino* – were examined in Part I.¹⁹ This corpus was assembled

¹⁵ Rapp 2003, 101–168. Leonti Mroveli's eleventh-century date is confirmed by epigraphical evidence: Gap'rindašvili 1961. Mroveli is also attested in two manuscripts from the eleventh/twelfth century: Rapp 2003, "The Enigma of Leonti Mroveli", 157–163, esp. 159.

¹⁶ Rapp 2003, 165–167 and 205–206. Cf. Rapp 1997, vol. 1, esp. 364–366.

¹⁷ *Royal List II* also commences with Bak'ar/Bakur.

¹⁸ Rapp 2003, 107 and 165. See further for Mroveli's manipulation of *The Life of the Kings*.

¹⁹ As noted in Part I, the four historiographical components of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay are unnamed in extant manuscripts. Divisions and titles employed here are Toumanoff's. The "pre-Christian" section of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay is missing in three of the four extant manuscripts; only the Šhatberdi Codex preserves it. In at least two cases (Čheliši Codex and Sin.Geo.N.50) the texts devoted to pre-Christian history were deliberately removed: Rapp 2003, 245–255. For the vandalism of traditions about the eponymous forefathers Hayk and K'art'los, see Rapp 2003, 169–196.

in the tenth century; its earliest manuscripts derive from this time. The compact *Primary History* and *Royal Lists* are closely related to the pre-Bagratid components of K'art'lis c'xovreba. The testimony of the former group is terse and lacks the narrative detail, refinement and, notably, the conspicuous Iranic imagery and Iranian orientation of the latter. Be that as it may, the preservation of Iranian words and proper names in the short historiographical section of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay is sometimes superior to the pre-Bagratid texts of K'art'lis c'xovreba.²⁰ As we shall see in the Epilogue, this implies a common source that was handled differently.

Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay

- 1 *The Primary History of K'art'li*, possibly seventh century, no later than ninth/tenth century
- 2 *Royal List I*, ninth/tenth century
- 3 *The Conversion of K'art'li*, first half of the seventh century
- 4 *Royal List II*, ninth/tenth century
- 5 *Royal List III*, ninth/tenth century
- 6 *The Life of Nino* (i.e., *Vita Nino*), ninth/tenth century

Whether Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's historiographical components are of greater antiquity than K'art'lis c'xovreba's pre-Bagratid texts has not been settled. There are three tenable solutions: first, the relevant components of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay abbreviate and filter the testimony of the pre-Bagratid texts in K'art'lis c'xovreba, sometimes injecting other traditions; second, *The Primary History* and *Royal Lists* served as a major source and perhaps inspiration for K'art'lis c'xovreba's pre-Bagratid works, though the latter did not blindly duplicate them; and third, both assemblages are predicated upon the same tradition, an interpretation I accept. Because Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's four historiographies were probably composed by a variety of authors working at different times, their individual relationships to the three pre-Bagratid texts may vary.

Extant manuscripts do not allow us to establish the precise relationships of the pre-Bagratid components K'art'lis c'xovreba and the historiographies of Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay. But each group preserves unique and valuable information. While their basic testimony is often harmonious, some inconsistencies are discernible. The most obvious involves P'arnavaz and Azon/Azoy. *The Life of the Kings* identifies P'arnavaz as the first monarch to rule the K'art'velians; he won the position of *mep'e* by leading a heroic insurrection against Azon, the repressive Macedonian governor appointed by Alexander the Great. Conversely, *The Primary History* and *Royal List I* describe Azoy as the son of an existing but unnamed king of the Aryan K'art'velians (i.e., eastern Georgians integrated

²⁰ See especially the publications of Bielmeier.

into/closely associated with the Achaemenid satrapies)²¹ who was installed by Alexander as the first indigenous monarch to reign from Mc'xet'a.²²

Iranic Residue: **Rudastagi*

Aside from their physical size and detail, the most profound difference between the pre-Bagratid histories of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and the historiographical compositions of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* is the socio-cultural and political framework in which the Caucasian experience is situated. On the one hand, *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* embed eastern Georgian history within that of the Iranian cultural world, even centuries after the Christianisation of the local monarchy. On the other, *The Primary History* and *Royal Lists* sometimes acknowledge in broad strokes connections with the Near East but signal neither their depth nor the implications of these bonds, thus muting Caucasia's rich Iranian heritage.

The Primary History of K'art'li, *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*'s concise initial component, commences with Alexander the Great's fictive invasion of eastern Georgia. The anonymous author understands this event to mark the advent of K'art'velian history, which he indicates by the initial word *pirvel* (პირველ), "[at] first", hence "in the beginning".²³ He ties the inception of the Mc'xet'a-based monarchy directly to Alexander, a circumstance enunciated differently in *The Life of the Kings*. Although Alexander's presence in Caucasia is not substantiated by credible literary or archaeological evidence,²⁴ his vanquishing of the Achaemenid Empire was the chief catalyst for the foundation of K'art'velian kingship at this moment.²⁵

²¹ *Royal List I*, §1, Abulaže ed., 82 = Rapp trans., 259. For Aryan K'art'li, see pp. 121–124.

²² Mamulia 1979 for the diverging perspectives of P'arnavaz's later descendants (represented in *The Life of the Kings*), in the first instance, and those of the *erist'avis* of Ožrq'e and Klarjet'i (represented in *The Primary History of K'art'li* and *Royal List I*), in the other.

²³ *Primary History of K'art'li*, §1, in Rapp 2003, 257 = Abulaže ed., 81. Similarly, *The Life of the Kings* begins *pirvelad* (პირველად): Qauxč'išvili ed., 3. So too does the *vita* of Nino in its *K'art'lis c'xovreba* recension: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 72. See also Rapp 2003, 262. Alexander appears in the Iranian epic, for which see now: Jamzadeh 2012; and Stoneman, Erickson and Netton 2012. For his Iranian image, see Shayegan 2011.

²⁴ Arrian, *Anabasis*, IV.15, for Alexander passing close to K'art'li; cf. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, IV.39. For Pharasmanēs, "king of the Chorasmians", encouraging Alexander to invade Colchis, see Arrian, *Anabasis*, IV.15.4–6. In the Classical imagination, Caucasia encompassed the region defined by the Caucasus Mountains and stretched far eastward to the Hindu Kush. See also: Braund 1994, 12, 41–42 and 141–142; Kavtarāze 2000, 187–195; and Tuite 1996b, for early connections.

²⁵ Toumanoff 1969a, 9, for "some Macedonian interference" in eastern Georgia. K'art'li was not alone; a number of other kingdoms arose on the edges of Alexander's empire.

Iran is invisible in *The Primary History*.²⁶ But this text refers to the elusive realm of Aryan (“Iranian”) K'art'li, a territory which must have been incorporated into the Achaemenid satrapies. Close scrutiny of *The Primary History* reveals another remnant of the intimate socio-linguistic connection of Iran and eastern Georgia, though one probably deriving from the Sasanian epoch:

Then [Alexander] besieged the city of Sarkine for eleven months. And he stopped on the western side of Sarkine and planted a vineyard and drew out a canal [ruy] from the K'sani [River], and he appointed people as canal overseers [meruveni] over the source[?] of the canal [dastagit'a ruysayt'a]; therefore this place is called Nastagisi.²⁷

Following the lead of the brilliant lexicographer Sulxan-Saba Orbeliani (1658–1725), scholars have typically interpreted the bizarre construction *dastagit'a ruysayt'a* (დასტაგითა რუესაიტა) as “the source/head of the canal”.²⁸ However, Roland Biellemer has corrected the customary reading to *meruveni *rudastagit'a* (მერუვენი *რუდასტაგითა), thus “... [Alexander] appointed people as canal overseers from the *rudastagi*”.²⁹ According to Biellemer, Georgian **rudastagi* renders Middle Persian *rōstāg* (var. *rōtastāk*, *rōstāk*), a Partho-Sasanian territorial unit. Significantly, *rōstāg* denotes not only “district” or “province” but also “river-bed”.³⁰ In Armenian, the term *rotastak* (ռոտաստակ) appears in Agat'angelos, Robert Thomson translating it in this instance as “capital”.³¹ In Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's *History of the Albanians*, King Vač'agan possessed a “private/royal village” named *Ėutak* (Վւտակ).³² *Ėutak* is a scribal corruption in which the original *u* (s) was confused with *ł* (w); in turn, *ł* (w) was joined with *o* (o) to become the diphthong *uo* (*u* = *o*+*w*; cf. Gk. *ou*). Later in the narrative, we meet the

²⁶ Herakleios' campaign against the Sasanians and his sacking of Ctesiphon may have influenced the inclusion/popularity of Caucasian stories about Alexander at this time. For the likening of Herakleios to Alexander in a seventh-century text from Edessa, see Reinink 1985.

²⁷ *Primary History of K'art'li*, §6, Abulaže ed., 81^{20–26} (and Šatberdi Codex, Gigineišvili and Giunašvili eds., 320^{19–22}), trans. in Biellemer 1994a, 38, cf. Rapp trans., 258: “ხოლო სარკინესა ქალაქსა ებრძოლა ათერთმეტ თთუჳ და დადგა სარკინესა დასავალით კერძო. და დასცა ვენაკი და რუდ გამოიღო ქსნიო, და დასხნა კაცნი მერუვენი დასტაგითა რუესაითა; და ჰრქუან ადგილსა მას ნასტაგისი”.

²⁸ Sulxan-Saba Orbeliani, *Sitqvis kona*, Abulaže ed. (1966), “Stagi”, 112.

²⁹ Biellemer 1994a, 38–41.

³⁰ Nyberg 1968, 114–115; Nyberg 1974, 171; MacKenzie 1986, 72 (for riverbed); and Morony 1984, 534, “riverbed, district, province, a rural subdistrict in late Sasanian administration ...”

³¹ Agat'angelos, §841, Thomson trans., 374–375, and Thomson 2010 trans., 446 (including note): *hrotastakn Ayararatean gawarin*, “*յոտաստակն Այարարատեան գաւառին*”, “the capital of the province of Ayarat”. Cf. Biellemer 1994a, 39–40.

³² Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.18, Arak'elyan ed., 51^{3–4}.

correct form when Dasxuranc'i mentions "Sargis the bishop of Rōstak" (*Սարգիս Բոստակացի եպիսկոպոս*).³³ Finally, in his rich geographical treatise Anania Širakac'i alludes to the Albanian district of Rōtēstak (*Ռոտեստակ*). Its precise location is unknown.³⁴

Bielmeier's emendation should be accepted with a caveat: the Georgian corruption implies that the meaning of **rudastagi/rōstāg* had been forgotten by the K'art'velians towards the end of Late Antiquity. The reconstructed phrase displays a definite retrojection of Sasanian-era vocabulary to earlier periods, though this does not preclude the possibility of Nastagisi/Nastakisi and its necropolis at nearby Samadlo having fallen within the authority of, say, the Achaemenid satrap of Caucasia, hence the application of an Iranian organisational term to the period of Alexander's conquest. In fact, I think these areas were comprehended within the Achaemenid satrapies, but there are no grounds to connect either the term or concept of **rudastagi* directly to the Achaemenids.

There is another interpretation, and it too highlights linguistic and social connections with Iran. Dan Shapira reads the passage: "And he struck [i.e., planted] a vineyard and drew a rivulet from K'sani and he settled [there] men to keep the *dastagird* of the brook, and they called the place Nastagisi".³⁵ In its geographical aspect Middle Persian *dast[a]gird* (*dastkirt*) denotes a "settlement" and especially a noble "estate" or "patrimony".³⁶ The Armenian equivalent is *dastakert* (*դաստակերտ*).³⁷ According to Garsoïan, "[i]n Iran, the term designated a 'royal estate' ... but in Armenia it could also be used of *naxarar* 'holdings' ... and thus emphasized the autonomy of the magnates' possessions, even when they were granted by the crown".³⁸ Dasxuranc'i uses *dastakert* in the sense of "country villa", whereas the Byzantine chronographer Theophanēs identifies the location of Xusrō II's palace as Dastagerd (Δασταγέρδ).³⁹

These signatures of the Iranian world are intentionally faint. After all, the narrow objective of *The Primary History* is to elucidate the origin of the K'art'velian crown within the breakdown of Achaemenid power. The subsequent *Royal List I*, which kicks off as a skeletal narrative and deteriorates into a simple list of names, catalogues the purportedly unbroken succession of pre-Christian

³³ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, III.8, Aṙak'elyan ed., 299.²⁰

³⁴ Anania Širakac'i, V.21 (short recension) and Hewsens's commentary, 261 (n. 163A).

³⁵ Cf. Shapira 2007a, 327–328, transliteration altered.

³⁶ For its etymology, see Skalmowski 1993. I wish to thank Touraj Daryaee for this reference. See also Morony 1984, 529, "a landed estate, often with a fortified mansion".

³⁷ Sargsyan 1968 (especially in the sense of an "estate" carved out of the physical landscape); and Schmitt 1986, 451. See also: Daryaee in *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 54–55; and Pigulevskaia 1956, 202–206.

³⁸ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, "Dastakert", 520.

³⁹ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.23, Aṙak'elyan ed., 86₁, Dowsett trans., 48; and Theophanēs, AM 6118, de Boor ed., 321–325.

kings up to Mirian III. Besides fleeting references to kings who erected idols and defensive structures, the unadorned *Royal List I* offers virtually no particulars. Like its predecessor, this text makes no effort to illuminate the cultural fabric of eastern Georgia and does not explore Caucasia's close connection to Iran.

Sasanian *Bidaxšes* in Caucasia (and the Foundation of Tp'ilisi)

Having reached us exclusively as the initial components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, *The Primary History* and *Royal List I* together give an awkward synopsis of pre-Christian K'art'velian history as background to the triumphant story of the monarchy's conversion. But the limited details contained in these sketches were not originally composed for this purpose; rather, they were surgically extracted from a lost narrative source that probably contained significant Iranian and Iranic elements. Ultimately, the "pre-Christian" section of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* establishes the antiquity of K'art'li's political culture, yet the corpus's overall message is the early and independent Christianisation of eastern Georgia's dynastic monarchy and, through it, the king's subjects.

The final historiographical components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* are devoted to the early Christian K'art'velian monarchy and push ahead to the *interregnum*. In accordance with the chronological sequence, the second and third *Royal Lists* are placed after *The Conversion of K'art'li* in the host corpus. *Royal List II*, the richer of the two, commences with Bakur I (r. 363–?380)⁴⁰ and continues through Herakleios' expedition against the Sasanian Empire, during which the emperor traversed K'art'li. It overlaps with all but the initial century of Sasanian rule and mentions several Sasanian officials and allies.

Royal List II explicitly names four *bidaxšes*: K'ram Xuar Borzard (Xuar in the Čeliši witness);⁴¹ Varaš;⁴² Borazbod;⁴³ and Varsk'en.⁴⁴ In the case of Varsk'en, the apostate husband of St Šušānik, *bidaxš* refers to the toparch of the Armeno-Georgian marchlands. But the other *bidaxšes* are Sasanian officials based in Caucasia. These imperial *bidaxšes* – like *marzbāns* – were technically appointees, but in reality the office may have passed hereditarily within particular noble houses according to Iranian custom. It is not entirely certain whether *Royal List II* has correctly identified the imperial office in question. But in Iran, Caucasia and elsewhere some high-ranking Sasanian administrators were actually styled *bidaxš* (Geo. *pitiaxš*). For example, the imperial *bidaxš* Pāpag

⁴⁰ Bak'ar in *The Life of the Kings*. His reign might have ended in 365: Toumanoff 1990, 524.

⁴¹ *Royal List II*, §4, Abulaže ed., 92₃.

⁴² For the name, see Č'xeiže 1987, 95–96.

⁴³ Čeliši gives the mutilated reading Barab: *Royal List II*, §10, Abulaže ed., 92₃₇.

⁴⁴ Unattested in Čeliši. For Varsk'en, see *Royal List II*, §17.



Figure 3.1. Sasanian silver bowl of *Bidaxš Pāpag*, second half of the third century, found at Armazis-q'evi near Mc'xet'a. The inscription adorns the back of the object.

is attested in the third-century Paikūlī inscription.⁴⁵ At the end of the same century was produced an inscribed silver bowl found in a grave at Armazis-q'evi. The object's damaged Middle Persian inscription identifies its owner within a three-generation succession of *bidaxšes*: "[The property of] Pāpag, *bidaxš*, son of Ardaxšīr, son of ... Ardaxšīr, *bidaxš*. Drachms of silver – 252 drachms".⁴⁶ These Iranian names are not known to have been current among the *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier; therefore, the inscription may pertain to imperial *bidaxšes*. In any case, there can be no question that *Royal List II* relies upon an old tradition for the late fourth- and fifth-century Sasanian officials it calls *bidaxšes*.

K'ram Xuar Borzard is connected with the extension of Sasanian power in Caucasia. Under Varaz-Bakur II (var. Varaz-Bak'ar, r. 380–394), unspecified "marzbān(s) of the king of the Iranians" entered Siwnik'. The K'art'velian monarch was forced to retreat. K'ram Xuar Borzard, the "*bidaxš* of the king of the Iranians", entered eastern Georgia and established his headquarters at the Tp'ilisi fortress.⁴⁷ From there he made tributaries of K'art'li, Somxit'i (almost certainly the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands), Siwnik' (Geo. Sivniet'i) and Vaspurakan (Geo. Guaspuragani).⁴⁸ *Royal List II* is careful to identify this Tp'ilisi-based *bidaxš* as a Sasanian official, and K'ram Xuar Borzard's name suggests an Iranian origin. If K'ram Xuar Borzard's association with a major fortress is authentic, his appointments might have included commandant, called *c'ixist'avi* in Georgian and *berdakal-hambarakapet* in Armenian.

But there is a chronological hitch. Georgian testimony places the start of Tp'ilisi's construction during the reign of Vaxtang Gorgasali (r. 447–522). If this information is substantially accurate and if K'ram Xuar Borzard is a historical figure of the late 300s, he could not have based his operations in the city we know as Tp'ilisi. We are left with three possibilities: K'ram Xuar Borzard lived at a later time; the use of the name Tp'ilisi is proleptic; or the received story of Tp'ilisi's foundation is flawed or incomplete.⁴⁹ This last explanation is intriguing,

⁴⁵ NPī, §§16 and 32, Skjærvø ed., 33 and 42. The office is also mentioned in ŠKZ, §§23ff.

⁴⁶ Harper 1974, 68–69, based on Lukonin 1961, 61. Cf. the misreading in Henning 1961. See also Soltes 1999, #105, 204–205.

⁴⁷ On the establishment of *marzbānates* in Caucasia, see p. 79. *Marzbān* and *bidaxš* were distinctive imperial posts. For Mar Qardagh's appointment as *bidaxš* and *marzbān* in Christian Iraq, see *History of Mar Qardagh*, cap. 6, Walker trans., 22. See also Walker 2006, 1 *et seq.*

⁴⁸ *Royal List II*, §§3–4, Rapp trans., 303–304. For the linkage of these areas, see also *ibid.*, §20, Rapp trans., 308. Siwnik' and Vaspurakan are not attested in the pre-Bagratid components of K'art'lis c'xovreba.

⁴⁹ Various parts of the city have been occupied at different times since the Chalcolithic/Eneolithic age. For the archaeology of Tp'ilisi/T'bilisi, see Abramišvili M. ca. 2009, a pamphlet produced for the Georgian National Museum. See also Abramišvili 2010. The oldest known archaeological remains in the environs of modern-day T'bilisi are a Chalcolithic/Eneolithic settlement (end of the fifth/start of the fourth millennium BC) exposed during construction works near the Delisi metro station. Numerous Late

for *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* positions a Sasanian fortress “between the passes of Tp’ilisi opposite the fortress of Mc’xet’a” in the late fourth century, precisely under Varaz-Bak’ar II.⁵⁰ Archaeologists have yet to identify such a fortress. Should the report be genuine we must also wonder about potential Sasanian fortifications just downriver on the Kura/Mtkuari in the strategic area that later became the K’art’velian capital Tp’ilisi. If so, Vaxtang may have elected (or been ordered by the *šāhan šāh*) to build a new capital here in part because of a Sasanian antecedent, the scope and name of which has yet to be determined.⁵¹

This raises the possibility of Vaxtang having been compelled to recognise Sasanian sovereignty. At the western end of the strategic plain of Šarwān/Širvān (mod. Azer. Şirvan) in nearby Caucasian Albania, Partaw (Geo. Bardavi) was constructed – or at least comprehensively rebuilt and enlarged – in the late fifth century under the *šāhan šāh* Pērōz, a renowned as a builder of cities.⁵² According to Movsēs Daxsuranc’i, “A great town Perozapat [< MPers. Pērōzabād] was built by Vač’ē by order of Peroz, king of Persia, and is now called Partaw”.⁵³ Sasanian *marzbāns* resided in Partaw from the early 460s.⁵⁴ Officials with this title first took up residence in Tp’ilisi around 517.⁵⁵ Together, Partaw and Tp’ilisi formed a Sasanian axis through Albania and eastern Georgia for the control of strategic

Bronze Age sites have been identified, including cemeteries at Nak’ulbak’evi and T’reli, the last of which includes extensive “royal graves” from the eighth to sixth century BC. See Abramišvili R. 1995. A first-century AD cemetery at the end of Važa-P’šavela Avenue has yielded silver bowls with Armazic inscriptions. At a minimum, then, Vaxtang and Dač’i did not build their new capital on virgin soil. Given their encroachments elsewhere in eastern Georgia we would expect the Sasanians to have established a presence at this strategic place. I wish to thank my colleague Dr Abramišvili for these references.

⁵⁰ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 136.

⁵¹ See also von Wesendonk 1924, 20.

⁵² On Partaw (Partav; Arab. Barḍa’a; mod. Azer. Bərdə), see also p. 319. The Şirvan Plain is an extension of the Mūghān Steppe reaching into northwestern Iran. Among other important cities built by Pērōz are Šahrām Pērōz in Ādūrbādagān, Rām Pērōz near Ray and Rowšan Pērōz between Gurgān and Bāb-i Šūl: Pourshariati 2008, 381.

⁵³ Movsēs Daxsuranc’i, I.15, Aṛak’elyan ed., 42₄₋₆, Dowsett trans., 25: “*Եւ ի Հրամանէ Պերոզի՝ պարսից արքայի, շինեցաւ ի Վաչէէ Պերոզապատ մեծ քաղաքն, որ այժմ կոչի Պարտաւ:*” Daxsuranc’i sometimes calls the city Peroz-Kawat (Պերոզ Կաւատ; *ibid.*, e.g., II.19, Aṛak’elyan ed., 178₂). *The Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 4–5, credits the city’s foundation to the mythical Bardos (cf. Bardavi = Partaw), son of Togarmah. Partaw became the seat of the Albanian katholicate in the mid-sixth century: Daxsuranc’i, II.4.

⁵⁴ On their domains in the sixth century, see Eremyan 1963, 120.

⁵⁵ Neither Partaw nor Tp’ilisi is attested in the list of Sasanian cities in *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*. Caucasia plays an extremely limited role in this Middle Persian source. However, a few cities in and near Ādūrbādagān are enumerated, e.g., “[t]he city of Ādūrbādagān was [built] by Ērān-Gušasp who was the general of Ādūrbādagān” (§56; Daryae in his trans. of *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 56, notes that “this may be a reference to the sacred fire-temple of Ādūr-Gušasp”) and “the city of Ganzag [i.e., Ganzak] was built by Frāsyiāk, the son of Tūr” (§58).

passes through the Caucasus Mountains. The Middle Persian *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* alludes to Wērōy-pahr, “the K'art'velian Guard”, who were entrusted with the Sasanian defence of important mountain passes.⁵⁶ What is more, the Kura/Mtkuari River flowed through K'art'li and Albania and bound the two kingdoms with a major trans-Caucasian communications and transit route.⁵⁷ Because of the strategic connection of Partaw and Tp'ilisi, and because of their commanding positions in the transitional zone between highlands and lowlands, eastern Georgia and Albania were often linked by the Sasanian government.⁵⁸ The Mihrānid prince and future Christian martyr Pīrāngušnasp, for example, was reportedly appointed *marzbān* of K'art'li and Albania by Kavād in the early sixth century.⁵⁹

That Sasanian influence over eastern Georgia was growing in this period is confirmed by the foundational inscription of Bolnisi Sioni. The construction of the basilica commenced in 478/479, the twentieth year of Pērōz's reign. This sector of eastern Georgia was under the control of the dynastic *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark' who nominally served the K'art'velian king headquartered at Mc'xet'a. But the *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands could wield a great deal of autonomy and some, like Varsk'en, freely aligned themselves with Ctesiphon.⁶⁰

Royal List II is acquainted with two additional imperial *bidaxšes*. Varaš escorted King Mirdat IV (r. 409–411) to Ctesiphon where he passed away. As is typical in received Georgian sources, Ctesiphon is called “Baghdad” (Baydadi, ბაღდადი).⁶¹ Mirdat's capture and death is reported in slightly more detail in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. According to the former, the *šāhan šāh* dispatched his “*erist'avi*” Up'rob, who detained and transferred Mirdat to Ctesiphon, where he perished.⁶² *The Life of Vaxtang* opens with Mirdat's death and a Sasanian assault upon Christian eastern Georgia.⁶³ In my view, Up'rob is Varaš. The different renderings of his name must be the result of a carelessly executed *nusxuri* manuscript in which the original *ᲕᲚᲗᲚᲕ* (Varaš) was mistaken for *ᲕᲚᲗᲚᲕ* (Up'rob). *Royal List II*'s remaining imperial *bidaxš* Borzabod

⁵⁶ *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, §18, and Daryaee's commentary, p. 54. Cf. Marquart 1931, 12. See also Bielmeier 1988, 101.

⁵⁷ Eremyan 1939. At this time, Mc'xet'a was located on two important routes: one extending east into Albania, and the other south to the Armenian Arsacid capital Artaxāt (Lat. Artaxata; *ibid.*, 81–90). There was not, however, a major road connecting eastern and western Georgia through the Surami Mountains.

⁵⁸ Georgian sources sometimes acknowledge the combination: Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 140.

⁵⁹ Following his ca. 520 conversion, Pīrāngušnasp took the Christian name Grigor. On this figure see: Goilaže 1988; and Greatrex 1998, 141.

⁶⁰ As we have seen, at least one *bidaxš*, Bakur (Gk. Bakourios), closely aligned himself with the Roman Empire. But this probably constitutes an unusual case.

⁶¹ MPers. Tisifōn; cf. Arm. Tisbon (*Տիսբոն*) and Gk. Ktēsiphōn (Κτησιφῶν).

⁶² *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 138.

⁶³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 139.

is said to have usurped the authority of the K'art'velian king Mirdat V (r. 435–447) by conferring upon the archbishop Glonok'or the military-civilian office of *erist'avi*.⁶⁴ Borazbod is described as *bidaxš* of K'art'li and Heret'i, the latter of which often designated western Albania.⁶⁵ In this manner, *Royal List II* attests the administrative linkage of K'art'li and Albania.

Political and religious tension between eastern Georgia and the Sasanian Empire is perceptible throughout *Royal List II*, its narrative culminating in the last Irano-Roman war. *Royal List II* is the first of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's* historiographical works to yield specific details about the relationship of K'art'li and Iran, but its anonymous author sheds only faint light on his realm's broader social and cultural condition.

The third *Royal List* is extremely brief and occupies just half a page in Ilia Abulaže's critical edition. It commences with the presiding prince Adarnase I (r. 627–642) and quickly regresses to a bare inventory of princes and chief prelates (*katholikoi*) of the K'art'velian Church. Other than an allusion to the Arab sacking of Ctesiphon,⁶⁶ *Royal List III* supplies no direct information about Sasanian Iran.

Divergent Vistas

Two of *K'art'lis c'xovreba's* pre-Bagratid narratives paint a radically different picture. Instead of sterile, decontextualised visions, *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* depict eastern Georgia and the whole of Caucasia as the northwestern sector of the Iranian cultural world. *The Life of the Kings* embarks not with Alexander but with the remote ethnogenesis of the major peoples of Caucasia. Most of the text, however, focuses on the history of the K'art'velian monarchy from its inception down to Mirian's conversion. Starting with its first K'art'velian *mep'e* P'arnavaz, *The Life of the Kings* routinely depicts pre-Bagratid dynasts as hero-kings governing a realm whose social structure and conventions closely resembled those of Arsacid Parthia and Sasanian Iran.

Within *K'art'lis c'xovreba* *The Life of the Kings* is followed by the hagiographical *Life of Nino* and the historiographical *Life of the Successors of Mirian*; the three texts together comprise the suite *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* assembled by Leonti Mroveli. The suite's final component, which addresses the reigns of the earliest Christian kings, was compiled much later, perhaps by Mroveli himself in the mid-eleventh century but on the basis of older materials. Significantly, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* is devoid of the Iranic imagery and Iranian context of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*, the first text of *K'art'lis c'xovreba's* second

⁶⁴ Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 276–277, for Glonok'or's connection with Mobidan, a Manichaean who infiltrated the K'art'velian ecclesiastical organisation. See also above, pp. 160–162. For bishops as Sasanian bureaucrats in the fifth century, see McDonough 2008a.

⁶⁵ *Royal List II*, §10, Rapp trans., 305.

⁶⁶ *Royal List III*, §3, Rapp trans., 311. “Baghdad” renders Ctesiphon.

suite, *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasli*. The author of *The Life of Vaxtang* casts fifth-century K'art'velian kingship and society in an Iranian mold reminiscent of *The Life of the Kings*, but he further depicts a *Christian* monarch, Vaxtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522), as a Sasanian-like hero-king. This imagery is even more remarkable when we remember that the received narrative was composed around the year 800, nearly five centuries after the initial Christianisation of the K'art'velian crown and a century and a half after the collapse of Sasanian power.

The patent Iranian flavour of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* has usually been construed as a reverberation of the high esteem Iranian epic literature enjoyed under the “Golden Age” Bagratids. This was the era of Šot'a Rust'aveli and his thirteenth-century epic poem *Vep'xistaqaosani*, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Rust'aveli's masterpiece reminds us that, in terms of social structure and mores, highborn Georgians living at the height of the Byzantinising Bagratids remained closely aligned to their counterparts in the Near and Middle East. Should we accept the customary eleventh-century attribution of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*, their association with the Iranian epic's popularity during Bagratid rule is reasonable.⁶⁷ There is, however, a better explanation. Whereas these historiographical texts were edited in the eleventh century, their original composition belongs to earlier times. Elsewhere I have confirmed the ca. 800 date advocated by Cyril Toumanoff and Michael Tarnishvili (T'arxnišvili).⁶⁸ Should the narratives – in the condition they have come down to us – belong to the late eighth/early ninth century, as I am confident they do,⁶⁹ then their Iranian and especially Sasanian-like imagery, even when fabulous and legendary, are best interpreted as expressions of an integrated Caucasia and Iran. Archaeological, linguistic and hagiographical evidence confirms the bond. In short, pre-Bagratid historiographies offer invaluable *internal* insights into the diverse Iranian world but from distinctly K'art'velian and Caucasian points of view. As such, they allow us to see the Sasanian world through “Georgian” eyes.

⁶⁷ Javaxišvili 1977, 176–194.

⁶⁸ See especially: Toumanoff 1963, 24 *et seq.*; Tarnishvili 1947, 38–42; Tarnishvili 1955, “Leonti Mroveli”, 91–94; and Rapp 1997 and 2003.

⁶⁹ Rapp 2003, 101–242. The ca. 800 date is based chiefly upon internal criteria, including sources and influences as well as toponyms and vocabulary.

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Chapter 4

The Life of the Kings

The chronological radius of *The Life of the Kings* is quite unlike any other monument of pre-modern Georgian historiography. Commencing with the remote ethnogenesis of the K'art'velians and their Caucasian neighbours, this text emphasises the history of the eastern Georgian monarchy and concludes on the threshold of King Mirian's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century. The entire source is therefore devoted to pre-Christian times. It is the only component of K'art'lis c'xovreba to take up Caucasia's "pagan" past.¹

The Life of the Kings does not allow us to construct a seamless narrative of "what really happened", a trait it shares with its pre-Bagratid companions in K'art'lis c'xovreba. But this does not detract from its historical worth. Contrary to the confident claims of specialists who afford blanket priority to Graeco-Roman sources, the selection and presentation of historical material and the way it is synthesised with legendary and mythical elements are, at a minimum, indicators of the outlooks and attitudes of K'art'velian authors. The value of pre-Bagratid historiography is yet greater. Although encrusted with legendary aspects and later embellishments, its narratives are predicated upon a reasonably solid bedrock of contemporaneous and near-contemporaneous evidence extending back to the Hellenistic epoch. Branding them as later fictions cannot be justified.²

Hybrid Origins: The *Tabula Populorum* and King Nimrod

The Life of the Kings is set in motion with the ethnogenesis of Caucasia's major peoples. This succinct account, based on an adapted biblical motif, is the only significant departure from the omnipresent Iranic tone and Iranian orientation of *The Life of the Kings*. So as to trace their origin to the earliest possible moment, the ca. 800 author³ creatively inserted the K'art'velians and their neighbours into the *tabula populorum* of Hippolytus' *Chronicle*. Back in the third century, Hippolytus of Rome had assembled an influential elaboration of

¹ Nino's *vita* engages the transition from polytheism to Christianity under King Mirian.

² Meißner 2000 and Morin 2004 for dismissive views of Georgian historiographical texts. Morin's snub is perplexing given his interest in Georgia's connection to the Iranian world.

³ Or, perhaps, an earlier source.

Genesis 10's "table of nations".⁴ By means of the Armenian adaptation of Hippolytus, which was produced no later than the first half of the seventh century, the medieval K'art'velian historian identified the K'art'velians, Armenians and other Caucasian peoples as direct descendants of Togarmah (Geo. T'argamos), Noah's great grandson through Japheth (Iap'et'i). But even here traces of the Iranic imagery deployed elsewhere in *The Life of the Kings* are discernible. Togarmah is deliberately depicted as a *gmiri* (გმირი), "hero";⁵ and his Caucasian progeny, including the eponymous forefathers Hayk (Geo. Haos) and K'art'los, were "powerful and renowned heroes" (*gmirni zlierni da saxelovanni*, გმირნი ძლიერნი და სახელოვანნი).⁶

The anomalous biblical scheme inaugurating *The Life of the Kings* is soon pierced by an Iranian personality and intensifying Iranic imagery.⁷ The reimagined tale of "the hero Nimrod, the first king of the whole world"⁸ bridges biblical and Iranian traditions. According to *The Life of the Kings*, Nimrod (Geo. Nebrot'i) was the great opponent of the primeval Caucasians. Genesis 10.8–9 describes him as "the first on earth to become a mighty warrior" and as a "mighty hunter before the Lord". In the early Georgian historiographical tradition Nimrod is a hero (*gmiri*) and king (*mep'e*) who personally engaged his enemies in single

⁴ Kekeliḡe 1955b, 1956c and 1964; and Rapp 2003, 132–142. For Caucasia in the Armenian adaptation of Hippolytus' *Chronicle*, see Ananun *žamanakagrut'iwn*, Sargissian ed., esp. 5, trans. in Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 97. For the Greek text, see Hippolytus, *Chronicle*, Helm and Bauer eds., with a Ger. trans. by J. Marquart (Markwart). I wish to thank Tom Schmidt for his kind assistance with these publications. Hippolytus' *Chronicle* was manipulated by other pre-modern Caucasian historians, including Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.1–3 (see Dowsett trans., 1–3, esp. p. 1 [fn. 1]). See also Greenwood 2008a. Bickerman 1952 explores the Greek contribution to the *origines gentium*. Doborjiniḡe 2010, an important study of the written traditions of Georgian ethnogenesis, curiously downplays the Armenian adaptation of *The Chronicle* of Hippolytus.

⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'iḡvili ed., 3₆. Thomson 1996a, 2, prefers "giant"; cf. *goliat'i* (გოლიათი). By itself the heroic imagery applied to Togarmah does not imply an Iranic context and/or origin. However, the terminology and symbolism introduced here are developed in the remainder of the work.

⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'iḡvili ed., 4₇₋₈.

⁷ A few short biblical vignettes were inserted into the post-diluvian narrative, presumably by Archbishop Leonti Mroveli in the eleventh century. Thus, we find blunt notices of Moses, Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem, and the birth of Jesus: *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'iḡvili ed., 14, 15 and 35–36.

⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'iḡvili ed., 6₇₋₈: "... ნებროტს გმირსა, რომელი იყო პირველი მეფე ყოვლისა ქუეყანისა". Cf. Thomson trans., 6. Nebrot'i is the Bēl of Armenian writers, including Movsēs Xorenac'i. Following Eusebios' *Chronicle*, Xorenac'i identifies Bēl-Nimrod as an Ethiopian: I.5, Thomson trans., 75 (and fn. 7); Xorenac'i (I.7) also equates Bēl-Nimrod with Kronos. For Nimrod, Kronos and Domjōs (a warrior and the first to rule Persia and Assyria), see John of Nikiū, V.2–4 and VI.1–3. For Nimrod as a "giant" and as the first to reign over Babylon, see Michael the Syrian, II.3, Chabot trans., 19–21. See also Payne 2012.

combat.⁹ He spoke the Persian language¹⁰ and his royal progeny, the Nebrot'ianis (ნებროთიანნი, i.e., Nimrodids), were Persians/Iranians.¹¹ The heroic Nimrod is therefore presented as an Iranian, the world's first monarch of renown and the initiator of the Iranian monarchy.¹² In some basic respects Nimrod plays the role of the Iranian epic's Kayōmart (Gayōmard), first king upon the Earth and first of the legendary Pišdādids (Pišdādīyāns).¹³

The Life of the Kings introduces Nimrod as the overlord of the eponymous founding fathers of Caucasia, including the Armenian Hayk (Geo. Haos), the K'art'velian K'art'los and the Albanians Bardos and Movakan. In his capacity of leader of the primogenitor-siblings, Hayk orchestrated a rebellion against his Iranian suzerain. Already engaged in Ādurbādagān (Geo. Adarbadagan), Nimrod dispatched sixty heroes (*gmiris*) and a powerful army against the sons of Togarmah, the T'argamosianis (თარგამოსიანნი).

[A] fierce battle took place between them, which resembled a violent [storm] in the air. For the dust of their feet was like a thick cloud; the flashing of their armour was like the lightning of the sky; the sound of their voices was like the sound of thunder. The multitude of arrows and their throwing of stones were like dense hail; and the shedding of their blood was like a stream of torrents. The struggle between them waxed strong, and the slaughter on both sides was numberless.¹⁴

⁹ Single combat is a common theme in the Iranian epic. Siyāmak, son of the first king of the world Kayōmart, was killed in single combat against a demonic opponent.

¹⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 162.

¹¹ E.g., *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 27, where a descendant of Nimrod was brought from Iran. The same text, however, makes a distinction between the Nebrot'ianis and the Caucasian branch of the Arsacids (Geo. Aršakunianni), *ibid.*, 33. "Nebrot'ianni" encompasses the Achaemenids as well as their legendary predecessors.

¹² Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.7, reports the circulation of many traditions about Nimrod/Bēl.

¹³ But unlike Kayōmart, Nimrod is not made to be the first man, for which see Daryaei 2003. Although surviving Georgian texts – especially *The Life of the Kings* – are unfamiliar with these dynastic names, they mention particular kings, including the Kayānid Key Kāvus, Geo. K'ekapos. In the ninth century, the epic Iranian king Farīdūn was associated with Nimrod (as well as Noah and Abraham) by Dīnawarī, Guirgass ed., 8.

¹⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 6₂₃–7₄ = Thomson trans., 7–8: "იქმნა მათ შორის ბრძოლა სასტიკი, რომელი ემსგავსა სასტიკებასა ჰაერისასა. რამეთუ მტვერი ფერცისა მათისა ვითარცა ღრუბელი სქელი; ეღვა აბჯრისა მათისა ვითარცა ეღვა ცისა; ჳმა პირისა მათისა ვითარცა ჳმა ქუხილისა; სიმრავლე ისართა და ტყორცა ქვისა მათისა ვითარცა სეტყუა ჳშირი, და დათხევა სისხლისა მათისა ვითარცა ლუარი სეტყუათა. განძლიერდა ბრძოლა მათ შორის, და მოსწყდა ორგნითვე ურცხვ".



Figure 4.1. Modern statue of Hayk, Erevan.

Hayk urged on his Caucasian heroes (*gmiris*). As the tide turned in their favour an enraged Nimrod led the assault upon the T'argamosianis. This Irano-Caucasian equivalent of the unrelenting struggle between archenemies Iran and Tūrān reaches its climax with the single combat waged by Nimrod and Hayk.¹⁵ In the heat of battle Hayk fired an arrow that struck Nimrod's chest with such force that it penetrated his bronze armour and erupted from his back. The first king of the world was no more.

Nimrod's ruin and the withdrawal of Iranian forces emboldened the victorious Hayk to declare himself the first king in Caucasia. Our Georgian source styles him *mep'e* (მეპე); the Armenian equivalent is *t'agawor* (թագավոր). *The Life of the Kings* thus associates the origin of monarchical authority in Caucasia with Iran and specifically with the T'argamosianis' vanquishing of Nimrod in remote Pīšdādīd and Old Testament times.

¹⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 7₁₁₋₂₄. A similar but more detailed account of the confrontation between Hayk and Bēl-Nimrod is featured in Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.10–11. On Nimrod's association with the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. ca. 1246–1206 BC), see Speiser 1958. For the hypothesis that the Nimrod of Genesis is based on the tradition preserved in Berossos (Berossus), see Gmirkin 2006, esp. 114–117.

C'xorebay sparst'a

Some – but by no means most – of the Iranian imagery permeating *The Life of the Kings* reflects the direct influence of Iranian traditions. On three occasions its ca. 800 author signals a written source he calls *C'xorebay sparst'a* (ცხოვრება სპარსთა), *The Life of the Iranians*.¹⁶ In each instance there are broad correspondences with the Iranian epic tradition, especially the lost Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag*, *The Book of Kings*,¹⁷ a living narrative blending the mythical ancient Iranian history of the *Avesta* with Sasanian traditions. *Xwadāy-nāmag* existed in at least three recensions;¹⁸ its profile and contents have been gleaned principally through Islamic texts, particularly Ferdowsī's eleventh-century *Šāhnāma*, and through a host of related narratives in Arabic and New Persian, including works by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Ya'qūbī (d. ca. 900), Bal'amī (fl. 963) and al-Tha'libī (d. 1038).¹⁹ Chronology rules out the possibility of pre-Bagratid Georgian historians having accessed any of these later compositions. Although we cannot entirely discount the influence of *Xwadāy-nāmag*'s lost Arabic translation by 'Abdullāh ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 759), *The Life of the Kings* exhibits no familiarity with Arabic sources of any kind.

The Life of the Kings embeds its initial reference to *The Life of the Iranians* in the aftermath of Nimrod's showdown with the T'argamosianis:

A certain hero [*gmiri*] named Farīdūn [Ap'ridon] became preeminent among the clans of Nimrod: "Who tied with a chain Bēvarasp [Bevrasp], lord of serpents, and fastened him on a mountain which is inaccessible for men". Such is written in *The Life of the Iranians*.²⁰

¹⁶ As a rule, late antique and medieval Georgian historians rarely acknowledge their sources, a pattern also prevailing among Armenian historians. On *C'xorebay sparst'a*, see Rapp 2003, 114–118. Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.48, refers to "books of the Persians" (*Parsic' mateank'*, *Պարսիկ մատենք*): Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 176.

¹⁷ E.g.: Ingoroqva 1939, 95–96; and Ingoroqva 1941a, 136–137. See also Melik'išvili 1959, 36. The familiarity of the Roman historian Agathias with *Xwadāy-nāmag* is explored in Cameron 1969–1970. In the eastern Georgian case, the author of *The Life of the Kings* was by no means the only historian who adapted traditions from the Iranian epic.

¹⁸ Shahbazi 1990, 208 and 215–218.

¹⁹ On *Xwadāy-nāmag* and its transmission, see, e.g.: Yarshater 1983; and Shahbazi 1990 (including its sources, pp. 209–213). See also: Pourshariati 2008; and, for the complexity of the tradition, Bonner M.R.J. 2011 and 2012. On *Xwadāy-nāmag*'s written basis, see: Omidshahar 1996; and the observations in Walker 2006, 124–125.

²⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 12₂₄–13₃, based upon Thomson trans., 16: "და გამოწნდა ნათესავთა შორის ნებროთისთა კაცი ერთი გმირი, რომლისა სახელი აფრიდონ, რომელმან შეკრა ჯაჭვითა ბევრასფი, გუელთა უფალი, და დააბა მთასა ზედა, რომელ არს კაცთ შუუვალთ. ესევეთარი წერილ არს ცხოვრებასა სპარსთასა". I have opted for "Iranians" instead of "Persians" because

Bēvarasp and Farīdūn are prominent characters in Iranian mythology. The former is the tyrannical Zahhāk, who usurped the throne with the aid of Iblis (var. Eblis), Satan. In a tradition having its distant roots in the *Avesta*, two inextricable black serpents sprouted forth from Zahhāk's shoulders, which Iblis had kissed. King Farīdūn punished the pretender by chaining him to Mt Damāvand, a massive 5600-metre volcano in Māzandarān near Ray in north-central Iran.²¹ With the exception of vague references to serpents and to Bēvarasp having been chained to an unidentified mountain, these details transmitted by Ferdowsī are absent from *The Life of the Kings*.

Movsēs Xorenac'i's *History of the Armenians* provides additional Caucasian insight into the myth of Bēvarasp.²² There, Biwrasp Aždahak is an Iranian ancestor who lived in the time of Bēl-Nimrod;²³ Dambavend is the mountain upon which Biwrasp was chained. Chronological and geographical proximity may suggest that Xorenac'i was a source of *The Life of the Kings*. But the eighth-century Armenian author incorporates numerous details, including Classical motifs, which are entirely alien to the Georgian narrative. Because there is not a single confirmed case of *The Life of the Kings*'s author appropriating material directly from Xorenac'i, these two outstanding Caucasian antiquarians must have drawn from a common pool of epic traditions – including the lost Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag* – that circulated throughout the Iranian world.²⁴ In actuality, the Georgian material is considerably older than the turn of the eighth/ninth century.

The Life of the Kings's second allusion to an Iranian source likewise anticipates the Sasanians by many centuries:

After this, a few years later, the same Key Kāvus [K'ekapos] again dispatched his grandson, the son of Siyāwaxš [Geo. Šioši] “the Fortunate”, who had been killed in Tūrān [T'urk'et'i], as is written in the book of *The Life of the Iranians*.²⁵

Key Kāvus and Siyāwaxš/Siyāwoš are well-known Kayānid (Kayānīyān) figures in the *Šāhnāma*, where they receive extended treatment. T'urk'et'i, “the land

the alleged source belongs to the Sasanian era. See further for additional analysis of this passage.

²¹ For the motif, see, e.g., Abrahamian 2006. The Armenian adaptation of *The Life of the Kings* specifies the mountain of Rayis: *Patmut' iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 17^{12–13}; Thomson trans., 16.

²² Movsēs Xorenac'i, “*Ի Պարսից ստատիկայ*”, Abelean and Yarut'iwnian eds., 89–92 = Thomson trans., “From the Fables of the Persians”, 126–128. See also: Čugaszyan 1958; and Russell 1987b, 42–43.

²³ On the connection of Bēl and Nimrod, see Payne 2012, 215.

²⁴ “Epic was the *lingua franca* of the Parthian world ...”: Russell 2001–2002, 56.

²⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 14^{21–23}, based on Thomson trans., 19: “შემდგომად ამისსა მცირედთა წელთა კუალად გამოგზავნა ამანვე ქეკაპოს ძისწული მისი, ძე შიოშ ბედნიერისა, რომელი მოიკლა თურქეთს, ვითარცა წერილ არს წიგნსა სპარსთა ცხორებისასა”. For the name Šioši, see Č'xeize 1987, 101.

of the Turks” or Turkestan, designates Iran’s chief nemesis Tūrān.²⁶ According to the *Šāhnāma*, because of the indiscretions of his stepmother, Siyāwaxš was exiled to Tūrān where he was unjustly put to death by the Tūrānian warrior-king Afrāsiyāb.

The final reference to *The Life of the Iranians* is accompanied by a prodigious temporal leap from the legendary Iranian past to the Sasanians. The interlude skips all but the very end of Parthia, precisely the sort of Arsacid neglect characterising the *Xwadāy-nāmag* and related traditions.

And in [K’art’velian king Asp’agur’s] time K’asre Anušarvan Sasaniani became king in Iran. He put an end to the Ažayaniani kings and was known as Ardašir, as is written in *The Life of the Iranians*.²⁷

The anonymous author of *The Life of the Kings* thus situates the demise of the Parthian Arsacids within the reign of Asp’agur I, the Georgian designation Ažayaniani (var. Ažyalaniani)²⁸ evoking Iranian Aškānīyān, the Ašaghān of al-Ṭabarī and other Islamic-era sources.²⁹ Asp’agur, the last K’art’velian Arsacid, actually ruled from 265 to 284, so this notice about the events of 224 has been telescoped forward by several decades. The founder of the Sasanian dynasty, correctly named Ardaxšir (var. Ardašir; Geo. Ardašir), is confused with Xusrō I Anuširwān (*anōšag-ruwān*, r. 531–579). This faulty association follows an internal logic: if in a later period all *šāhan šāhs* could be called Xuasro, as they were, then the founder of the Sasanian dynasty should be the original Xuasro, rendered here by the variant K’asre. The chronological inconsistency is a hint of the text’s provenance, as will be revealed in the Epilogue.

²⁶ “It is only with the appearance of the ‘European’ Huns ... in the mid-fourth century, however, that we may begin to speak of a genuine interaction between the Turkic peoples and the populations of Transcaucasia”: Golden 1996, 45–46. Hunnic raiders penetrated Armenia Major ca. 363.

²⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 59_{8–10}, based on Thomson trans., 70: “და ამის-ზე მეფე იქმნა სპარსეთს ქასრე ანუშარვან სასანიანი, რომელმან მოხრნა მეფენი აჟღანიან[6]ი, რომელი იცნობების არდაბირობით, ვითარცა წერილ არს ცხოვრებასა სპარსთასა”. See also *Life of the Kings*, K’art’aria, C’agareišvili and Sarjvelaže eds., 73_{4–6}. Confusion in transcribing between the *nusxuri* and *mxedruli* scripts – especially ž (ჟ) and b (ბ) – has resulted in some manuscripts reading Ardabir: *არდაბირის* versus *არაქსუნის*. Elišē’s late sixth-century Armenian history commences with the demise of the Parthian Arsacids: “*Քանզի ի բառնալ ազգին Արշակունեսաց, տիրեցին աշխարհիս Հայոց ազգն Սասանալ պարսիկ ...*”, “On the extinction of the Arsacid line [*azgin Aršakuneac*] the line of Sasan the Persian ruled over Armenia ...” (cap. 1, Tēr-Minasean ed., 6_{1–2} = Thomson trans., 60).

²⁸ Ažayanian[n]i, the correct Georgian form, in the Mariamseuli and Mc’xet’ian redactions. Anaseuli gives Ažyalanian[n]i.

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, Perlmann trans., vol. 4, 99–101.

Ažayaniani is a *hapax* in Georgian. Because *The Life of the Kings* twice uses the local form Aršakuniani (არშაკუნიანი) for acculturated Caucasian Arsacids, Ažayaniani seems to have been restricted to *Parthian* Arsacids.³⁰ With one exception, extant witnesses of early Georgian sources invariably refer to the Parthians by the generic term Sparsni (სპარსნი), “Iranians/Persians”. *The Life of Vaxtang*, however, knows Gregory the Illuminator as Grigol Part’eveli, “Grigol the Parthian”.³¹ This reflects Gregory’s descent from the Parthian Sūrēns.³² Medieval Georgian texts of the Bagratid era occasionally deploy Part’i (პართი), “Parthian”.³³ We again meet Gregory, this time as Grigol Part’eli, in the later Georgian version of his *vita*. In the same text, which is a Bagratid-era adaptation, the Parthian Arsacids are designated Aršakuniani, a word corresponding to Armenian Aršakuni (Արշակունի). It should be noted that Classical Armenian texts more commonly draw a distinction between Parthians and Persians. Xorenac’i thus writes about the “nation of the Parthians” (*azg Part’eac’*, *ազգ Պարթեաց*) and its Pahlawk’ (*Պաղաւք*) kings.³⁴

The reference to the Ažayanianis in the Georgian *Life of the Kings* may have an Armenian parallel in Koriwn’s fifth-century *vita* of Maštoc’. The *vita*’s two initial words *Azk’anazeaz azgin* (Ազքանազան ազգին) have normally been interpreted as “the Ashkenazian line/people/nation”.³⁵ After all, Jeremiah 51.27 links the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. But Ashkenaz’s explicit connection to Armenia is, so far as I am aware, not found independently in other early Armenian sources, which invariably emphasise Armenian descent from Togarmah.³⁶ While Koriwn may advance a divergent origins tradition, we should consider whether the received phrase *Azk’anazeaz azgin* is a later corruption of “Aškānīyān line/people/nation” owing in part to scribal confusion of *q* (z) and either *š* (š) or *u* (s) since the form *Ask’anaz* (Ասքանազ) is also used in Classical Armenian.³⁷ This is a possibility – albeit an unlikely one – in light of Ehišē’s deployment of the analogous formula *azgin Aršakuneac’* (ազգին Արշակունեաց), “the Arsacid line/

³⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 33₄ and 63₁₉. Aršakuniani is also found in the text’s regnal subtitles, though these appear to have been added later.

³¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 161₇. A reference to “the lands of the Parthians” (*k’ueqanani part’isani*, ქუეყანანი პართიისანი) in *The Life of the Kings* is an early-modern interpolation: Qauxč’išvili ed., 38, *apparatus criticus* for ll. 27–28.

³² Žordania 1892, 19. For Gregory’s Sūrēn lineage, see Garsoiān 1976, 10–11.

³³ The medieval Georgian version of *Vis o Rāmin* refers to the “Pahlavī language” (*p’alauri ena*, ფალაური ენა): *Visramiani*, Gvaxaria and T’odua eds., 108₆, Wardrop trans., 114.

³⁴ Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.68, Abelean and Yarut’iwnean eds., 203₁₉ and 204₃.

³⁵ Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc’*, cap. 1, Abelean ed., 22₈. See also Thomson 1980, 142.

³⁶ According to Genesis 10.3, both Togarmah and Ashkenaz were descendants of Gomer, who in turn was in the line of Japheth.

³⁷ The tenth-century Yovhannēs Drasxanakerc’i, I.6, makes the Armenians descendants of both Ashkenaz (Ask’anaz) and Togarmah.

people/nation”.³⁸ However, Koriwn’s use of the expected Aršakuni elsewhere in the *vita* may militate against it.³⁹

Finally, beyond the pages of *The Life of the Kings* but still within the pre-Bagratid section of *K’art’lis c’xovreba* we encounter an additional reference to *The Life of the Iranians*. In the account of the K’art’velian presiding prince Guaram I *kouropalatēs* (r. 588–ca. 590), Ps.-Juanšer documents the rebellion of the Mihrānid Bahrām Čōbīn against the Sasanians.⁴⁰ Čōbīn was catapulted to legendary status and came to be featured in some recensions of *Xwadāy-nāmag*. In Iranian sources of the late Sasanian era, he could even be a messianic figure.⁴¹ The ca. 800 Georgian account begins with a brief notice about the eastern campaigns of the pre-insurrection Čōbīn, who was fighting on behalf of the *šāhan šāh*:

Then there appeared in Iran a man who was called Bahrām Čōbīn [Baram Č’ubini]. He attacked the T’urk’s who had invaded Iran, as is clearly described in *The Life of the Iranians*. He killed Saba, king of the T’urk’s, and routed their army.⁴²

In 588 Bahrām Čōbīn was appointed commander of the Sasanian army. He wrested the important city of Balkh (Balk) from the Western Turks and captured Hephthalite territories in Afghanistan. Before withdrawing, Čōbīn’s troops killed the *khāqān* of the Eastern Turks.⁴³ Sasanian and affiliated traditions, including Ps.-Juanšer, identify the *khāqān* as Šāwa/Sāva/Sāba.⁴⁴ Chinese sources call him Ču-lo-hóu.⁴⁵ Ps.-Juanšer subsequently takes up Čōbīn’s insurgency against the Sasanians and reports the intervention of the Roman emperor Maurikios (Maurice, r. 582–602).

Scholars have been unable to pinpoint the source or sources that may lurk behind the various references to *The Life of the Iranians*. No cases of direct quotation or definite borrowing from known literary compositions have been identified. The most promising candidate is some variant(s) of *Xwadāy-nāmag*⁴⁶ or another

³⁸ Elišē, cap. 1, for which see p. 193 (fn. 27) *supra*.

³⁹ E.g., Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc’*, cap. 3, Abelean ed., 36.

⁴⁰ Rapp 2003, 214–215.

⁴¹ For which see especially Czeglédý 1958.

⁴² Ps.-Juanšer, *Gauxč’išvili* ed., 220_{4–6} = Thomson trans., 230: “მაშინ გამოჩნდა სპარსეთს კაცი ერთი, რომელსა ერქუა ბარამ ჩუბინი. ესე ეწყო თურქთა, სპარსეთს შემოსრულთა, ვითარცა წერილ არს განცხადებულად ცხოვრებასა სპარსთასა, მოკლა საბა, თურქთა მეფე, და აოტა ბანაკი მათი”. This passage does not appear in *Patmut’iwn Vrac’*, the medieval Armenian adaptation of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*.

⁴³ Shahbazi 2007; and Pourshariati 2008, 126. The most important Caucasian source for these events is the seventh-century Armenian history attributed to Sebēos, cap. 10; see also the commentary by James Howard-Johnston, vol. 2, 168–169.

⁴⁴ Shahbazi 2007, 520; and Czeglédý 1958, 22.

⁴⁵ Marquart 1898, 189–190.

⁴⁶ E.g., Toumanoff 1943, 171 (and fn. 37). Cf. Javaxišvili 1977, 192.

forerunner of the eleventh-century *Šāhnāma*.⁴⁷ In light of the extensive Parthian presence in Caucasia, it is altogether possible that a Parthian-manipulated recension of *Xwadāy-nāmag* was exploited through oral and/or written means. Whatever the case, there can be no doubt of the incorporation of *dramatis personae* featured in the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition into *The Life of the Kings* and its pre-Bagratid counterparts.⁴⁸ With regards to the particular Georgian reference to Ardashīr, another attractive possibility is the late Sasanian *Kārnāmag ī Ardashīr ī Pāpagān*, *The Book of the Deeds of Ardashīr, Son of Pāpag*. It is thought to derive from *Xwadāy-nāmag*.⁴⁹ However, the mere hint of an Iranian written source in *The Life of the Kings*'s brief mention of Ardashīr – whom it confuses with the later Xusrō I Anūšīrwān! – gives no reason to think that its anonymous author actually read and made use of it. Still other written sources have been proposed, including the history of al-Ṭabarī and its tenth-century Persian translation by Bal'amī. These Islamic-era works are fascinating candidates, but we possess no definitive proof of their influence or direct use.⁵⁰ At any rate, they post-date the ca. 800 composition of these pre-Bagratid texts.

One thing is certain: two pre-Bagratid historians – the anonymous author of *The Life of the Kings* and Ps.-Juanšer – sought credibility by citing a written source about Iranian history. But are these allusions to texts they knew existed, assumed to have existed or wanted us to believe to have existed? In the final analysis, we have no concrete proof of either individual having had *direct* access to a *known written* Iranian history or epic. Yet these authors were undoubtedly familiar with the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition. This is not an isolated circumstance. The author of *The Life of the Kings* similarly claims to have drawn upon a host of written sources: *The Book of the Greeks* (*Cigni beržent'a*, წიგნი ბერძენთა) for Alexander the Great;⁵¹ *The Conversion of the Greeks* (*Mok'c'evay beržent'a*, მოქცევისა ბერძენთა) for Constantine's conversion to Christianity;⁵² and *The Life of the Armenians* (*C'xorebay somext'a*, ცხორებისა სომეხთა) for Gregory the Illuminator and the conversion of King Trdat.⁵³ While narrative traditions ultimately stand behind all these

⁴⁷ A written Georgian version of *Šāhnāma* probably did not exist before the fifteenth century. This by no means precludes the possibility of Georgian familiarity through oral and other means. See: Abulaže Iu. 1916; Baramize 1934, 20–53; Baramize 1935–1936; and Kobiže 1959.

⁴⁸ See also the Epilogue.

⁴⁹ E.g., Mamulia 1964a.

⁵⁰ E.g., Gabašvili 1983, 38–40 and 45.

⁵¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 17₃₋₅. Alternately, in this case, “a book of the Greeks”.

⁵² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 69₁₇₋₂₁. Cf. *Conversion of K'art'li*, §§1–4, Abulaže ed., 83.

⁵³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 69₇₋₉. *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 84₅₋₆, also specifies *The Conversion of the Armenians* (*Mok'c'evay somext'a*, მოქცევისა სომეხთა), i.e., some version of Agat'angelos.

references – i.e., Ps.-Kallisthenēs (Callisthenes),⁵⁴ the church historians Eusebios (Eusebius) and/or Sōkratēs (Socrates) and Agat'angelos respectively – there are no indisputable cases of *direct familiarity*.

At the very least, pre-Bagratid historians – and their sources – were privy to oral versions of the Iranian epic.⁵⁵ Judging from received Georgian accounts, oral epics featuring Iran could be vague in terms of historical personages, places and events.⁵⁶ Such traditions propagated widely throughout the Caucasian arena, even among highland pastoralists. Further, the various Caucasian communities, including acculturated Parthians, did not accept the Sasanian epic wholesale: they adapted, expanded and actively contributed to it.

An important role in this dynamic process may have been played by *gōsāns*, minstrels, some of whom were the broadcasters, guardians and creators of mixed epic and historical traditions throughout the Iranian world.⁵⁷ *Gōsāns* are attested among the Armenians well into the later medieval era.⁵⁸ They are also mentioned in Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's *History of the Albanians*.⁵⁹ In the Georgian milieu, *The Life of the Kings* refers to *mgosanni glovisani* (მგოსანნი გლოვისანი), “mourning minstrels”, who sang about the deeds of P'arsman K'ueli (r. 116–132), a monarch poisoned by a cook in league with the Parthian Arsacids.⁶⁰ Another Georgian reference appears in a later interpolated account in *The Life of the Kings*. Within the reign of King Aderki (r. 1–58) is inserted a later notice about the Apostle Andrew's alleged missionary activity in what would become western Georgia.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Ps.-Kallisthenēs is extant in an Armenian variant, but it is not the source of the Georgian tradition.

⁵⁵ See below for the elusive *Book of Nimrod*, another possible Iranian/Iranic source.

⁵⁶ This and other evidence flies in the face of persistent claims of a firm civilisational boundary demarcating the pastoralists/nomads of the north and the sedentary populations of the south. Cf. T'op'č'išvili 2011.

⁵⁷ Boyce 1957. See also Rapp 2003, 116–117. There were other professionals in the commonwealth associated with the creation and transmission of epic traditions, including *šāhnāma xwān*, readers of the *Šāhnāma*, who are attested in the Ghaznavid era and later. See Omidšalar 1996, 238.

⁵⁸ Russell 1987a, esp. 1–13. Dowsett in Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, 52 (fn. 3), for ecclesiastical ordinances forbidding the songs of *gōsāns* who belonged to the entourages of princes seeking sanctuary in Armenian monasteries.

⁵⁹ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.26, Aṛak'elyan ed., 92₅₋₇, where “*gusans*” feature in King Vač'agan's canons of Aluēn regulating clergy-layman relations.

⁶⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 53₁₀. See also Ingoroqva 1941a, 94–103.

⁶¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 37–38₂₂, 39–42₁₃, and 42₁₈–43₈ = Thomson trans., 354–359. The Georgian-language source of this story, *The Wanderings of St Andrew*, probably belongs to the eleventh century. However, Georgian tales about Andrew's missionary activity are somewhat older, e.g., in the tenth-century Klarjet'ian *mravalt'avi*: cap. 46, Mgaloblišvili ed., 387 (for Andrew's supposed proselytising along the coast of the Black Sea in what would become western Georgia). Dvornik 1958 remains the essential study of the Andrew legend in the Eastern Christendom. On the Georgian version, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 372–382, esp. 377. Cf. Ličeli 1998. *The Wanderings of Andrew* was rendered into

Andrew chanced upon the settlement of Acqueri (mod. Acqveri) where he found a “pagan” temple managed by the widow Samjivari. Her son unexpectedly died and Samjivari begged for the apostle’s intercession. Andrew dispersed all the people including the *gōsāns* (*mgosnebi*, მგოსნები),⁶² rendered “wailers” by translator Robert Thomson.⁶³ Through the apostle’s prayers the boy was rescued from death. Additional medieval Georgian references to *gōsāns* are encountered in the Iranic epic poetry popular at the Bagratid court from the late eleventh century onward, including Rust’aveli’s *Vep’xistqaosani* as well as *Abdulmesiani*, often attributed to Ioane Šavt’eli.⁶⁴

Although we are only beginning to understand the synergy of Caucasian oral and written traditions in Late Antiquity, some hints of their intersection have come to light. Certain passages in pre-Bagratid historiographies show signs of having been composed originally in verse.⁶⁵ At least some of these may be vestiges of a lyrical tradition once broadcast by *gōsāns*, whose songs evolved throughout Parthian Arsacid, Sasanian and post-Sasanian times.⁶⁶

Sasanian Antecedents: Ancient Iran

As *The Life of the Kings* transitions from Nimrod’s demise to the pre-Christian history of the eastern Georgian monarchy, the thin biblical scaffolding rapidly gives way to a sturdy and highly visible Iranic scheme incorporating vignettes and personalities from the Iranian epic. Like other early Georgian sources, it fuses pre-Achaemenid (e.g., Pīšdādīd and Kayānīd), Achaemenid Persian

Georgian by the famous Athonite Ep’t’wme (Gk. Euthymios; Lat. Euthymius), *hēgoumenos* of the Ivērōn monastery from 1005 to 1019. His successor Giorgi Mt’acmideli (Ivērōn’s *hēgoumenos* from 1044 until 1056) used this tract against the jurisdictional claims of the patriarchate of Antioch. Substantially later, in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, *The Wanderings* was inserted into the P’alavandišviliseuli (P) and Barat’ašviliseuli (b) manuscripts of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*’s Vaxtangiseuli recension. It does not appear in any of the oldest, pre-Vaxtangiseuli exemplars. Based on the early-modern Vaxtangiseuli recension, the pioneering text and Fr. trans. of M.-F. Brosset incorporate the interpolated passages: Brosset 1849, 53–63.

⁶² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 40₂₅.

⁶³ Thomson 1996a, 357.

⁶⁴ E.g., Ioane Šavt’eli, *Abdulmesiani*, 44.4 and 101.2, Lolašvili ed., 131 and 150. See also: Axvlediani 1990, 57–51; Axvlediani 1974, 92; and Axvlediani 1977. Minstrels are featured in *Vis o Rāmin*, including its medieval Georgian version. For “singers and minstrels” (*mutribt’a da mgosant’a*, მუტრიბთა და მგოსანთა), see *Visramiani*, Gvaxaria and T’odua eds., 45₃₅, Wardrop trans., 21. Vaxušti reports singers at the court of Erekle II in the mid-eighteenth century, for which see Dowsett 1997, 19.

⁶⁵ Ingoroqva 1954, 726–729; and Ingoroqva 1941a, 94–103. See also Rapp 2009, 665.

⁶⁶ Epic traditions could be constructed as verse, prose or a combination of the two: Omidasalar 1996, 239.

(including Kayānid),⁶⁷ Parthian Arsacid and Sasanian history into a linear “Iranian/Persian” experience. All these diverse polities are designated Sparset’i (სპარსეთი), “the land of the Iranians/Persians”.⁶⁸ Throughout *The Life of the Kings* this uniform and continuous Iranian experience is inseparable from the Iranic imagery ubiquitously applied to Caucasia.

While it is difficult to correlate any of *The Life of the Kings*’s passages with specific and independently verifiable episodes, the historical trends, social institutions and royal imagery they divulge are historical enough – and all of these are connected to the Iranian world. One of the text’s underlying themes, introduced already with Hayk’s defeat of Nimrod, is the tension arising from the close socio-cultural and political affinities of Caucasia and the Iranian imperial centre, on the one hand, and manoeuvrings towards Caucasian autonomy, on the other. Such tensions sometimes broke into the open. When lives were lost, the victims pursued vengeance.⁶⁹ More broadly, the author connects pivotal moments in Caucasian history with swings in Iranian political fortunes. The K’art’velians and their neighbours sought to capitalise upon moments of Iranian political turmoil or military weakness. For example, *The Life of the Kings* directly ties the enthronement of the first K’art’velian king P’arnavaz to Alexander’s defeat of the Achaemenids. While any immediate connection of K’art’li and Alexander is fantastical, there can be no question of the profound effect Hellenistic transformations had upon Caucasia. And in light of the totality of literary and archaeological evidence, we must accept the reported creation of K’art’velian kingship in the early Hellenistic age. The genesis of royal authority in Armenia and K’art’li was, according to *The Life of the Kings*, intimately bound to Iran. Though Hayk’s ascension to royal status is unadulterated legend, it is based on the valid understanding that Armenian kingship was an old one preceding the K’art’velian. For its part, the tale about P’arnavaz enshrines the reality of the K’art’velian kingdom’s establishment after the collapse of the Achaemenid administration and the satrapy of Armina, which extended over much of southern Caucasia.⁷⁰

Prior to Alexander’s fictive invasion, *The Life of the Kings* communicates the rise of Mc’xet’a, the future royal capital, as well as the casting of “Khazar” (Geo.

⁶⁷ *The Life of the Kings* displays no knowledge of the historical Great Kings of Achaemenid Persia. However, a list of Achaemenid rulers is found in the excerpts of the Georgian adaptation of Hippolytus’ *Chronicle* preserved in the tenth-century Šatberdi Codex: Gigineišvili and Giunašvili eds., “Mep’eni sparst’ani”, 199₁₇–200₇. But this source was never integrated into the Georgian historiographical canon.

⁶⁸ *Sparsuli* (სპარსული) is the adjectival form. With few exceptions, Alexander’s empire, Pontos and the Roman and then Byzantine Empires are similarly subsumed under the rubric “Greece”, *Saberznet’i* (საბერძნეთი).

⁶⁹ Rapp 2009, 672–673.

⁷⁰ Pushing ahead in time to the end of the sixth century, yet another Iranian dynasty, the Sasanian, suppressed K’art’velian royal authority.

Xazari) dominion over the Caucasian T'argamosianis.⁷¹ The latter assertion should not be understood literally, for it constitutes an oblique acknowledgement of the antagonisms between the sedentary population of southern Caucasia and pastoralist highlanders/nomadic invaders. In this manner, nomadic and semi-nomadic elements have been subsumed under the anachronistic “Khazar”.⁷² Should he have a particular group in mind, the author may intend the Scythians who penetrated the basin of the Kura/Mtkuari River ahead of Darius' counterattack in 513/512 BC. This campaign brought Achaemenid Persia into direct and regular contact with Caucasia.⁷³ But “Khazar” might represent other nomadic groups, too, such as Cimmerians and Sarmatians. Whatever is meant by the ethnonym, “Khazar” supremacy was soon challenged by a resurgent Iran.

From then on the Iranians, the descendants of Nimrod, gained strength on the East. A certain hero, named Farīdūn [Ap'ridon], became preeminent among the clans of Nimrod: “Who tied with a chain Bēvarasp [Bevrasp'], lord of serpents, and fastened him on a mountain which is inaccessible for men”. Such is written in *The Life of the Iranians*. Farīdūn ruled over the whole land of the Iranians. To some lands he dispatched *erist'avis*, his agents [*q'eladni*], and other lands he made tributary. He sent off with a large army his *erist'avi* who was called Ardavān [Ardam], a descendant of Nimrod. He came to K'art'li, destroyed all the cities and fortresses of K'art'li. And he killed as many Khazars as he found in K'art'li.⁷⁴

⁷¹ In the Iranian epic, “Khazars” are mentioned during the reigns of Hormizd IV and Xusrō II. These, too, may be anachronistic: Henning 1952, 504–505. Although the Khazars are anachronistic for the Hellenistic period they were prominent actors in the time of the ca. 800 author, for which see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 106–107. For an overview of the literature and sources on Khazar origins, see Golden 2007, esp. 52–57. Historical relations of Caucasia and the Khazars are surveyed in Golden 1996, 49–53. Shapira 2007a investigates the Khazars and their image in medieval Georgian and Armenian literature. For Iranian sources, see also: Czeglédy 1960; and Shapira 2007b.

⁷² See also Anč'abaže 1993.

⁷³ Jacobs 2000. For Scythian influences, see Maisuradze B. and Pirtskhalava 2004. On Scythians, Cimmerians and Sarmatians, see also Rostovtzeff 1922.

⁷⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 12₂₃–13₈, Thomson trans., 16: “ხოლო მიერიოგან განძიორდეს სპარსნი მიერ შიხის აღმოსავლითგან, ნათესავნი ნებროთისნი. და გამოჩნდა ნათესავთა შორის ნებროთისთა კაცი ერთი გმირი, რომლისა სახელი აფრიდონ, რომელმან შეკრა ჯაჭვითა ბევრასვი, გუელთა უფალი, და დააბა მთასა ზედა, რომელ არს კაცთ შეუვალიო. ესევეთარი წერილ არს ცხოველებასა სპარსთასა. აფრიდონ ეუფლა ყოველსა ქუეყანასა სპარსთასა: ხოლო რომელთამე ქუეყანათა შეგზავნა ერისთავნი, კვლადნი მისნი, და რომელიმე ქუეყანა მოხარკე ეყო. ამან წარმოგზავნა ერისთავი თჳსი სპითა დიდითა, რომელსა სახელი ერქუა არდამ, შვილი ნებროთის ნათესავთა. მოვიდა ქართლად და შემუსრნა ყოველნი ქალაქნი და ციხენი ქართლისანი. და მოსრა ყოველი რაოდენი ხაზარი პოვა ქართლსა შინა”.

The Iranian general Ardavān (Ardawān; Geo. Ardam) is described as an *erist'avi*, an office in late antique and medieval Georgia held by the civilian and military leader of a district who was under royal authority.⁷⁵ In this case, however, *erist'avi* is applied in an Iranian context. The equivalent Iranian terminology is uncertain, although *erist'avi* may intend “general” and nothing more. Because *erist'avi* could also designate *marzbān* and *bidaxš* (Geo. *pitiaxši*) in Sasanian frameworks, viceroy, toparch, marcher-lord and even satrap are viable candidates.⁷⁶ *The Life of the Kings* credits this Ardavān with building Darubandi (დარუბანდი), the fortified city of Darband in northeastern Caucasia, in what is now Dagestan.⁷⁷ He also encircled Mc'xet'a and the adjacent Armazi fortress with a mortared stone wall, thus introducing the K'art'velians to mortaring techniques.⁷⁸ This tradition may echo a genuine historical phenomenon: archaeological evidence suggests the popularisation in eastern Georgia of sophisticated, large-scale construction with regular mud bricks, recesses and masonry in and around the Achaemenid era.⁷⁹ The most impressive demonstration of these architectural advancements is the great hall at Gumbat'i in Kaxet'i's Alazani Valley. This Achaemenid-like structure belongs to the fifth or fourth century BC.⁸⁰

The Life of the Kings subsequently imparts Farīdūn's parcelling of Iran among his three sons. Iran and K'art'li were entrusted to Īrāj (var. Erēch/Erēz; Geo. Iared). This symbolic linkage is an audacious pronouncement of K'art'li's ancient Iranian heritage. But the prestige-enhancing connection of eastern Georgia and Iran does not emanate from any *Iranian* elaboration of *Xwadāy-nāmag*. Notwithstanding, Īrāj was murdered by his two brothers and in the ensuing turmoil the K'art'velians joined with the Alans (Geo. Ovsis) of northern Caucasia and rebelled against the Iranians.⁸¹

Key Kāvus (Geo. K'ekapos) led the Iranian recovery but was bogged down by complications in Caucasia: he was blinded by a spell cast by a sorcerer (*kac'i mgrznebeli*, კაცი მგრძნებელი) in Leket'i, an area today falling within Dagestan. As a result, the Iranian king was prevented from entering. Upon his retreat Key Kāvus' eyesight was restored and the Iranians successfully reasserted supremacy over eastern Georgia. Later, when the Iranians and Tūrānians (Geo. T'urk'ni) met on the battlefield, the K'art'velians and Armenians staged yet

⁷⁵ See below, pp. 210–212.

⁷⁶ Toumanoff 1956, 416–417.

⁷⁷ Gadjeiev 2008, for the famous Sasanian fortress and wall – “the Great Caucasian Wall” – at Darband, dating to 568–569. Another Sasanian defensive wall in northeastern Azerbaijan stretched from the fortress of Çırax-qala to the Caspian Sea, for which see pp. 136–137.

⁷⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 13.

⁷⁹ Knauss 2006, 95.

⁸⁰ On Gumbat'i see pp. 24–25 and 123.

⁸¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 13–14. The forging of alliances between peoples in northern and southern Caucasia is noted by Strabōn, XI.4.5. For the Alans, see: Alemany 2000 and 2003; Miller 2004; and Bachrach 1973.

another insurrection. After a few years Key Kāvus dispatched his son Farīburz (Geo. P'araborot) to punish the rebels, but Farīburz and his men were soundly beaten in Ādurbādagān. Key Kāvus then charged his grandson Key Xusrō (Geo. K'aixosro), son of Siyāwaxš (var. Siyāwoš; Geo. Šioši *bednieri*, “the Fortunate”), with reining in the treacherous Caucasians. Key Xusrō subdued all the fortresses and cities, and installed Iranian generals/administrators (*erist'avis*). He also “built in Ādurbādagān a house of prayer of their religion ...”,⁸² a tip of the hat to the Mazdean significance of Ādurbādagān and perhaps an anachronous reference to the Sasanian-era Zoroastrian sacred fire of Ādur Gušnasp at Taxt-e Solaymān, not far from the city of Ganzak.⁸³

The newly enthroned Key Xusrō was determined to avenge his father who – according to *The Life of the Kings* and its source, C'xorebay sparst'a – had fallen on the battlefield in Tūrān (Geo. T'urk'et'i).⁸⁴ The king declared war on the Tūrānians, and on cue the Armenians and K'art'velians banded together, went into revolt and murdered local Iranian officials. Meanwhile, twenty-eight Tūrānian families, having been vanquished by Key Xusrō, crossed the Sea of Gurgan (the Caspian Sea)⁸⁵ and trekked up the Kura/Mtkuari River. Traversing what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan, they entered eastern Georgia. The Tūrānian emigrants came to terms with Mc'xet'a's custodian, the *mamasaxlisi* (lit. “father of the house”), who dispersed them among eastern Georgia's principal settlements. Many were concentrated on a site in the western environs of Mc'xet'a that came to be called Sarkine, “the place of iron”.⁸⁶ The K'art'velians strengthened their hand by befriending other prospective allies from Anatolia/Pontos⁸⁷ (Geo. Saberznet'i, “Greece”), Syria/Mesopotamia (Asuret'i) and northern Caucasia (Xazaret'i, “Khazaria”, probably Scythia and the plains north of Caucasia).

Years passed and the Iranian king Wištāsp (var. Vištasp/Guštasp; Geo. Vaštašab) aimed to pacify Caucasia once and for all. His son Spanddād (Geo. Spandiat-Rvali; NPers. Isfandiyyār)⁸⁸ – “a giant and a [man of] renown” (*goliat'i igi da saxelovani*, გოლიათი იგი და სახელოვანი) – crossed into Ādurbādagān and prepared for imminent attack. But news suddenly arrived of his grandfather's

⁸² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 15; “... აღაშენა ადარბადაგანს სახლი სალოცავი სჯულისა მათისა ...”

⁸³ See pp. 49–51 and 94–99.

⁸⁴ The memory of Key Xusrō (K'aixosro) is briefly evoked in the twelfth-century *Life of King of Kings Davit'*, cap. 48, Šaniže ed., 185₁₀, Šaniže ed. (Metreveli general ed.), 320₁₉, Thomson trans., 329.

⁸⁵ For the Caspian as the “Western Sea” (*arewmteay cov*, *აჲრემთეაჲ ღოჲ*), which imparts a Parthian point of view, see Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.8, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 29₃, and Thomson trans., 82 (fn. 4).

⁸⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 15. Sarkine < *rkina* (რკინა), “iron”. *Sa- ... -o/e* is a standard geographical circumfix (e.g., Sak'art'velo).

⁸⁷ The full range of Caucasia's cross-cultural dialogue with the Iranic kingdom of Pontos, established in the third century BC, has yet to be revealed.

⁸⁸ On this name, see Schmitt 1986, 457.

death during the latest Tūrānian invasion and the Caucasian campaign came to an untimely end. However, Spanddād's son and successor, Bahrām (Geo. Baram), “who was called Ardašīr [i.e., Ardaxšīr; Geo. Ardašīr]”,⁸⁹ consolidated Iranian authority by conquering Babylon and Syria. During his reign the Iranians imposed tribute upon the Greeks (Geo. Berzenni), “Romans” (Geo. Hromni) and K'art'velians.⁹⁰

At this juncture *The Life of the Kings* turns its attention to Alexander the Great. Caucasia was never breached by Alexander and his troops, yet the “world conqueror” plays a critical role in this tradition. The generally positive portrayal of Alexander in received Georgian texts owes something to the early Parthian Arsacids, who, in the words of M. Rahin Shayegan, “claimed simultaneously the double heritage of Alexander and the Seleucids, as well as that of Cyrus and the Achaemenids”.⁹¹ According to the ca. 800 author, Alexander made his way to the isthmus – presumably after the conquest of Persepolis – and marched into eastern Georgia. He found “pagan” K'art'velians called “Bunturks” (Bunt'urk'ni, ბუნტურქნი)⁹² and “Qipchaqs/Kipchaks” (Qivč'aqni, ყიფჩაყნი)⁹³ living in a despicable manner. The historian is adamant about Alexander's “civilising” mission in K'art'li.⁹⁴ First, Alexander instituted a uniform polytheism based upon the veneration of the Sun, Moon, the “five stars” (the five brightest planets in the night sky) and the Creator of the universe.⁹⁵ Second, he homogenised the cultural-linguistic landscape of eastern Georgia by force of arms: “He slaughtered all the mingled tribes living in K'art'li; he also slew or took captive all the foreign tribes ...”⁹⁶ Finally, the advent of the K'art'velian monarchy is directly tied to Alexander's victory over Achaemenid Persia. As presented, P'arnavaz's rise hinged upon the toppling of the Macedonian Azon, the harsh and idolatrous viceroy of K'art'li. Azon was Alexander's kinsman and had been personally appointed by him. While this account is impregnated with legend, it is of immense historical value for its later attempt to explain and fix concretely in time several critical events of the Hellenistic era. K'art'velian kingship based

⁸⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 16₁₈: “რომელი იცნობების არდაშირობით [ardašīrobit]”.

⁹⁰ Correcting Rapp 2009, 655.

⁹¹ Shayegan 2011, 306.

⁹² Also called Sarkinelni, apparently the Tūrānians who resettled at Sarkine in K'art'li under Key Xusrō. For the Bunt'urk's and the Iranic basis of the prefix *bun-*, see p. 133.

⁹³ Another blatant anachronism. For the historical Qipčaq and Georgia, see: Golden 1984; and Bíró 1973.

⁹⁴ This image might be connected to the memory of Herakleios' activities in southern Caucasia.

⁹⁵ Cf. the Zoroastrian *Book of Arda Viraf* for Alexander planting “the seeds of doubt in men's minds regarding religious matters”: Jamzadeh 2012, 179.

⁹⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 18₁₅₋₁₆ = Thomson trans., 25: “დაიპერა ალექსანდრე ყოველი ქართლი, და მოსრნა ყოველნი იგი ნათესავნი ადრეულნი ქართლს მყოფნი, და უცხონი იგი ნათესავნი მოსრნა და დაატყუენა ...”

at Mc'xet'a was established in the epoch of Alexander, but the details presented in *The Life of the Kings* are dubious in terms of what actually happened.

P'arnavaz and the Establishment of K'art'velian Kingship

When the royalist authors of the oldest surviving Georgian historiographical works took up their pens at the turn of the eighth/ninth century, they were faced with a paradox: K'art'li had a long and opulent history, yet much of that history had been forgotten. Received local sources devoted to the K'art'velian kings were uneven in coverage. Selectively salvaging elements that would advance their historiographical aims, these pre-Bagratid historians were producing memory as much as they were preserving it. At the same time, they went about their task in a deliberate way. One of their aims was the insertion of the K'art'velians and especially their dynastic monarchs into established Eurasian traditions. The enduring cosmopolitan and cross-cultural condition of eastern Georgia and Caucasia was obvious enough, so it seemed natural to link the region to the prestigious personalities of Near Eastern antiquity, including Noah (through Togarmah), Nimrod and Alexander. Despite this background and purpose, *The Life of the Kings* and its pre-Bagratid companions in *K'art'lis c'xovreba* cannot be dismissed as medieval fictions.⁹⁷ At a minimum, they are based upon a remarkably sound sequence of K'art'velian kings, many of whom are attested in non-Georgian literary and epigraphical sources, including Greek and Latin texts as well as Roman and Sasanian inscriptions and even fragments of Manichaean manuscripts.⁹⁸ What is more, received pre-Bagratid historiographies are squarely built upon an earlier K'art'velian historiographical tradition that had once existed in written form. The principal lost source is discussed in the Epilogue.

As noted, the backbone of *The Life of the Kings* is an (allegedly) uninterrupted procession of Iranic pre-Christian kings from the foundation of the eastern Georgian monarchy in early Hellenistic times to the conversion of Mirian, an event that occurred perhaps in 326 and no later than 337. Its concluding pages therefore overlap with the early Sasanian enterprise. Except for its initial origins account, *The Life of the Kings* is wholly conceived within an Iranian framework. What is more, the text's vocabulary, imagery and personalities have been projected through Sasanian and post-Sasanian filters, even for eras pre-dating Ardashīr's enthronement. Chief among this imagery is the routine depiction of pre-Christian K'art'velian monarchs as Sasanian-like hero-kings. As is typical of surviving pre-Islamic Iranian traditions, the Sasanians enjoy a privileged position while the Parthian Arsacids are nearly

⁹⁷ Cf. Braund 1994, 2 (fn. 2).

⁹⁸ E.g.: Melik'išvili 1959 and 1999a–d; Toumanoff 1963, 1969 and 1990; and Braund 1994.

invisible, and this despite the successful implantation of royal Arsacid branches and other aristocratic Parthian families in Caucasia's three kingdoms.⁹⁹

The Life of the Kings affords extended treatment to its first K'art'velian monarch P'arnavaz (r. 299–234 BC).¹⁰⁰ Speculation has swirled around the possible absorption into the received text of an earlier narrative devoted to this towering figure. Such notions have been fuelled by the subtitle *C'xovrebay p'arnavazisi* (ცხოვრებაჲ ფარნავაზისი), *The Life of P'arnavaz*, prefacing the account in some Georgian-language variants, especially those of the early modern Vaxtangiseuli recension. The thematic and syntactical uniformity of the passages describing P'arnavaz and the remainder of *The Life of the Kings* militates against the incorporation of a stand-alone *Life of P'arnavaz*. The spelling *c'xovreba[y]* instead of archaic *c'xorebay* in surviving manuscripts implies a later insertion.¹⁰¹ Beyond question is the received account's repackaging of older traditions about P'arnavaz, as remnants of verse revealed by Pavle Ingoroqva indicate.¹⁰²

The saga of P'arnavaz reads as though it has been ripped from the Iranian epic.¹⁰³ The introduction of the king-to-be establishes his auspicious pedigree: P'arnavaz was, we are assured, the direct descendant of the two most important eponymous forebears of the eastern Georgians: K'art'los and his son Mc'xet'os. More immediately, P'arnavaz's paternal uncle Samar was *mamasaxlisi* (custodian) of Mc'xet'a. Both Samar and P'arnavaz's unnamed (!)¹⁰⁴ father are said to have lost their lives resisting Alexander's assault. After their deaths, P'arnavaz's unnamed mother, "a Persian from Spahān [i.e., Isfahān]" (*sparsi aspaneli*, სპარსი ასპანელი),¹⁰⁵ spirited away the boy, then aged three, and found safe haven in the Caucasus Mountains. Once P'arnavaz attained adulthood, he daringly

⁹⁹ In part this is the result of the rivalry between acculturated Arsacids and Mihrānids.

¹⁰⁰ Rapp 2009, 668–671.

¹⁰¹ See also *Life of the Kings*, K'avt'aria, C'agareišvili and Sarjvelaże eds., 40₁₋₂. Several of the earliest redactions (i.e., Anaseuli, Mc'xet'ian and Čalašviliseuli) are defective for *The Life of the Kings* and are missing the leaves that might have contained the subtitle. The medieval Armenian adaptation also lacks the subtitle. On the possibility of a separate *Life of P'arnavaz*, see: Baramiže R. 1987 and 1992; and Tchanturia 2000.

¹⁰² Ingoroqva 1954, 726–729; Ingoroqva 1941, 94–103; and Rapp 2009, 665.

¹⁰³ *Life of the Kings*, Gauxč'išvili ed., 20₁₅–26₁₁ = Thomson trans., 28–38.

¹⁰⁴ The naming of P'arnavaz's uncle but not father might reflect the competing tradition enshrined in *The Primary History of K'art'li* and *Royal List I*. In those texts P'arnavaz's father is not mentioned, though he may be Azoy, king of Aryan K'art'li. If this alternate view of Azoy is essentially accurate, then *The Life of the Kings* may have vilified P'arnavaz's father by transforming him into the bloodthirsty Macedonian Azon. But why the denigration would have been necessary is unclear. All this is reminiscent of the confusion of Ardaxšīr's genealogy in received Persian and Arabic texts.

¹⁰⁵ *Aspahaneč'woy* (Ասպահանեչույ) in the Armenian adaptation: *Life of the Kings* in *Patmut' iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 29₁. Aspaani appears in *Visramiani*, e.g., *Visramiani*, Gvaxaria and T'odua eds., 33₅, Wardrop trans., 1. For adjectival *aspaanelni*, see *Visramiani*, Gvaxaria and T'odua eds., 35₁₁. For Spahān in *Vis o Rāmin*, see Minorsky 1946–1947, 29.



Figure 4.2. Modern statue of P'arnavaz, T'bilisi.

returned to Mc'xet'a. Word of P'arnavaz's talents reached Azon, the tyrannical Macedonian governor based in the city. P'arnavaz had grown into "an intelligent man [*kac'i gonieri*], an enterprising mounted warrior [*mq'edari šemmart'ebeli*], and a skillful hunter [*monadire q'elovani*] ..." ¹⁰⁶ Fearing the worst, P'arnavaz's mother urged her son to seek asylum with her brothers in Spahān, far beyond Azon's reach. The future king begrudgingly consented, though he lamented the "misfortune" (*čiri*, ჭირი) of abandoning the "domain of his fathers" (*saqop'elsa mamat'a mist'asa*, საყოფელსა მამათა მისთასა).

P'arnavaz's looming departure was derailed by a fateful dream (*sizmari*, სიზმარი). The young man envisioned himself inside a vacant hall (*saxli*, სახლი, also "house") that he could not leave.

Then a ray of sunlight [*šuk'i mzisa*] entered the window and seized him around the waist; it drew him up and brought him out the window. When he had come out into the field, he saw the Sun bending down. He stretched out his hand, wiped the dew off the Sun's face, and anointed his own face. P'arnavaz awoke, was astonished, and said: "The dream means that I should go to Spahān [i.e., Isfahān], and there I shall find good [fortune] [*ket'ili*]" ¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 21₁₋₂: "ხოლო ესე ფარნავაზ იყო კაცი გონიერი, მკედარი შემმართველი და მონადირე ჯელოვანი ..." In Late Antiquity, *mq'edari* (mod. *mxedari*) conveyed the sense of "mounted warrior", but in the medieval period it could denote "soldier": Tarnishvili 1947, 39–40; and Rapp 2003, 145–146 (esp. fn. 166).

¹⁰⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 21₁₃₋₁₇ = Thomson trans., 29–30: "მაშინ შემოვიდა სარკუმელსა მისსა შუქი მზისა და მოერტყა წელთა მისთა, და განიზიდა

Afterwards P'arnavaz went hunting alone on the Diyomi Plain. He shot a deer with an arrow and pursued the wounded animal to the foot of a cliff. The darkness of evening was falling, so P'arnavaz pitched camp. On that spot he discovered a cave whose mouth had been concealed aeons ago. When a storm unexpectedly bore down, the young man cut through its obstructed entrance with his axe. Inside, to his astonishment, he feasted his eyes upon an incomprehensible cache of gold and silver.¹⁰⁸ Over the course of five nights, P'arnavaz, his mother and his two sisters collected the treasure and plotted a new course of action.¹⁰⁹ Escape to Iran was abandoned. P'arnavaz pledged to oust Azon and to take his rightful place at the helm of K'art'li.

With his newfound wealth, the charismatic P'arnavaz mobilised an army and forged an alliance with the nobleman K'uji,¹¹⁰ to whom he later entrusted Egrisi in western Georgia. Along with the support of the Egrisians, the king-to-be secured as allies the Alans/Ovisis and Leks of northern Caucasia. A thousand élite “Roman” cavalrymen defected from Azon and joined P'arnavaz's cause. These are, the text claims, the original *aznauris* (sing. აზნაური), a Georgian term designating the aristocracy.¹¹¹ Sensing imminent danger, the Macedonian fled to the rugged southwestern district of Klarjet'i. Meanwhile, P'arnavaz subdued the rest of K'art'li and consented to a pact with the Seleucid king, “Antiochos of Asurastan” (Geo. Antiok'os *asurastanisa*), who provided additional troops and a legitimising crown.¹¹² The following year Azon unleashed an ill-fated

და განიყვანა სარკუმელსა მას. და ვითარ განვიდა ველად, იხილა მზე ქუე-
მდაბლად, მიჰყო კელი მისი, მოჰკოცა ცუარი პირსა მ[ხ]ისასა და იცხო პირსა
მისსა. განიღვიძა ფარნავაზ და განუკურდა, და თქუა: ‘სიზმარი იგი, ესე არს,
მე წარვულ ასპანს, და მუნ კეთილსა მივეცემი’”. Cf. the dream of Anania Širakac'i
in which the Sun approached him in the shape of a young man: Russell 2001–2002, 82–83.

¹⁰⁸ There are several examples of the discovery of lost treasure in early Caucasian literature, including Dasxuranc'i's account of the exploits of Babik in the late fourth/fifth century. After Babik worsted the Hun champion Honagur in single combat, the *šāhan šāh* restored his family's patrimony in Siwnik'. During his first year there, Babik went hunting and in Šalat pursued a stag up a hill. The feet of both the stag and Babik's horse sank into the soft ground. When the soil was removed a resplendent church filled with the relics of martyrs was revealed: Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.1, Aṛak'elyan ed., 109–112.

¹⁰⁹ Extant witnesses of the Armenian adaptation read fifteen nights: *Life of the Kings in Patmut' iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 30, and Thomson trans., 30 (fn. 21).

¹¹⁰ By tradition, a fortress-city on the Egrisian/Colchian Plain in western Georgia is called C'ixegoji, whose initial construction *The Life of the Kings* (Qauxč'išvili ed., 24₃) credits to K'uji, one of P'arnavaz's *erist'avis*. It is the Archaeopolis (Ἀρχαιόπολις) of Classical sources and is known in modern Georgian as Nok'alak'evi (ნოქალაქევი). For ongoing excavations, see <http://www.nokalakevi.org/home.html> (last accessed 26 March 2014). I wish to thank Professor Ian Colvin for his tour of the fascinating site in July 2013.

¹¹¹ For the false derivation of *aznauri* (“aristocrat, noble”) from Azon, see above p. 88.

¹¹² Antiochos is a generic descriptor for the Seleucid king, like Xusrō for the Sasanian *šāhan šāhs* and *caesar* for the Roman and Byzantine emperors. On K'art'li and the Seleucid Empire, see Melik'išvili 1959, 49 and 298–301.

counterattack. The final battle was fought in Artani, which the author identifies variously as “the city of the *k’ajis* [i.e., demons]” (*kajt’a k’alak’i*, ქაჯთა ქალაქი) and “Huri” (ჰური). Azon was killed and P’arnavaz advanced to Anžianzora (ანძიანძორა) on the border with Anatolia, thus extending his domains to what would become Roman territory. P’arnavaz now realised his destiny and “... became king [*mep’e*] over all K’art’li and Eguri”.¹¹³

While patriotic and positivistic historians have eagerly accepted this account at face value without subjecting it to obtrusive scrutiny, it is far more likely that the ca. 800 author has retrojected later notions about the union of eastern and western Georgia to the time of K’art’li’s first king.¹¹⁴ By reshaping the footprint of P’arnavaz’s authority, late antique and medieval K’art’velian kingdoms could lay claim to western lands up to the border of the Romano-Byzantine Empire. This having been said, the possibility of ancient K’art’velian military operations in the environs of Anžianzora cannot be entirely dismissed. Even if this report is based on a kernel of truth, K’art’li’s *hegemony* over the southwest and especially on the western side of the Surami Mountains was by no means permanent or, so far as can be discerned, sustained over the long haul.

The principal threads of the story of P’arnavaz – a fatherless boy hidden and raised in a remote mountainous region,¹¹⁵ a forgotten lineage, dreams, sacral kingship, solar imagery, the hunt, discovery of a treasure concealed in a cave long ago, and so forth – are reminiscent of legends about Iran’s foundational kings, including Cyrus and Ardaxšīr.¹¹⁶ In the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpagān*, for instance, the Sun foretells the rise of the Sasanian dynasty within a dream.¹¹⁷ The parallel is not coincidental. Several scholars have underscored the Parthian and Sasanian flavour of P’arnavaz’s dream, particularly its solar imagery. They have

¹¹³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 24₆₋₇: “... *mep’e ik’mna qovelsa k’art’lsa da egursa zeda*” (“... მეფე იქმნა ყოველსა ქართლსა და ეგურსა ზედა”). Eguri is a *hapax* in Georgian; Egrisi is the customary form.

¹¹⁴ Ancient K’art’velian political power sometimes encroached upon the Egrisian frontier, perhaps with Seleucid encouragement, for which see Braund 1994, 151. Genuine connections in antiquity between eastern and western Georgia are beyond reproach but are frequently exaggerated by patriotic scholars. In many respects, the two spheres had distinctive histories and cultures though within a common Caucasian milieu. And, in any event, their medieval unification under the incipient Georgian “national” church and the Bagratids was by no means predestined. For a comparison of their political structures, see Melik’išvili 1999d.

¹¹⁵ For this *topos* in Armenian and Iranian literature, see Garsoïan 1976, 32 (fn. 61).

¹¹⁶ Rapp 2009, 670–671; and Frye 1964, 40–50.

¹¹⁷ *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpagān*, I.8, Grenet ed. and trans., 54–55, Āntiā trans., 2. Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.70, vaguely mentions this dream. The tale of Artavan and Artaxšīr preserved in the Greek *Ag* witness of Agat’angelos has several parallels with *Kārnāmag*: Agat’angelos (*Ag*), Thomson trans., 123–126 (and corresponding footnotes). See also Muradyan G. and T’op’č’yan 2008 (accessed 19 May 2013).

also noted a connection to the Mazdean devotion to Miθra (Mithra).¹¹⁸ Further, P'arnavaz is made to anoint himself with the Sun's essence, a one-man ritual establishing the inherent autonomy of K'art'velian kingship *from its inception*. P'arnavaz's self-anointment may have a Sasanian inspiration or parallel: some early *šāhan šāhs* crowned themselves.¹¹⁹ At the same time, the exigency of defeating Azon persuaded P'arnavaz to accept the nominal suzerainty of the Seleucid king. Concrete ties undoubtedly extended between the Seleucid and Caucasian monarchies,¹²⁰ but again we must treat the details with caution.

Once P'arnavaz had assumed the mantle of kingship, *The Life of the Kings* emulates *Xwadāy-nāmag* by ascribing the creation of the realm's fundamental institutions to this first K'art'velian monarch.¹²¹ Centuries after the writing of both texts, but on the basis of earlier epic traditions, Ferdowsī credits the first Iranian king Kayōmart (Keyumars) with the invention of court ceremonial and procedure, clothing and food; the second king Hūšang – with fire, iron, blacksmithing, agriculture and canals; the fourth king Jamšīd – with linen and social classes; and so on.¹²² Similarly, P'arnavaz reputedly devised the basic political structure of K'art'li, according to which all sovereign power was vested in the dynastic *mep'e* (მეფე), “king”.¹²³ The *mep'e* was aided by the *spaspeti* (სპასპეტი), the K'art'velian equivalent of Parthian *spāδpat* and Sasanian *spāhbed*. The *spaspeti* was the supreme battlefield general, “an attendant in the king's presence” (*šemdgomadve cinaše mep'isa*, “მემდგომადვე წინაშე მეფისა”), and the second-in-command.¹²⁴ Commensurate with his importance, the patrimony of the *spaspeti* comprised the central district of Šida, or Inner, K'art'li.

¹¹⁸ The Mithraic elements of the P'arnavaz tale may be connected to the activity in eastern Georgia of indigenised Parthian aristocratic houses, especially Mihrānids. For Mihr worship in neighbouring Armenia, see the publications of Russell. See also: Pourshariati 2008, 386–392; and the conjectural Čilašvili 2001.

¹¹⁹ Canepa 2009, 13.

¹²⁰ E.g., Lang 1983, 508–515.

¹²¹ *The Life of the Kings* thus deploys succinct, adapted Judaeo-Christian legends as the framework for ethnogenesis and embraces *Xwadāy-nāmag* as the framework for the origins and development of royal power.

¹²² Ferdowsī, Levy trans., 5, 7–8, 9–10. See also Rapp 2009, 670. Jamšīd (Geo. Jimšedi) is mentioned in Ioane Šavt'eli's thirteenth-century *Abdulmesiani*, 35.1, Lolašvili ed., 128.

¹²³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 24–25 = Thomson trans., 34–35.

¹²⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 25. *Spaspeti* is also attested in early Georgian hagiography. In his well-known description of the four main social groups of eastern Georgia at the turn of the first century AD/BC, Strabōn writes: “There are also four castes among the inhabitants of this land. One, and the first of all, is that from which they appoint their kings, the appointee being both the nearest kin to his predecessor and the eldest, whereas the second in line administers justice and commands the army”, “Τέτταρα δὲ καὶ γένη τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκεῖ τὴν χώραν· ἓν μὲν καὶ πρῶτον, ἐξ οὗ τοὺς βασιλεῖας καθιστᾶσι, κατ' ἀρχιστεῖαν τε καὶ ἡλικίαν τὸν πρεσβύτατον, ὁ δὲ δεῦτερος δικαιοδοτεῖ καὶ

The *spaspeti* was entrusted with eight *erist'avis*. *Erist'avi* (ერისთავი) is a compound consisting of *eri* (ერი), “army, people, host”, here in the genitive case, and *t'avi* (თავი), “head”. There is no exact analogue in Armenian, although *erist'avi* is sometimes used in the sense of *tanutēr* (տանուտեր), the principal of a *naxarar* (նախարար) family. For its part, *tanutēr* is based on *tan* (տան), the genitive of *tun* (տուն), “house, family”, and *tēr* (տեր), “lord”.¹²⁵ In the Armenian adaptation of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, *kolmapet* (կողմապետ), a variant of *kolmakal* (կողմակալ), “keeper- or governor-of-a-region”, with its root *kolmn* (կողմ), “region, side”, is an occasional synonym for *erist'avi*.¹²⁶ In early Georgian translations of biblical texts, *erist'avi* frequently renders Greek *stratēgos* (στρατηγός), “general”.¹²⁷

In Georgian contexts, *erist'avis* exercised broad civilian and military authority on the district (provincial) level. They were essentially governors, and royalist historians stress their institutional dependence upon the *mep'e*. *The Life of the Kings* describes the *erist'avates* as they were supposedly created by P'arnavaz:

[P'arnavaz] dispatched one as *erist'avi* of Margwi, and gave him [the land] from the Small Mountain, which is Lixi, as far as the [Black] Sea, above the Rioni [River]. And P'arnavaz built two fortresses: Šorapani and Dimna.

He sent a second as *erist'avi* of Kaxet'i, and gave him [the land] from the Aragwi [River] as far as Heret'i, which is Kaxet'i and Kuxet'i.

He sent a third as *erist'avi* of Xunani; and he gave him [the land] from the Berduji River as far as Tp'ilisi and Gač'iani, which is Gardabani.

He sent a fourth as *erist'avi* of Samšwilde; and he gave him [the land] from the river of Skwiret'i as far as the mountain, which is Tašir[i] and Aboc'i.

He sent a fifth as *erist'avi* of Cunda; and he gave him [the land] from P'anvari as far as the head of the Mtkuari [River], which is Javaxet'i, Kolay and Artani.

He sent a sixth as *erist'avi* of Ožrq'e; and he gave him [the land] from Tasis-kari as far as Arsiani, from the head of the Noste [River] to the [Black] Sea, which is Samc'xe and Ačara.

στρατηλατῆι” (XI.3.6, Jones ed. and trans., 220–221). Strabōn's second-in-command must be the *spaspeti*. See also Lort'k'ip'aniže O. 1996 and 2010.

¹²⁵ Cf. Arm. *nahapet*, for which see p. 77. See also Thomson 1996a, 20 (fn. 71).

¹²⁶ E.g., *Life of the Kings* in *Patmut'iwñ Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 34₆₋₇. See also Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 538.

¹²⁷ Toumanoff 1963, 96 (fn. 143), 98 (fn. 147), 361 and 443. Drawing upon medieval Western European terminology, Toumanoff translates *erist'avi* “duke”.

He sent a seventh as *erist'avi* of Klarjet'i; and he gave him [the land] from Arsiani as far as the [Black] Sea.

And the eighth, K'uji, was *erist'avi* of Egrisi.

And one he appointed as *spaspeti*; and he gave him [the land] from Tp'ilisi and from the Aragwi [River] as far as Tasis-kari and P'anvari, which is Šida K'art'li.¹²⁸

Under the *erist'avis* were an unspecified number of lesser generals called *spasalaris* (sing. სპასალარი < MPers. **spāhsālār* [from *spāh*, “army”, and *sālār*, “leader, master”]; NPers. *sepāh-sālār*).¹²⁹ In turn, *spasalaris* were responsible for *at'asist'avis* (sing. ათასისთავი), “heads of a thousand”.

The Life of the Kings does not mince words about the inspiration for this administrative machine:

ესრეთ განაწესა ესე ყოველი ფარნავაზ მიმსგავსებულად
სამეფოსა სპარსთასა.

In this fashion did P'arnavaz order everything, imitating the kingdom of the Persians [i.e., the Achaemenid Empire].¹³⁰

¹²⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 24⁹⁻²⁵ = Thomson trans., 34-35: “ერთი გაგზავნა მარგუს ერისთავად, და მისცა მცირით მთითგან, რომელ არს ლიხი, ვიდრე ზღუ[რ]ადმდე [ევრისისა], რიონს ზემოთ. და ამანვე ფარნავაზ აღაშენნა ორნი ციხენი, შორაპანი და ღიმნა. | და გაგზავნა მეორე კახეთისა ერისთავად, და მისცა არაგვთგან ვიდრე ჰერეთამდე, რომელ არს კახეთი და კუხეთი. | მესამე გაგზავნა ხუნანისა ერისთავად, და მისცა ბერდუჯის მდინარითგან ვიდრე ტფილისამდე და განიანთამდის, რომელ არს გარდაბანი. | მეოთხე გაგზავნა სამშუღდის ერისთავად, და მისცა სკვრეთისა მდინარითგან ვიდრე მთამდე, რომელ არს ტაშირი და აბოცი. | მესხეთე გაგზავნა წუნდის ერისთავად, და მისცა ფანვართგან ვიდრე თავადმდე მტკურისა, რომელ არს ჯავახეთი და კოლა და არტანი. | მეექვსე გაგზავნა ოძრჯის ერისთავად, და მისცა ტასისკართგან ვიდრე არსიანთამდის, ნოსტის თავითგან ზღუამდის, რომელ არს სამცხე და აჭარა. | მეშუდე გაგზავნა კლარჯეთის ერისთავად, და მისცა არსიანითგან ზღუამდე. | და მერვე, ქუჯი, იყო ერისთავი ევრისისა. | ხოლო ერთი დაადგინა სპასპეტად და მისცა ტფილისითგან და არაგვთგან ვიდრე ტასისკარამდე და ფანვარდამდე, რომელ არს შიდა-ქართლი”. On Šida K'art'li, see Gvasalia 1991.

¹²⁹ Andronikašvili 1966, 372. See also Toumanoff 1963, 96-97. *Salari* (სალარი), ultimately based on MPers. *sālār*, “leader, master”, is attested in the Bagratid-era *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 266. See also: *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Thomson trans., 268 and fn. 36; and MacKenzie 1986, 73.

¹³⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 25₄ = Thomson trans., 35. This passage does not appear in the Armenian adaptation.

Deliberately or not, K'art'velian *erist'avates* mimicked aspects of Achaemenid satrapies and Seleucid *stratēgoi*.¹³¹ Whatever their genuine origin, the later historian wanted to convince posterity that the basic political structure of K'art'li: (1) was created by the very first K'art'velian king in the wake of Alexander's conquest and the failure of the Achaemenid Empire; (2) was fundamentally Persian/Iranian, having been based directly upon the Achaemenid administrative system;¹³² and (3) had remained stable throughout Hellenistic, Parthian and Sasanian times.¹³³ In this way the long-term viability, stability and autonomy of the K'art'velian realm are established.

The Life of the Kings attributes yet other institutions to the first K'art'velian king. Religiously, P'arnavaz is said to have crafted the idol at the heart of the putative polytheism of the K'art'velians: "[The king] made a great idol named after himself. This is Armaz, because P'arnavaz was called Armaz in Persian".¹³⁴ P'arnavaz's burial in front of Armaz suggests a Hellenistic deification of the early K'art'velian monarchs.¹³⁵ In Part I it was proposed that Armaz is a syncretic K'art'velian manifestation of Ahura Mazdā. While there is no archaeological corroboration of Armaz's existence as the physical idol described in this narrative, several "fire temples" from the Hellenistic and especially Parthian Arsacid periods have been identified in eastern Georgia. Subsequent K'art'velian kings are said to have expanded the pantheon of idols. According to *The Life of the Kings*, Saurmag set up Ainina and Danana; P'arnajom installed an idol named Zaden.¹³⁶ At least some of these alleged idols are encoded with aspects/memories of the syncretic Mazdaisms of pre-Sasanian Caucasia.¹³⁷ As we have seen, the received tradition assigns the maintenance and expansion of local polytheism

¹³¹ Toumanoff 1963, 443.

¹³² The structural affinities of Caucasian and Iranian aristocratic society may be far older than the first-century AD date proposed by David Marshall Lang and Charles Burney: "After the Hellenistic and Romanizing phase of Armenian history, stretching from the Orontids to the advent of the Arsacids in the first century AD, a new phase of 'Iranianism' was now entered into by Armenian and Georgian society. In this new phase, the Armenian and Georgian aristocracy began to pattern itself on the Iranian, exactly as the Arsacid monarchy of Armenia tended to become institutionally a mirror of the Parthian empire. Instead of the autocratic centralism characteristic of the Roman empire, the Armenians and Georgians adopted the more flexible system of feudal allegiances, which had been characteristic of Iranian state structure since Achaemenid times" (Burney and Lang 1972, 204, emphases added).

¹³³ For the nearly identical network of *erist'avates* reported under Vaxtang Gorgasali, see pp. 314–318.

¹³⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 25,^{10–11} = Thomson trans., 36: "და ამანვე ფარნავაზ შექმნა კერპი დიდი სახელსა ზედა თუხსა: ესე არს არმაზი, რამეთუ ფარნავაზს სპარსულად არმაზ ერქუა".

¹³⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 26.

¹³⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 27 and 29.

¹³⁷ See above, esp. pp. 142–160.

to the K'art'velian monarchy. Not surprisingly, the king is also made to guide his subjects' Christianisation. With the crown's baptism in the fourth century, its obligation to construct idols metamorphosed into the building of churches.¹³⁸

Language and Script

P'arnavaz's reported "state-building" activities spilled into the linguistic and literary spheres:

This P'arnavaz was the first king in K'art'li from among the descendants of K'art'los. He extended the Georgian language [*ena k'art'uli*], and no more was a different language spoken in K'art'li except Georgian. And he created the Georgian script.¹³⁹

Much ink has been spilled over the invention of the Georgian script, a development inextricably bound to the creation of the Armenian and Albanian scripts. Suffice it to say that not a scrap of tangible evidence speaks to a Hellenistic origin for *asomt'avruli*, the first dedicated Georgian script. Rather, received alphabetic characters for the Georgian, Armenian and Albanian languages were created by a multifaceted, pan-regional Christian effort at the turn of the fourth and fifth century.¹⁴⁰ Without exception, all dated specimens of Georgian writing were produced after the conversion of King Mirian in the early 300s. As noted in Part I, the oldest dated example is the foundational inscription of the church of Bolnisi Sioni. It was executed in 493/494.¹⁴¹ Other fifth-century Georgian inscriptions have been identified in ecclesiastical contexts at Urbnisi Sioni in K'art'li and in the vicinity of Jerusalem.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Kipiani 1992, for the architectural context.

¹³⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 26⁸⁻¹⁰ = Thomson trans., 37-38: "და ესე ფარნავაზ იყო პირველი მეფე ქართლსა შინა ქართლოსისა ნათესავთაგანი. ამან განავრცო ენა ქართული, და არღარა იზრახებოდა სხუა ენა ქართლსა შინა თვნიერ ქართულისა. და ამან შექმნა მწიგნობრობა ქართული". Cf. Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.14, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 46¹⁴⁻¹⁵ = Thomson trans., 95, Aram "... ordered the inhabitants of the land to learn the Armenian speech and language", "*Հրաման տալ բնակչաց աշխարհին՝ ուսանել զխոսս և զլեզուս Հայկական*". The adjectives *k'art'veli* (animate) and *k'art'uli* (inanimate) can denote K'art'li proper (as is the case for the period under review) and/or, from the Bagratid era to the present, "Georgia/Georgian".

¹⁴⁰ The orderings of the Caucasian alphabets, including Georgian, are based on various arrangements of Greek but the forms of the individual letters only occasionally have obvious Greek correspondences: Gamqrelize 1989 and 1994; and Šaniže M. 2000. See Russell 1987b, 132-134, including received Armenian letters reflecting "the dual influence of the Northern Mesopotamian Aramaic and Greek scripts".

¹⁴¹ Silogava 1994. See also Šošiašvili 1980, 64-66.

¹⁴² Urbnisi Sioni: Šošiašvili 1980, 62-63. Jerusalem: Ceret'eli 1960a; and Mgaloblišvili 2006-2007, for the recent discovery of a late fifth-/early sixth-century tombstone upon

Alongside fabulous and patriotic attempts to push the Georgian script back to P'arnavaz's reign and to even more remote times, a few professional academics have pursued pre-Christian origins. Prominent among them is the late Levan Čilašvili, who identified fourteen crude *asomt'avruli* inscriptions from Nekresi (ten specimens) and Rust'avi (four specimens) as pre-Christian monuments.¹⁴³ Through an accumulation of circumstantial archaeological and later textual contexts, Čilašvili assigned the oldest inscription to the fourth to second century BC and the most recent to the fourth century AD. None, it is true, contain any allusions to Christianity. Among these important objects are five inscriptions Čilašvili identifies as Mazdean gravestones of the first and second century AD.¹⁴⁴ The later *vita* of Abibos Nekreseli confirms the strong presence of Mazdeans in this part of Georgia still in the sixth century, but the source may refer to a surge of Sasanian Zoroastrianism. At the start of Late Antiquity, there is no reason to doubt the presence of a significant Mazdean community in far eastern Georgia, as Nekresi's large Mazdean temple attests. All the Mazdean gravestones studied by Čilašvili appear to have been deliberately damaged, perhaps by Christians; their fragments were reused in the construction of subsequent structures. The desecration may have occurred in the fourth century when Nekresi's Mazdean temple was "ruthlessly destroyed and robbed".¹⁴⁵

The plot thickens. If these inscriptions are pre-Christian, Čilašvili reasons, then we have incontrovertible proof of P'arnavaz's introduction of the first Georgian script. This is a huge and unsubstantiated leap; the underlying assumption hangs by the thinnest of threads. For Čilašvili's provocative hypothesis to have a modicum of validity, the passage in *The Life of the Kings* must be literally true. If nothing else, a pre-Christian origin is not necessarily proof of an attribution to P'arnavaz. Čilašvili also speculates about the first king's motivation for fashioning a script: the translation of the *Avesta* and other Mazdean texts into Georgian.¹⁴⁶ This is a fascinating possibility, to be sure, but once again we lack authenticating evidence.

There can be no question that the crudely scratched inscriptions from Nekresi and Rust'avi offer fascinating insights into non-Christian and especially Mazdean communities in late antique eastern Georgia. But Čilašvili's dating

which is carved an *asomt'avruli* inscription specifying "... Iohane, bishop of P'urtaveli, a K'art'velian" ("... ႠႠႢႠႢႢ ႢႠႢႢႢ | ႢႠႢႢႢႢႢႢႢႢႢႢ | ႢႠႢႢႢႢ ႢႠႢႢႢႢႢ | ႢႢႢႢႢ"). This is the earliest attested usage of the ethnonym *k'art'veli*. P'urtaveli has yet to be explained. See also Seligman 2004.

¹⁴³ Čilašvili 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Čilašvili 2000; and Čilašvili 2004, 16–50 *et seq.* Most if not all four of the Rust'avi inscriptions mark graves. Both the Nekresi and Rust'avi gravestone inscriptions employ the formula ႢႢႢ ႢႢႢႢႢႢႢႢႢ (*ese sap'lavi*), "This grave ..." On the broken rim of a wine jar is an inscription beginning with the abbreviated Ⴂ-Ⴂ, *m-b*. Čilašvili 2001 creatively interprets this as "*Mithra-baga* (the Sun Lord)" (p. 26). See also Čilašvili 2004, 29–35.

¹⁴⁵ Čilašvili 2000, 19.

¹⁴⁶ Čilašvili 2004, 88–114 and 129; Čilašvili 2000, 19.

of these monuments has more to do with the desire to confirm the received tradition about P'arnavaz than what the archaeological evidence and discernible context actually allow us to say. In my view, the early inscriptions at Nekresi are witnesses of local Mazdeans adopting a script that was devised and used by contemporaneous Christians in neighbouring K'art'li ahead of large-scale onslaughts against Mazdaism, which would have occurred in the mid-fourth century *at the absolute earliest*. Despite the new insights gleaned from the extraordinary Nekresi and Rust'avi inscriptions, we still possess no tangible evidence seriously calling into question the Christian provenance of *asomt'avruli*.¹⁴⁷

Yet we cannot completely dismiss the possibility of an earlier, pre-Christian Georgian script.¹⁴⁸ Prior to *asomt'avruli* and its Armenian and Albanian analogues, the peoples of Caucasia were familiar with a number of written languages. In the case of Armenia, Koriwn asserts the existence of a distinctive Armenian script before that devised by Maštoc'.¹⁴⁹ On a regional scale, varieties of spoken and written Aramaic were used in southern Caucasia in the several centuries before Christianisation.¹⁵⁰ Several specimens of a local idiom of written Aramaic have been discovered in Armazis-q'evi near Mc'xet'a, hence the name "Armazic" proposed by Giorgi Ceret'eli (Tsereteli).¹⁵¹ Armazic was an outgrowth of the Aramaic language and script of northern Mesopotamia, and its origins have been traced to the first century BC.¹⁵² Armazic inscriptions from the first and second centuries AD have been found in a variety of contexts in K'art'li and on the temple at Garni in Armenia Major. The latest instance of Armazic is an inscription on a third-century plate discovered in Bori, located in the intermediate zone between eastern and western Georgia.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ On the problematic evidence of the Davat'i stele, including an *asomt'avruli* alphabet and an apparent creation date (5320 = 285/284 BC), see Abramišvili G. and Alek'size 1990. For images, see Mač'abeli 2008, ##24–28.

¹⁴⁸ Rapp 2003, 19.

¹⁴⁹ For the earlier Armenian script attributed to Bishop Daniel the Syrian, see: Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc'*, cap. 6; and Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.52.

¹⁵⁰ For Aramaic inscriptions on the boundary stones of the Armenian Artāšēsid king Artāšēs I (r. 188–ca. ?165 BC), see Perikhanian 1971. It has been suggested that the Armazic script – at least in the case of the Armazi Bilingual – was used to write an early form of Georgian: Frye 1952. See also Metzger 1956, 20–21.

¹⁵¹ On the relationship of the Armazic and *asomt'avruli* scripts, see Ceret'eli 1948–1949.

¹⁵² Ceret'eli K. 1996b, repr. Ceret'eli K. 2001, 426. On Armazic, see also: Ceret'eli K. 2004; Metzger 1956; Frye 1952; and Tod 1943. For Armazic inscriptions discovered at Dedop'lis Mindori, including three short inscriptions on the rims of wine vessels dated to the first century BC and on a number of small plaques made of deer antlers, see: Ceret'eli K. 1993b; and Gagošize 2001, 274–275.

¹⁵³ Ceret'eli 1991, repr. Ceret'eli 2001. For Garni, see: Perikhanian 1964; and Shapira 1999–2000a.

The most famous Armazic inscription, the Armazi Bilingual, was found at Armazis-q'evi.¹⁵⁴ It is one of two inscribed slabs that was reused in the construction of a later sarcophagus.¹⁵⁵ The ca. 150 AD Armazi Bilingual memorialises Serapiṭ, daughter of the *bidaxš* Zewaḥ the Younger.¹⁵⁶ Zewaḥ was in the service of the K'art'velian king, yet it is not clear whether the *bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands was actually based in Mc'xet'a at the time. It is possible that the outlying Armazis-q'evi district was simply the site of the *bidaxšes'* necropolis. The Bilingual's somewhat shorter Greek text is arranged first:

[Greek]

Sērapeitis, daughter of Zeouach the Younger, *pitiaxēs*, wife of Iōdmanganos, son of Pouplikios [i.e., Publicius] Agrippa, *pitiaxēs*, who won many battles as *epitropos* of the great king of the Iberians, Xēpharnougos. [She] died, younger than twenty-one years, who had inimitable beauty.

[Armazic]

I am Serapiṭ, daughter of Zewaḥ the Younger, *biṭaḥš* of King Parsman [i.e., P'arsman], wife of Yodmangan the victorious and winner of many victories, master of the court of King Ḥseparnug [and the] son of Agrip[pa], master of the court of King Parsman, victorious over the mighty, which Parnawaš [i.e., P'arnavaz] could not accomplish. [Serapiṭ] was so fine and beautiful that no one was her equal in beauty. And she died in her twenty-first year.¹⁵⁷

Significantly, the epitaph's Armazic text is partly written in the first person, from the perspective of Serapiṭ, whereas the divergent Greek is entirely in the third person.

The archaeological record is too sketchy for us to assay the prevalence of written, let alone spoken, Aramaic among the K'art'velian élite.¹⁵⁸ However, alongside Armazic at least two other variants of the Aramaic script were employed in eastern Georgia: imperial Aramaic and Parthian. In addition, local Jews wrote Palestinian Aramaic in Hebrew letters.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, written Aramaic was fairly widespread in K'art'li and neighbouring lands. It was sometimes used

¹⁵⁴ English overview of the Armazi Bilingual inscription in Braund 1994, 212–214, including translation. See also above, p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ *Mtskheta* I 1958, 277.

¹⁵⁶ On *bidaxš* in the Armazi Bilingual, see Giorgaḗ 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Ceret'eli K. 1992, building upon the earlier investigation of Ceret'eli 1941. Cf. Giorgaḗ and Shifman 1988. For the Greek text, see Qauxč'išvili T'. 2000, #235, 255–256.

¹⁵⁸ Armazic and Greek are often found together. In the case of the Armazi Monolingual inscription (dating perhaps to the mid-70s AD), the Aramaic (*mlk*) and transcribed Greek (*bzls* < Gk. βασιλεύς) words for king are used interchangeably: Giorgaḗ 2008, 253.

¹⁵⁹ Ceret'eli K. 1996a. See also Shaked 2006.

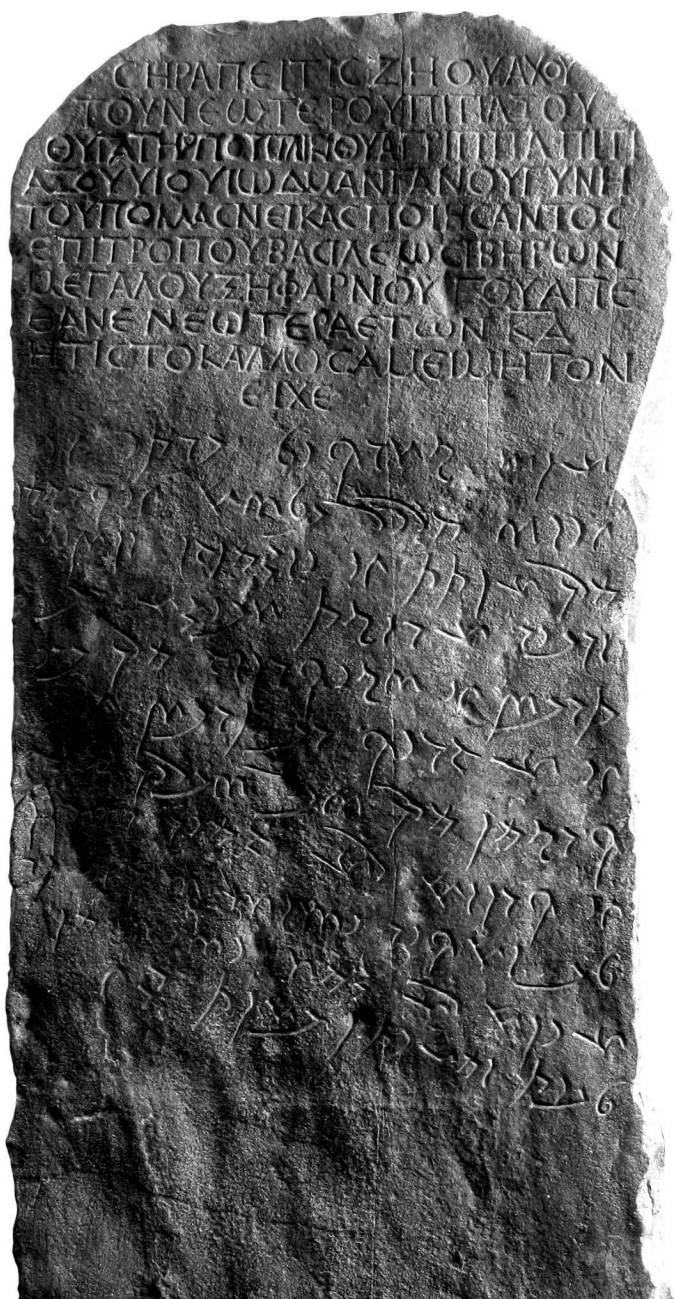


Figure 4.3. The Armazi Bilingual inscription.

in tandem with Greek, which was disseminated throughout Caucasia under the Seleucids, Parthian Arsacids and Romans. (But the use of Greek need not indicate close and sustained connections with the Hellenic world, as the K'art'velian example shows.)¹⁶⁰ In Armenia Major, Aramaic characters even may have formed the basis of the short-lived Danelian script preceding that of Maštoc'.¹⁶¹

One of the aims of the initial section of *The Life of the Kings* is to explain how ancient K'art'li's cultural-linguistic hodgepodge had been homogenised with the emergent dominance of the K'art'velians. The author characterises the situation prior to Alexander's conquest in this way:¹⁶²

Until this [time] the language in which the K'art'losianis [i.e., the progeny of the forefather K'art'los] conversed had been Armenian. But when these innumerable peoples had come together in K'art'li, then the K'art'velians abandoned the Armenian language. From all these peoples was created the Georgian [lit. K'art'velian] language.¹⁶³

The primacy afforded Armenian is striking but logical: it proceeds from the earlier status of the Armenian primogenitor Hayk (Haos), who is depicted as the first monarch based in Caucasia. Further we read:

Now all these peoples in K'art'li became so mixed that six languages were spoken in K'art'li: Armenian, Georgian [K'art'velian], Khazar [i.e., Scythian(?)],

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Braund 1994, 212: "The main language of the élite seems to have been Greek, at least from the second century AD onwards. Certainly, no Latin inscription has been found in Iberia". A Latin inscription has, however, been discovered in Azerbaijan's Qobustan region south of Baki (Baku): "IMP DOMITIANO CAESARE AVG GERMANICO LVCIVS IVLIVS MAXIMVS LEGIONIS XII FVL", "During [the reign] of Domitian, Caesar, Augustus Germanicus, Lucius Julius Maximus [of the] Twelfth Legion Fulminata". See: Grosso 1954, 118; Trever 1959, 342–346; Kavtaraze 2000, 216–217; and Braund 2003, 189–190. This inscription was carved by a Roman sojourner, not a long-term or permanent resident. For a catalogue of the Greek inscriptions found on the territory of the Georgian Republic, see Qauxč'išvili, T'. 1999–2000. For Aramaic and Greek in the Parthian Empire, see Bickerman 1983, 16.

¹⁶¹ It may have been "an adaptation of some Aramaic script", for which see Thomson in Xorenac'i, 319 (fn. 10).

¹⁶² On these excerpts, see Rapp 2003, 140 and 434–437.

¹⁶³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 16₄₋₆, based on Thomson trans., 21: "აკამომღის ქართლოსიანთა ენა სომხური იყო, რომელსა ზრახვიდეს. ხოლო ღღეს შემოკრბეს ესე ურიცხუნი ნათესაენი ქართლსა შინა, მაშინ ქართველთაცა დაუტევეს ენა სომხური. და ამათ ყოველთა ნათესაეთაგან შეიქმნა ენა ქართული". Cf. the mid-tenth century definition of K'art'li as the lands where the liturgy and prayers were performed in Georgian (*k'art'uli*): Giorgi Merč'ule, *Vita Grigol Xanzt'eli*, cap. 44, Abulaze ed., 290₃₈₋₄₁, Lang trans., 148.

Syrian, Hebrew and Greek. All the kings of K'art'li [and] the men and women knew these languages.¹⁶⁴

Antique Caucasia was home to a breathtaking assortment of peoples, cultures and languages.¹⁶⁵ But these passages constitute a later attempt to concoct a simplified context – partly based on the broad sweep of reality – in which a distinctive K'art'velian culture and language *should* have developed. We must remember that the author of *The Life of the Kings* routinely compresses huge swathes of time and, in the process, introduces anachronisms and outright fabrications as he elucidates his vision of the origins of the K'art'velian kingdom and its primary institutions.

Considering the close historical connections of Iran and Caucasia, it is astonishing that the ca. 800 historian does not mention Persian as one of the languages spoken in early K'art'li. Along with the story of ethnogenesis, this account probably constitutes a later layer of the tradition, devised when élite K'art'velians had already started to reorient themselves towards Romano-Byzantine culture.¹⁶⁶ By this time the gravitational pull of Iran had been diminished owing to the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. And we must not overlook the probability that the linguistic connection between Georgian and Iranian was so close that contemporary K'art'velians regarded many Iranic and Iranian elements as intrinsically Georgian.

In *The Life of the Kings*, Alexander and P'arnavaz are the central players in the creation of a distinctive K'art'velian *ethnie* whose cardinal ingredients are fidelity to the king in Mc'xet'a and a common language and religion. Alexander is credited with having personally combatted the “foul” polytheisms and lack of social order in ancient K'art'li. He installed his kinsman Azon as governor and ordered him “to worship the Sun and the Moon and the Five Stars, and to serve the invisible God, the Creator of everything”.¹⁶⁷ Acting through Azon, Alexander thus attempted to force upon the K'art'velians the exclusive worship of the most

¹⁶⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 16_{21–23} = Thomson trans., 23: “და იყვნეს ქართლს ესრეთ აღრეულ ესე ყოველნი ნათესავნი, და იზრახებოდა ქართლსა შინა ექუსი ენა: სომხური, ქართული, ხაზარული, ასურული, ებრაული და ბერძული. ესე ენანი იცოდეს ყოველთა მეფეთა ქართლისათა, მამათა და დედათა”.

¹⁶⁵ Catford 1977, 283, for pre-modern perceptions of Caucasia's linguistic diversity, including seventy tribes speaking different languages in Dioskourias in what would become western Georgia (Strabōn, XI.2.16), Romans relying upon 130 interpreters in the same port city (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI.5), and Arabs referring to the region as *Jabal al-Alsun*, “the Mountain of Languages” (al-Mas'ūdī, tenth century).

¹⁶⁶ Given the lost source proposed in the Epilogue, this layer may have been introduced by the ca. 800 author-editor.

¹⁶⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 18_{24–25} = Thomson trans., 26: “და უბრძანა აღექსანდრე აზონს, რათა პატივსცემდენ მზესა და მთოვარესა და ვარსკულავთა ხეთთა, და კმსასურებდენ ღმერთსა უხილავსა, დამბადებელსა ყოვლისასა”.

brilliant celestial bodies and a creator god. As a result, he imposed a standardised religion which, it can be inferred, was shared with others in the Hellenistic world. Alexander likewise imposed political unity and vested local control in the hands of Azon who, in the long run, undermined his achievements. On the whole, Alexander created cultural, social and linguistic homogeneity: “[he] slaughtered all the mingled peoples [tribes] living in K’art’li; he also slew or took captive all the foreign peoples [tribes], including women and innocent children less than fifteen years old ...”¹⁶⁸ The descendants of the eponym K’art’los – from whom the K’art’velians arose – were spared, and they soon ascended to the vanguard of eastern Georgia’s political and cultural life.

Upon Alexander’s death, *The Life of the Kings* reports the partition of his empire into four sectors.¹⁶⁹ Azon pledged his allegiance to “Bizintios”, ruler of “Greece”, a foreshadowing of Georgia’s later ties to the Byzantine Empire. Alexander’s passing gave Azon the opportunity to impress his own brand of idolatry upon the K’art’velians by fashioning two anthropomorphic silver idols, Gac’i and Gaim.¹⁷⁰ Instead of eradicating idolatry after Azon’s ouster, P’arnavaz personalised and K’art’velised it. He built upon Alexander’s political order by establishing an independent K’art’velian monarchy. And he secured the dominion of the Georgian language and was responsible for introducing the Georgian script, thus enabling Georgian literature. Or so we are told.

Iranic Onomasticon

The Life of the Kings thus lacks any substantial, direct acknowledgement of the intimate relationship between the Iranian and Georgian languages, a striking state of affairs since the author emphasises other linguistic connections. There are many possible explanations. It has already been noted that the relevant account probably belongs to a more recent layer of the text deriving from the eighth/ninth century. In addition, the linguistic tie was so tightly interwoven that it could easily have been overlooked by contemporaries. Even when terms were adapted from Iranian languages, sometimes through Armenian and other intermediaries, in many cases they were deemed integral to Georgian. In our discussion of early Georgian hagiography, we observed the large number of Parthian and Middle Persian loans in Georgian, not to mention words of a common Iranic stock. The same terms and numerous others infuse the medieval

¹⁶⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 18₁₅₋₁₇ = Thomson trans., 25: “დაიპერა აღექსანდრე ყოველი ქართლი, და მოსრნა ყოველნი იგი ნათესავნი აღრეულნი ქართლს მყოფნი, და უცხონი იგი ნათესავნი მოსრნა და დაატყუებნა, და დედანი და ყრმანი უცებნი, თხუთმეტისა წლისა უმცროსნი ...”

¹⁶⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 19–20.

¹⁷⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 20. For Azoy’s veneration of Gac’i and Ga, see *Primary History of K’art’li*, §8, Abulaže ed., 82.

components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. A profoundly Iranic Georgian language was not the preserve of a certain genre, literary school or particular author: it characterises the contemporary *K'art'velian* idiom of the Georgian language.

Proper names are the most perceptible indicators of the reticulate Irano-Caucasian linguistic bond. The pre-Christian monarchs featured in *The Life of the Kings* have names overwhelmingly drawn from and shared with Iranian languages, especially Parthian and Middle Persian but also East Iranian and via northern Caucasian intermediaries.¹⁷¹ These royal names are also conveyed in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's Primary History of K'art'li* and *Royal List I*, which sometimes give superior readings of forms obviously corrupted in *The Life of the Kings*. This is a curious circumstance since *The Primary History* and *Royal List I* are generally bereft of Iranic trappings.¹⁷² As documented in *The Life of the Kings*, the pre-Christian *K'art'velian* monarchs are:

299–234 BC	P'arnavaz I	< Mlr. *Farna-vazd; OIr. *farnah- vazdah- (cf. MPers. xwarrah) > Mlr. *Artavazd; ¹⁷³ Arm. Artawazd (Արտավազ); ¹⁷⁴ Gk. Artabasdos (Ἀρτάβασδος); ¹⁷⁵ cf. OIr. *arta- vazdah- and Av. Ašavazdah-, “one who furthers righteousness”; cf. Skt <i>pārīṇas-</i> and Indo-Iranian * <i>parHnas</i> , sovereignty, control, abundance”; ¹⁷⁶ Arm. P'arṇawaz (Փարնավազ); Gk. Pharnabazos (Φαρνάβαζος). ¹⁷⁷ Geo. P'arnavaz may be a later form of *P'arnavazd, cf. Armazi < Ahura Mazdā, Ōhrmazd, Hōrmizd; Arm. Aramazd (Արամազ). ¹⁷⁸
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¹⁷¹ Regnal dates are based on the calculations of Toumanoff 1963 and especially Toumanoff 1990. See also Rapp 2009, 660. For these names, see Andronikašvili 1966.

¹⁷² Rapp 2003, 296–298 and 485–487, for a comparison of the royal nomenclature of *The Life of the Kings* and the “pre-Christian” section of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*. The latter depicts Azoy as the first *K'art'velian* king to sit at Mc'xet'a.

¹⁷³ Cf. von Wesendonk 1924, 6, *xvarənd bāzu*, “having a brilliant arm”. See also: Justi 1895, 92; and Sanaʒe 2001, 69–91 and 182 (“radiant hand”).

¹⁷⁴ A name used as late as the eighth century. For the epitaph of Artawazd Kamsarakan, husband of Šušānik Mamikonean, on an eighth-century tombstone at Noramanuk in Naxčawan (mod. Azer. Naxçıvan; Rus. Nakhichevan), see Greenwood 2004, A.13, 86–87.

¹⁷⁵ In the mid-eighth century, the Armenian Artauasdos/Artabazos (Ἀρταύασδος/Ἀρτάβαζος), *stratēgos* of the Armeniakon Theme, attempted to usurp the Byzantine throne from the young Constantine V (r. 741–775).

¹⁷⁶ Lubotsky 2002, 193–195.

¹⁷⁷ E.g., Pharnabazos, satrap of Daskylion: Frye 1984, 115.

¹⁷⁸ I wish to thank Roland Bielmeier for his generous assistance with this and other etymologies. In private correspondence (16 August 2011), he observes that *farnah-* “points to Elr. origin”. For P'arnavaz see: Marr 1902, 5; Bielmeier 1990, 40; Bielmeier 1994a, 35–36; Schmitt 1983, 78; Schmitt 1986, 447; and Garsoiān in *Epic Histories*, 358–359 and 400. This P'arnavaz is not attested in Classical (Graeco-Roman) sources, but P'arnavaz II is

234–159	Saurmag	Elr. if associated with Sauromatēs (Σαυρομάτης), used by monarchs of the Bosporan kingdom, first-third centuries AD < Gk. Sauromatai (Σαυρομάται), “Sauromatians”. ¹⁷⁹
159–109	Mirvan I	< Mir. <i>mihrbān</i> , “friendly, kind”; ¹⁸⁰ cf. OIr. *Miθrāpāna, “having the protection of Miθra”.
109–90	P’arnajom	P’arnajom in <i>Royal List I</i> , §5 < Farnajom; cf. Arm. P’arānjem (Փարսանյեմ) < MPers. Xōrānzēm ¹⁸¹ (but Arm. and MPers. are female names!).
90–78	Aršak I ¹⁸²	Ars[ok] in <i>Royal List I</i> , §6; Mir. Aršak; Arm. Aršak (Արշակ); Gk. Arsakēs (Ἀρσάκης).
78–63	Artag	Arik in <i>Royal List I</i> , §7; Artak; Arm. Artak (Արտակ); Gk. Artōkēs (Ἀρτώκης); Lat. Artoces. ¹⁸³
63–30	Bartom ¹⁸⁴	Bratman in <i>Royal List I</i> , §8, ultimately based on OIr. *brāta-manah-, “having a brotherly mind”; ¹⁸⁵ cf. Geo. Bartam.
30–20	Mirvan II	Mirean in <i>Royal List I</i> , §9; see above, Mirvan I; and see below, Mirian III. ¹⁸⁶
20 BC–1 AD	Aršak II	Arsuk in <i>Royal List I</i> , §10; see above, Aršak I.

(for whom see Bartom, further). For Arm. P’arnavaz, see *The Primary History of Armenia*, Thomson trans., 362. This P’arnavaz is made to be the ancestor of the Bagratids, thus enshrining a tradition at odds with the Jewish ancestry claimed for the family in Movsēs Xorenac’i, I.22. *The Epic Histories* is familiar with the P’arnavaziani dynasty, which it calls P’arawazean (Փարավազեան): 1883 ed., 177, Garsoïan trans., 201.

¹⁷⁹ Bielmeier 1990, 40; and Bielmeier 1994a, 36. For the connection of Azon/Azoy with Indo-Scythian Azēs, see further.

¹⁸⁰ MacKenzie 1986, 56.

¹⁸¹ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 398–399.

¹⁸² This Aršak was the first of three successive Artaxēsids (Artaxiads) to rule eastern Georgia. For Aršak’s place in the Artaxēsid lineage, see Toumanoff 1990, 93. For the core Artaxēsids in Armenia, see Garsoïan 1997b, 46–50. The first Artaxēsid, Artaxēs (Artaxias), became king of Armenia in 188 BC. According to Strabōn, XI.14.15, Artaxēs had been a Seleucid general. Epigraphical and historiographical evidence demonstrates Artaxēs’ biological relationship to the Eruandids (Orontids).

¹⁸³ Artag’s reign coincides with the Roman invasion of Caucasia under Pompey. He is the first eastern Georgian ruler mentioned in Classical literature: Florus, I.40.28; and Cassius Dio, XXXVII.1–2.

¹⁸⁴ Also known as P’arnavaz II: Cassius Dio, XLIX.24.1. See Toumanoff 1969a, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Bielmeier 1990, 42 (fn. 24).

¹⁸⁶ Nuxuri v (ⴌⴓ) and e (ⴌ) are easily confused.

- 1–58 **Aderki**¹⁸⁷ Rok in *Royal List I*, §11; cf. Rok, (Ade)rok < Artak.
- a. Bartom**¹⁸⁸ Bratman in *Royal List I*, §12; see above, Bartom.
- b. K'art'am** K'aržam in *Royal List I*, §12;¹⁸⁹ < Elr. *karž-*, “miracle” and *ama-*, “power”, hence “possessing miraculous power”; Arm. K'arjam (**Քարձամ**);¹⁹⁰ cf. MPers. Karzam.¹⁹¹
- a. P'arsman I** Uncertain Iranian background, but probably related to *xwarrah* through an older Iranian form *farnah*, for which see P'arvavaz above;¹⁹² Arm. P'arsman (**Փարսման**); Gk. Pharasmanēs (Φαρασμάνης).¹⁹³
- b. Kaos** Kaoz in *Royal List I*, §13; Kāōs (< Kāvūs) and Mlr. *kay*, “king” of the legendary Kayānid dynasty of ancient Iran.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷ Aderki also appears in *Vita Nino* (K'c'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 100. See Toumanoff 1969a, 11–12, for his equation with P'arsman I, who is attested on the Armazi Bilingual, and in Tacitus, *Annals*, VI.32–35 *et sqq.*, and Cassius Dio, LVIII.26.4.

¹⁸⁸ This point marks the beginning of the alleged diarchy. *The Life of the Kings* attests five sets of isochronal (!) kings in Mc'xe't'a and Armazi (i.e., Armazis-c'ixe). The artificiality of the diarchy – an institution not attested independently – is discussed in Toumanoff 1963, 264–266, and Toumanoff 1969a, 2–3. In place of the diarchs, Toumanoff 1969a, gives Mihrdat I (58–106). See also: Melik'išvili 1959, 56; Melik'išvili 1999b; and Rapp 2003, 286. On the alleged division of the K'art'velian monarchy after the Treaty of 363, which may form the basis of this tradition, see Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII.12 and XXX.2. See also: Toumanoff 1963, 150 and 460–461; and Lenski 2002, 173. If the diarchy is a confused memory, the inspiration might have been the association of (K'art'velo-Armenian marchland and/or imperial Parthian Arsacid) *bidaxšes* with Armazis-q'evi in the first and second centuries.

¹⁸⁹ Corrupted K'art'am results from a misreading of *nusxuri ž (d)* as *t' (m)*.

¹⁹⁰ Bielmeier 1994a, 36–37. Cf. Andronikašvili 1966, 506–507. K'arjam is attested in Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.53, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 184.

¹⁹¹ MPers. Karzam < Av. Kauuārasman-. See Daryaei in *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 39.

¹⁹² Čilašvili 2004, 36–43, for an early inscription from Nekresi with the abbreviated P'RS (ՓՐՏ), perhaps to be read as P'arsman.

¹⁹³ Bielmeier 1990, 43–44, proposes a different etymology. He associates P'arsman with the undocumented MPers. **parsman*, which in turn is based upon Olr. **parθam(a)-manah-*, “having the best mind”. For the Armenian rendering, see Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.46, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 171₁₅, though the precise identity of this P'arsman is in doubt (Thomson trans., 186 [fn. 4]). Melik'išvili 1959, 56–58, amends the received lists of diarchs, favouring single rulers P'arsman (and not Kaos), Mirdat || Mithradatēs (and not Azork and Armazael) and K'art'am (and not Bartom), the last of which he shifts to the end of the three-king sequence.

¹⁹⁴ See Nyberg 1974, 116.

	a. Azork	Arsok in in <i>Royal List I</i> , §14; cf. Mlr. <i>arzīg</i> , “worthy” and MPers. <i>ārzōg</i> , “desire, lust”; ¹⁹⁵ Arm. Arzu (<i>Արզուն</i>).
	b. Armazel	“Of/from Armaz[i]” (?); Amazaer in <i>Royal List I</i> , §14; < Armaz(?). ¹⁹⁶
106–116	a. Amazasp I	Hamāzāspa, whose etymology is unresolved but which is based on Mlr. <i>aspa-</i> , “horse”; Arm. Hamazasp (<i>Համազասպ</i>); Gk. Hamazaspos (Ἡμαζάσπος). ¹⁹⁷
	b. Derok	Deruk in <i>Royal List I</i> , §15; Dārūk.
116–132	a. P’arsman II	See above, P’arsman I.
	b. Mirdat I ¹⁹⁸	Miθradāta, “given by Miθra”; Arm. Mihrdat (<i>Միհրդատ</i>); Gk. Mithradatēs/Mithridatēs (Μιθραδάτης/Μιθριδάτης). ¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ For the Middle Persian terms, see MacKenzie 1986, 11. Ārzōg was suggested by Roland Bielmeier (private correspondence, 16 August 2011).

¹⁹⁶ See Gippert 1984, 39. A monarch Armazael, great-grandson of King Aderki, appears in *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 100. The suffix *-eli* (-ელი) is commonly used in the adjectival forms of toponyms and ethnonyms, e.g., *k’art-v-eli*, but its attachment to Armaz[i] is otherwise unattested. The difference of Armazel (*რძიშრ:ბელი*) and Amazaer (*რძიშრ:ბელი*) is partly the consequence of an error in shifting from *nusxuri* to *mxedruli*. Confusions of *r* (*რ*) and *m* (*მ*) are not uncommon.

¹⁹⁷ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 378–379, for the uncertain etymology “MP[ers.] *Hamazāsp; cf. Av. **hamāza-*, ‘colliding/clashing’ + *aspa-*, ‘horse’ = ‘one who possessed war steeds’”. The name is also attested in the ŠKZ and in fragments of a Manichaean missionary history: Mgaloblišvili and Rapp 2011, 269–275 (including the identification of this Amazasp [III] – who is unknown in Georgian texts – as a Sasanian-supported pretender to the K’art’velian throne). A K’art’velian prince named Amazaspos is mentioned in a Greek-language epitaph found in Rome. Amazaspos campaigned with Roman forces against the Parthians under Trajan (r. 98–117): Ceret’eli 1960b, 130. The epitaph begins: “The illustrious king’s scion, Amazaspos | the brother of King Mithradatēs | whose native land lies by the Caspian Gates | Iberian, son of Iberian, is buried here ...”: Epitaph of Amazaspos, Cagnat ed., no. 192, 75–76, trans. in Braund 1994, 230. Toumanoff 1969a, 13 (fn. 63), and Bielmeier 1990, 40–41 and 43, persuasively connect Geo. Amazasp with Gk. Iamasaspos (Ἰαμάσασπος) attested on Vespasian’s inscription from Mc’xet’a.

¹⁹⁸ *Royal List I*, §16, identifies this diarchal pair as P’arsman K’ueli and P’arsman Avaz. At §17 this source mentions Rok and Mirdat, an unattested pair in *The Life of the Kings*.

¹⁹⁹ Bielmeier 1990, 40–41. This name is also attested in the Armazi Monolingual inscription (see Toumanoff 1963, 101–102 [fn. 154]) and in the Greek inscription commemorating the reinforcement of Mc’xet’a’s walls by Roman engineers under Vespasian in 75 AD: Ceret’eli 1960b; and Qauxč’išvili, T’. 2000, #229, 251–252. Additionally, the latter inscription mentions the Iberian king Pharasmanēs and Iamasaspos. The top of this sandstone monument is lost. Braund speculates the missing text’s composition in another language, “perhaps Latin or Armazian”: Braund 1994, 227 (fn. 126).

132–135	Adami	Yadami in <i>Royal List I</i> , §18; Yadami[z]da or Yadami[s]da; Lat. Radamistus. ²⁰⁰
135–185	P'arsman III	See above, P'arsman I.
185–189	Amazasp II	See above, Amazasp I.
189–216	Rev ²⁰¹	Rēw, Rēwnīz; Arm. Řew (<i>Րեւ</i>). ²⁰²
216–234	Vač'e	*Wačak (?). ²⁰³
234–249	Bakur I	Pakur < Mir. <i>bagpuhr</i> , “son of a god”; ²⁰⁴ Arm. Bakur (<i>Բակուր</i>); Gk. Pakoros/Bakour (Πάκορος/Βάκουρ); ²⁰⁵ Lat. Pacorus ²⁰⁶ /Bacurius.
249–265	Mirdat II	See above, Mirdat I.
265–284	Asp'agur I	Possibly < OIr. * <i>asparauka</i> -, “having bright horses”; cf. the seventh-century Bulgar khan Asparukh/Isperikh. ²⁰⁷
284–361	Mirian III	Geo. var. Mirean; Mihrān; ²⁰⁸ cf. Mirdat; ²⁰⁹ Arm. Mihran (<i>Միհրան</i>); ²¹⁰ Gk. Mithranēs (Μιθράννης).

²⁰⁰ Bielmeier 1990, 41–43; and Bielmeier 1994a, 37, who associates Adami/Yadami with names from the eastern Black Sea coast, e.g., Radamsadi[o]s. The Latin is attested in Tacitus, *Annales*, e.g., XI.44–45 and XIII.37. This king is the subject of the opera *Radamisto* by Georg Handel.

²⁰¹ The first of the Arsacids to rule K'art'li.

²⁰² Cf. Russell 1985, 38: “The Mir. form *rēw*, from Av. *raēva-*, is attested alone in the Georgian proper name რეგ Rev ...” But as observed by Bielmeier (personal communication, 16 August 2011), *rēw* occurs within certain Sasanian toponyms (e.g., Rēw-Ardaxšīr in Pārs: Marquart 1901, 27). A Rēw/Rēwnīz appears in the *Šāhnāma*.

²⁰³ Andronikašvili 1966, 466–467.

²⁰⁴ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 363–364. Two Parthian Arsacid kings were named Pakur: Pakur I (r. ca. 39 BC) and Pakur II (r. ca. 110 AD).

²⁰⁵ BAKOYP AΛANA, Bakour the Alan, is attested in an intaglio from Žinvali perhaps dating to the third century AD: Ramišvili and Jorbenaze 1976, 38. See also Braund 1994, 247.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Pacorus, king of the Laz, during the reign of Antoninus Pius: SHA, IX.6, *Magie* ed. and trans., 122–123.

²⁰⁷ Abaev 1949, 157 and 177. See also Schmitt 1985, esp. 20–23, p. 22 for Georgian and Armenian references. Cf. Gk. Aspaurokis (Ἀσπαυρούκις). For the earlier *bidaxš* Aspaurok, see above pp. 65–66. Between Asp'agur and Mirian *Royal List I*, §26, adds Mirian's father Lev.

²⁰⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64, explicitly equates Geo. Mirian and Ir. Mihrān: “[he] was called Mihran in Persian, but Mirian in Georgian” (“ერქუა სპარსულად მიჰრან, ხოლო ქართულად მირიან”).

²⁰⁹ *Life of Vaxtang* obliquely equates Mirdat with Mirian through the name of Vaxtang's sister Mirianduxt, lit. “daughter of Mirian”. Their father was Mirdat V.

²¹⁰ Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.85–86.

Many of these rulers are confirmed by non-Georgian authorities, including *The Primary History of Armenia*, Appian, Cassius Dio, Tacitus, Arrian and Ammianus Marcellinus.²¹¹

Other proper names in *The Life of the Kings* also belong overwhelmingly to the Iranian world. In addition to the ancient monarchs of the Iranian epic already discussed, we encounter several political élites and warriors: **K'uji** (Os. Kuza and Kužæg, Sarm. via Gk. KOYZAIOΣ), ally of P'arnavaz and ruler of Egrisi/Colchis in western Georgia;²¹² **P'arnavaz**, *spaspeti* and foster brother (*žuzusmte*, ძუძუსმტე) of King P'arsman K'ueli;²¹³ **Maežan** (cf. Vežan < Vēžan), *spaspeti* of King Asp'agur;²¹⁴ the Armenian **Sumbat Bivritiani**, probably identical to Smbat Bagratuni;²¹⁵ the Alan/Ovsi chieftain **Bazok** (Bāzūk; Arm. Bazuk, *Բազուკ*; cf. Os. *bāzug*);²¹⁶ the Iranian champion **Jumber (Juanšer?)**;²¹⁷ the Alan champion **Xuanxua** (Os. Xuānxuā);²¹⁸ and several Armenians – the Artašēsīd **Aršak** (father of the K'art'velian monarch Aršak), King **Iarvand/Eruand**, Iarvand's brother King **Artašan**, Artašan's three sons **Zaren**, **Artavaz** and **Tigran**, as well as **Kosaro** (the Arsacid Xosrov I, king of Armenia, r. ca. 191–?216/217) and the prince **Anak**.²¹⁹

Special mention should be made of **Azon** (var. **Azoy**). As we have seen, Azon, son of Iaredos, was the despotic Macedonian governor of K'art'li and the chief rival of P'arnavaz. In *The Life of the Kings*, Azon's name terminates in the standard Greek suffix –ov. Some observers have accordingly connected the names Azon and Jason, the famous hero who sailed with the Argonauts to Colchis in search of the

²¹¹ For an overview, see Javaxišvili 1998a, 108–110.

²¹² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 22₁₀. For the name, see Andronikašvili 1966, 138–139. On KOYZAIOΣ, a figure of the second/third century, see Biemeier 1988, 104 (n. 9).

²¹³ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 51₁₁ (e.g.).

²¹⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 62₁₅. For the name, see Andronikašvili 1966, 468–469. We have already encountered the Sasanian *marzbān* Vēžan Buzmihr (or Burzmihr). Among the K'art'velians, the name is attested in an eighth-century inscription on the pedestal of a cross kept in the church of John the Baptist in the Ateni Valley. Its Vežan was *mamasaxlisi* (abbot) of Ateni: Šošiašvili 1980, 106–107.

²¹⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 45₆. The Armenian historian Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.22, falsely assigns a Hebrew origin to the name Smbat. This is one of his “proofs” of the Jewish origin of the Bagratuni house. See also: Xorenac'i, II.63; and Toumanoff 1963, 327 and 336. The name Biwrat (*Բիւրատ*) is attested in Xorenac'i, e.g., II.36 (Biwrat Bagratuni) and II.37 (Smbat Bagratuni, son of Biwrat).

²¹⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 46₉, and 45₇, for Bazuk and Abazuk, two brothers and (simultaneous?) kings of the Alans. On Bazok/Bazuk, see Andronikašvili 1966, 438.

²¹⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 52₁. For the name, see p. 235 (fn. 265) and p. 332.

²¹⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 56₁₀. For the name, see Andronikašvili 1966, 509–510.

²¹⁹ For these Armenians, see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 28, 44–49 and 59. On Iarvand/Eruand, see Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.38.

Golden Fleece.²²⁰ However, neither the content nor context of the Georgian sources validates this derivation. In light of the Iranic background of other Caucasian royal and élite proper names, Azon/Azoy must be equivalent to Indo-Scythian Azēs.²²¹ Most famously, King Azēs I ruled the Indo-Scythians of northern India from 57 to 35 BC.²²² Along with Saurmag and K'art'am/K'aržam, Azon/Azoy may be another East Iranian linguistic imprint emanating from Iranic nomads to the north and east. Alternately, given the antiquity of Azon/Azoy, the Georgian might have inspired the East Iranian, now attested only through the transcribed Greek Azēs.

Thus, at the dawn of the Sasanian dynasty the aristocracy of Caucasia already had a long tradition of favouring Iranian and Iranic names, a trend that endured for many centuries after the Christianisation of the three monarchies.

***Xwarrah*/Fortune**

In the Iranian world perhaps no other political concept was more important than *xwarrah*. According to Sasanian and what we know of Parthian Arsacid ideology, *xwarrah* was the transcendental glory, radiance and virtue cloaking legitimate dynastic kings.²²³ From an early time it was embraced and extended by Caucasia's ruling élites. As is the case with many Iranian languages, Caucasian tongues give preference to the anlaut *p[a]rn-* or *f[a]rn-* whereas the older Avestan word – common in the Yašts – is *xvarənah-*, the basis of Middle Persian *xwarrah*. Permutations are found across the full range of Iranian languages, including Buddhist Sogdian *prn*, Bactrian *far[r]o*, Khotanese *phārra-* (“splendour, rank [of Buddha]”), Manichaean Middle Persian and Manichaean Parthian *prh* and *frh* (i.e., *farrah*) and, from northern Caucasia, Ossetic *farn/farnæ* (“happiness, wealth, well-being”).²²⁴ Controversy surrounds the Iranian form *farn-*, though it would seem to have originated in an East Iranian and/or Scythian environment, the path (or one of the paths) of transmission quite possibly extending through Caucasia and Media. *Farn-* was incorporated into Median proper names as early as the ninth and certainly by the eighth century BC.²²⁵ It is possible that **farnah* was the original Iranian form, which in turn was based on proto-Iranian **parnah*.²²⁶

²²⁰ E.g.: Melik'išvili 1959, 277; and Lang 1966, 84. Tacitus, *Annals*, VI.34, for the Iberian claim of descent from the Thessalians in the Argonautic period and for local traditions associated with the name Jason.

²²¹ For Azēs, see Bailey 1985, 132–135. Cf. Andronikašvili 1966, 131. I became aware of Andronikašvili 1980 as this book was going to press.

²²² See Frye 1984, 196–200.

²²³ And, in some contexts, the royal nobility (*šahrdārān*): Pourshariati 2008, 48. On *xwarrah*, see especially Skjærvø 1983.

²²⁴ Lubotsky 2002, 192. See also: Bailey 1971, 1–78; and Frye 1984, 216–217.

²²⁵ Lecoq 1987; and Lubotsky 1998 and 2002.

²²⁶ Lubotsky 2002, 193.

Armenian *p'arik'* (փարփ) and *p'arawor* (փարաւոր) are obviously connected to *farnah*-, aspirate *p* rendering *f*.²²⁷ Although we encounter no such stand-alone transcriptions in surviving Georgian texts, *farnah*'s anlaut is the basis of several proper names, including P'arnavaz, P'arnajom and P'arsman, not to mention H̄separnug/Xēpharnougos of the Armazi Bilingual inscription. In the Georgian milieu, even west of the Surami Mountains, the anlaut is attested deep into Christian times. Its application was not restricted to the royal family. A hermit named Pharanousēs (Φαρανούσης) is specified in a fourth-/fifth-century Greek inscription found near Cilikani in the vicinity of Mc'xet'a; the Laz noble Phartazēs (Φαρτάζης) is mentioned by the sixth-century Roman historian Agathias; and the Laz Pharismanēs (Φαρισμάνης) appears in the Byzantine chronicle of Theophanēs Confessor, which was completed in the early ninth century.²²⁸ An *asomt'avruli* inscription on a tenth-century stele from Ude attests a certain P'arsman, Φ[Τ]ΙΣΜΑ[Τ]Η.²²⁹ And in the mid-eleventh century an ex-P'arsman Arseni served as *hēgoumenos* of the Georgians' famous Ivērōn monastery on Mt Athos.²³⁰ In most if not all instances, Georgian *p'ar[n]*-, ფარ[ნ]-, renders Middle Persian *xwarrah* even after its original meaning and context had been forgotten.²³¹

While there is no direct rendering of the word *xwarrah* in extant Georgian manuscripts and inscriptions, the concept is sometimes deployed in pre-Bagratid historiography, particularly in the heavily Iranic *Life of the Kings* and *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*. Two Old Georgian words were used in the sense of *xwarrah*. The first, *didebay* (დიდებავ), literally means “greatness” but in many contexts signifies “glory, splendour”.²³² The second is *sue* (სუე, mod. *sve*, სვე), “fortune, destiny”, the equivalent of Armenian *baxt* (բախտ), “fortune, destiny”, from Middle Persian *baxt*.²³³ Legitimate K'art'velian kings were endowed with *didebay* and *sue*.²³⁴ P'arnavaz exuded *simdidre* (სიმდიდრე), “grandeur”, a word sharing

²²⁷ E.g., in the fifth-century *Epic Histories*, for which see the “Technical Terms” in Garsoïan's trans., 552. See also: Garsoïan 1976, 35–40; Garsoïan 1996b, 80–81; Schmitt 1983, 94; and Schmitt 1986, 453.

²²⁸ Pharanousēs: Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999–2000, vol. 2, #188, 213–214. Phartazēs: Agathias, III.11.2 and III.14.2. Pharismanēs (var. Pharasmanēs): Theophanēs, AM 5997. Closer to the time of P'arnavaz, see Herodotus, VII.79, for Colchian (Egrisian) and Marian troops under the command of a certain Pharanadatēs (Φαρανδάτης). *La Narratio de rebus Armeniae*, §2, written in Greek by a Chalcedonian Armenian in the seventh century, mentions a bishop named Pharne[r]sech (Φαρνε[ρ]σέχ). Finally, *farnah*'s anlaut is also evident among the kings of Pontos, e.g., Pharnakēs I (Φαρνάκης; second century BC).

²²⁹ Šošiašvili 1980, 138–139.

²³⁰ Giorgi Mc'ire, *Vita Giorgi Mt'acmideli*, cap. 20, Abulaže ed., 197₁₀.

²³¹ Some linguists disagree: Bielmeier 1990, 43–44.

²³² Cf. *mart'lmadidebeli* (მართლმადიდებელი), “orthodox” < *mart'ali* (მართალი), “true, truth” + *didebay*, “glory”.

²³³ On Arm. *baxt*, see: Balcer 1993, #56, 85–86; Schmitt 1983, 95; and Schmitt 1986, 453. For *xwarrah* in the post-Sasanian period, see Bailey 1971, 1–77.

²³⁴ Rapp 2009, 667–669. The etymology of *sue* is uncertain; cf. Andronikašvili 1966, 108–109.

with *didebay* the root *didi* (დიდი), “great”.²³⁵ Having defeated the Caucasian Arsacid Aršak II, the newly enthroned Aderki proclaimed to his soldiers: “I am the son of your kings, and my fortune [*sue*] has given me kingship [*mep’obay*]”.²³⁶ In the fierce conflict consuming rival diarchs P’arsman K’ueli and Mirdat, P’arsman engaged his adversary’s Parthian allies and “[h]is fortune [*sue*] gave him victory”.²³⁷ Whether it stemmed from terrible deeds or tragic circumstances, bad or “evil” fortune could deprive a king of his status and life. Sombre *gōsāns* (minstrels) blamed “evil fortune”, *sue boroti* (სუე ბოროტი), for P’arsman K’ueli’s assassination by an agent of the Parthian Arsacids.²³⁸

K’ueli (ქუელი; mod. *k’veli*), “valiant”, has a conceptual link to *xwarrah*. K’ueli’s Armenian equivalent is *k’aj* (քაջ) || *k’ajut’iwn* (քაջութիւն), “valiant, brave, valorous”.²³⁹ The etymology of *k’aj* is unknown, but the meaning is clear:

This term is occasionally used merely for intensification with the sense of “very, mighty, powerful” ... or for Christ ... or the saints ... who are God’s champions. The most common usage in [the fifth-century *Epic Histories*], however, is to denote the supernatural valor that is one of the main characteristics distinguishing the legitimate ruler of Iran in the Zoroastrian tradition. This quality was bestowed on them by the god Vərəθragna (Arm. Vahagn), who was himself “created victorious” (*pērōzgar*), as is explicitly stated by [the Armenian] Aa [witness of Agat’angelos] ... This heroic epithet also became part of the Sasanian royal title, according to [Movsēs Xorenac’i] ... [The *Epic Histories*] normally reserves this title for the hereditary ruling dynasty of the Aršakuni in Greater Armenia ... , thus showing that he was still acquainted

²³⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 26₆. *Simdidre* also denotes physical riches, e.g., *ibid.*, 23₂₈ = Thomson trans., 33. For *didebay*, see the discussion of *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* below.

²³⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 34₂₂–35₁ = Thomson trans., 48: “... მე ვარ შვილი მეფეთა თქუენთა, და სუესა ჩემსა მოუცემია მეფობა ჩემდა”.

²³⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 52_{17–18} = Thomson trans., 63: “და მოსცა სუემან მისმან ძღუევა ...” This idea is prevalent in Middle Persian literature and the Iranian epic, e.g., *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpagān*, V.13, Grenet ed. and trans., 76–77: “Because the kingly *xwarrah* [*xwarrah ī kayān*] was with Ardaxšīr, he was victorious, he killed Ardavān”. Ardaxšīr then took possession of Ardavān’s treasure and married his daughter.

²³⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 53₁₂.

²³⁹ Old Georgian *k’aji* (ქაჯი) denotes an evil being, demon and even a witch; cf. the diabolical beings in Armenian called *k’ajk’* (Russell 1987b, 451–453). The term is more commonly encountered in the Bagratid period, though it is used in *The Life of the Kings* but only as part of a city’s name (Qauxč’išvili ed., 10₃ [“city of the *k’ajis*”], 23₂₁, and for the following quotation, 44_{17–18}, “... and [the Armenian king Iarvand {Eruand}] named Cunda ‘K’ajatun’, which means ‘house of the demons [*devis*]’ [Thomson trans., 53: “... და უწოდა წუნდასა სახელად ქაჯატუნი, რომელი-ესე ითარგმანების დევთა-სახლად”]). See also Burney and Lang 1972, 220.

with its transcendental implications, as does his transfer of the epithet to the Mamikonean family ...²⁴⁰

Surviving Georgian texts do not employ *k'ueli* in such a specific manner as *k'aj*. When *k'ueli* is applied to monarchs such as P'arsman, however, it reinforces the sacral basis of K'art'velian kingship.

Throughout the Iranian Commonwealth, *xwarrah* and good fortune could be rescinded and the subjects of a delegitimised king acquired the right to rise up against him. As a literary device, the loss of divinely bestowed *xwarrah* and fortune usually signals the monarch's imminent death or overthrow. But in late antique Caucasia there always remained a stubborn devotion to dynasticism. Custom dictated that the new monarch should have a biological connection to the existing dynasty, in part because kingly *xwarrah*, Middle Persian *xwarrah ī kayān*, was the prerogative of certain families.²⁴¹ P'arnajom unwisely abandoned K'art'velian polytheism and

... adopted the religion of the Iranians [i.e., Parthians], fire-worship [*c'ec'xlis msaxureba*].²⁴² He brought from Iran fire-worshippers and mowbeds [*moguni*] and installed them in Mc'xet'a, at the place which is now called Mogut'a.²⁴³ He began openly to blaspheme the idols. Therefore, the inhabitants of K'art'li hated him, because they had great faith in the idols. Then the majority of the *erist'avis* of K'art'li conspired. They sent an envoy to the king of Armenia and said: "Our king has abandoned the religion of our fathers; no more does he serve the gods who rule K'art'li. He has introduced his paternal religion and abandoned his maternal religion. Now he is no longer worthy to be our king.

²⁴⁰ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, "K'aj/K'ajutiwn", 534–535. Cf. Testen 1989, who makes *k'aj/kaj* a cognate with Ir. *key*, "king". Agat'angelos (Aa), §127, Thomson trans., 138–139, for King Trdat's edict in which he supplicates Aramazd for "abundant fertility", Lady Anahit for "protection", and "the valiant Vahagn" (*i k'ajēn Vahagnē*, *ի քաջէն Վահագնէ*) for "valor" (*k'ajut'iw*n). For the inclusion of *k'aj* || *k'ajutiwn* in Sasanian *intitulatio*, see the purported letters from the *šāhan šāh* in Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.17, III.26 and III.51. Consider the first instance: "The most valiant [*k'aj*] of the Mazdeans, the equal to the Sun, Šapuh, king of kings ...", "*Մազդեականց քաջ և բարձակից արեղական ճապուհ արքայից արքայ ...*" (Abelean and Yartut'iwnean eds., 276₁₋₂ = Thomson trans., 271). The medieval Armenian adaptation of K'art'lis *c'xovreba* – produced substantially later, in the thirteenth century – often renders *k'ueli* as *k'aj*, e.g., P'arsman being "valiant in combat" ("*քաջ պատերազմող իբրև*"): *Life of the Kings in Patmut'iw*n Vrac', Abulaže ed., 55₁₇ = Thomson trans., 60.

²⁴¹ For the Middle Persian phrase, see p. 229 (fn. 237).

²⁴² Note the distinction between Zoroastrianism and the K'art'velians' alleged idolatry. If based on historical circumstances, the author may be referring to a royal attempt to import some Parthian/Iranian strain of Mazdaism at the expense of local syncretic variants.

²⁴³ P'arnajom's reign overlaps with the end of the Parthian Arsacid Mithradatēs II (r. 124/123–88/87 BC), who extended Parthian rule into Mesopotamia and Armenia.

Give us your son, Aršak, whose wife is a P'arnavaziani [i.e., a descendant of P'arnavaz], our kings".²⁴⁴

The Armenian Artašēsid (Artaxiad) monarch acceded to their request and his son Aršak was enthroned. The unnamed Artašēsid king is Artawazd I (r. ca. 161 BC); the correct name of his son is Artašēs, the fault stemming from *The Life of the Kings*'s confusion of Artašēsids as Arsacids.²⁴⁵ P'arnajom was subsequently killed at the Battle of Taširi. Another instance pertains to the Artašēsid ("Arsacid")-P'arnavaziani Bartom, whose royal position was challenged by Mirvan, P'arnajom's son who had been brought up in Parthia. Bartom had fathered no male progeny, so he arranged the marriage of his daughter to K'art'am, the P'arnavaziani grandson of the *erist'avi* K'uji. The historian explains:

And Bartom did this for the sake of pleasing the K'art'velians, because the K'art'velians had great respect for the P'arnavazianis. They did not wish for kingship [*mep'obafy*] of any other family which did not belong to [the lineage of] the P'arnavazianis.²⁴⁶

Considerably later, when the K'art'velian Arsacid Asp'agur passed away in 284 AD, what remained of the P'arnavaziani line ended at a decisive moment.²⁴⁷ Scrambling to safeguard dynastic stability, the *spaspeti* Maežan arranged the wedding of Asp'agur's daughter Abešura to the Iranian Prince Mihrān, called Mirian (var.

²⁴⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 29₅₋₁₅ = Thomson trans., 42, emphasis added: "... ამისა შემდგომად შეიყუარა სჯული სპარსთა, ცეცხლის მსახურება, მოიყვანა სპარსეთით ცეცხლისმსახურნი და მოგუნი, და დასხნა იგინი მცხეთას, აღგილსა მას, რომელსა აწ ჰქვან მოგუთა, და იწყო ცხადად გმობად კერპთა. ამისთვის მოიძულეს იგი მკვდრთა ქართლისათა, რამეთუ დიდი სასოება აქუნდა კერპთა მიმართ. მაშინ შეითქუნეს ერისთავნი ქართლისანი უმრავლესნი, და წარავლინეს მოციქული წინაშე სომეხთა მეფისა და რქუეს: 'მეფე ჩუენი გარდაცდა სჯულსა მამათა ჩუენთასა, არღარა მსახურებს ღმერთთა მპყრობელთა ქართლისათა, შემოიღო სჯული მამული და დაუტევა სჯული დედული. აწ არღარა ღირს არს იგი მეფედ ჩუენდა. მოგუეც ძე შენი არშაკ, რომელსა უზის ცოლად ნათესავი ფარნავაზიანთა, მეფეთა ჩუენთა'". When the P'arnavaziani line came to an end, the *spaspeti* Maežan lamented if only "there had remained an heir of our king or a relative of our kings, who was worthy to hold kingship [*mep'obafy*]" (და თუმცა დარჩომიდ იყო მკვდრი მეფისა ჩუენისა ანუ ნათესავი მეფეთა ჩუენთა, რომელიმცა ღირს იყო მეფობასა ...): *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 62₁₇₋₁₈.

²⁴⁵ Toumanoff 1963, 81 (fn. 103).

²⁴⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 32₁₃₋₁₅, Thomson trans., 46: "და ესე ქართველთა სათნოებისათჳს ექმნა ბარტომს, რამეთუ ქართველთა დიდი სათნოობა აქუნდა ფარნავაზიანთა მიმართ; და არა უნდა სხვსა ნათესავისა მეფობა, რომელსამცა არა შესდგომიდა ფარნავაზიანობა".

²⁴⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 59.

Mirean) in Georgian. *The Life of the Kings* expressly identifies Mirian as the first-born but illegitimate son of an unspecified Sasanian *šāhan šāh* (I). Notwithstanding, his name strongly implies that Mirian was a Parthian Mihrānid; in Mc'xet'a Mirian established a branch of royal Mihrānids called the Xosroianis (ხოსროიანები), often anglicised as Chosroids. Because of Mirian's union with Abešura, the couple's offspring, who in some ways represent a break from the past, could rightfully claim to have P'arnavaziani blood flowing through their veins.

The Hero-King

Didebay and *sue* are but one aspect of the elaborate Iranian royal imagery permeating *The Life of the Kings*. Consider this introduction to P'arsman II K'ueli (r. 116–132):

... P'arsman K'ueli ["the Valiant"] was a good [*ket'ili*] man, generous with gifts, and of a forgiving nature, handsome of stature [*asakit'a šuenieri*],²⁴⁸ large and powerful of body [*tanit'a didi da žlieri*], a brave [mounted] warrior [*mq'ne mq'edari*] and aggressive in battle, as fearless as one incorporeal [*ušiši vitarc'a uq'orc'o*], and in every respect superior to all the kings of K'art'li who had preceded him.²⁴⁹

Like his king, the *spaspeti* P'arnavaz was "valiant" (*k'ueli*, ქუელი), "faithful" (*sarmuno*, სარწმუნო), "loyal" (*ert'guli*, ერთგული, lit. "of one heart") and "trustworthy" (*misandobeli*, მისანდობელი).²⁵⁰ Conversely, P'arsman's rival, the diarch Mirdat, was "gloomy and bloodthirsty" (*urvili da mosisxle*, ურვილი და მოსისხლე).²⁵¹

Heroic vocabulary of this kind is encountered throughout *The Life of the Kings*. The first *mep'e* P'arnavaz is introduced as a *čabuki* (ჭაბუკი; Arm. *čapuk*, *Ճապուկ*), which might be translated as "young/youthful warrior". The Georgian term replicates Middle Persian *čābuk*, "agile, nimble, excellent".²⁵² P'arnavaz was "intelligent" (*gonieri*, გონიერი), "good" (*ket'ili*, კეთილი), a "[mounted]

²⁴⁸ This heroic quality is also stressed in Armenian literature, e.g., Movsēs Xorenac'i's portrayal of the eponymous forefather Hayk (I.10), for which see further.

²⁴⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 51₂₋₆ = Thomson trans., 60–61: "... ფარსმან ქუელი იყო კაცი კეთილი და უხუად მომნიჭებული და შემნდობელი, ასაკითა შუენიერი, ტანითა დიდი და ძლიერი, მკნე მკედარი და შემმართებელი ბრძოლისა, უშიში ვითარცა უკორცო და ყოვლითავე უმჯობესი ყოველთა მეფეთა ქართლისათა, რომელნი გარდაცვალებულ იყვნეს უწინარეს მისსა".

²⁵⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 51₁₀₋₁₂.

²⁵¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 51₂ = Thomson trans., 60.

²⁵² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 20₁₇. For the term, see MacKenzie 1986, 21; and Andronikašvili 1966, 408–409.

warrior” (*mq'edari*, մզեդարի) and a “skillful hunter” (*monadire q'elovani*, մոնადիրե զեղլովանի). Mirvan I was “perfect of body” (*tanit'a sruli*, լանտա սրլուի), “handsome” (*šuenieri*, ժւղւնիւրի), “strong” (*žlieri*, ձլիւրի), “brave” (*mq'ne*, մզնե) and “valiant”; in battle he moved “in ardour like a leopard, in courage like a panther, roaring like a lion” (*vit'arc'a jik'i sip'ic'xit'a*, *vit'arc'a vep'xi simq'nit'a*, *vit'arc'a lomi zaxilit'a*, *Վոտարճա չիկի սոփուցնտա, Վոտարճա քեքնի սոմճնտա, Վոտարճա լոմի շախիլտա*) and was “immovable, like a firm tower” (*vit'arc'a koški mtkic'e*, *Վոտարճա Կոժիկի մճուցիկ*), swords glancing off him because he was “like a smooth rock” (*vit'arc'a kldesa sipsa*, *Վոտարճա Կլճեսա սոքսա*). Mirvan II was a “[mounted] warrior”, “brave” and “valiant”. Aršak II was “mighty in strength” (*žlieri žalit'a*, ձլիւրի ձալտա) and “great/large” (*didi*, ճոճո). Aderki was “large of body” (*tanit' didi*, լանտա ճոճո) and “renowned” (*saxelovani*, Տախեղլովանի).²⁵³ And Amazasp II was “strong” and “a great giant” (*didi goliat'i*, ճոճո Գոլիատի).²⁵⁴

Comparable heroic imagery suffuses the Armenian *Epic Histories* (fifth century) and Movsēs Xorenac'i's *History of the Armenians* (eighth century). Xorenac'i sketches this picture of King Vālaršak: “The handsome [*anjnagel, անձնագիլ*] and valiant [*ari, արի*] Vālaršak, expert at the bow [*k'ajaletn, քաջաղիկն*], eloquent [*korovaban, Կորովաբան*] and intelligent [*hančarel, Հանճարիկ*] ...”²⁵⁵ *Ari*, “valiant”, is related to Armenian Arik' (*Արիկ*), “Aryans, Iranians”.²⁵⁶ Xorenac'i subsequently lavishes heroic attributes upon King Tigran, a predecessor of the renowned Tigran the Great. He was

... blond with grey-flecked hair, of ruddy complexion and gentle-eyed, personable and broad-shouldered, strong-legged and with noble feet, continent in eating and drinking and orderly at feasts, and – as those among our ancients who sang to the lyre used to say – moderate in pleasures of the flesh; he was wise and eloquent and eminent in everything that pertains to mankind.²⁵⁷

Even more than the author of *The Life of the Kings*, Xorenac'i (and his source) extends this colourful imagery back to the remote age of ethnogenesis. The eponym Hayk was

²⁵³ Cf. Arm. *ereweli* (*երեւելի*), “renowned, celebrated, eminent, illustrious”.

²⁵⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Gauxč'išvili ed., 21 (P'arnavaz), 27–28 (Mirvan I), 31 (Mirvan II), 33 (Aršak II), 33 and 35 (Aderki), and 55 (Amazasp II).

²⁵⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.9, Abelean and Yartut'wnean eds., 31_{10–11} = Thomson trans., 84: “... անձնագիլուն և քաջաղիկանն արին Վաղարշակայ, Կորովաբանուն և Հանճարիկի ...”

²⁵⁶ For *ariakan*, see above, p. 122.

²⁵⁷ Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.24, Abelean and Yartut'wnean eds., 72₁₇–73₅ = Thomson trans., 114: “... աղբրիկ ծալրի Հերաց ... Երեսօք դունեան և մեղուակն, անձնեալն և թիկնաւտն, առողաբարձն և զեղեցկոտն, պարեկեան ի կերտուրս և յըմպելիս, և ի խրախճանութիւնս օրինաւոր. զօրմէ ասէին ի Հինն մեր, որք փանդումն երգէին, լինել ամա և ի ցանկութիւնս մարմնուր չափաւոր, մեծիմաստ և պիւճաբան, և յամենայն որ ինչ մարդկութեան պիտանի:”

handsome and personable, with curly hair, sparkling eyes and strong arms. Among the giants [sing. *skay*] he was the bravest [*k'aj*] and most renowned [*ereweli*], the opponent of all who raised their hand to become monarch [*miapetel*] over all the giants and heroes [sing. *diwc'azn*]"'.²⁵⁸

The Bumberazobay

P'arsman K'ueli is among the greatest heroes commemorated in *The Life of the Kings*. He ruled in the first half of the second century AD, when the K'art'velian crown had reportedly split and Arsacid diarchys governed on opposite sides of the Kura/Mtkuari River.²⁵⁹ According to *The Life of the Kings*, the four previous sets of isochronal (!) diarchys – one sitting in Mc'xet'a and the other in the acropolis Armazi (i.e., Armazis-c'ixe) – had been on affable terms.²⁶⁰ But the cooperative atmosphere soured after the marriage of P'arsman's colleague Mirdat I to a Parthian Arsacid princess, “an Iranian [*sparsi*] wife of royal descent”.²⁶¹ A surge of external Parthian interference ensued and Mirdat hatched a plot against P'arsman, who surrounded himself with Armenian and K'art'velian allies. Ultimately, Mirdat fled to Parthia. In his place P'arsman promoted P'arnavaz, his *spaspeti* and “foster brother” (*žuzusmte*, ძუძუსმტე).

Mirdat soon returned at the vanguard of a Parthian army. P'arsman bolstered his forces with Armenian troops and the opponents met at Rkinis-q'evi.²⁶² In

²⁵⁸ Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.10, Abelean and Yartut'iwnean eds., 32^{15–18} = Thomson trans., 85: “... ზაკე კეყაყათაზად და ანანხაკ, ქაღაღანდორ, ჯაჯთაწი და ჯაათარაგოც: შაქ ძეჲ ასაკიჲს ქაღ და ხრეხი ქხაკ, და გუგუქინსაკჲ აძინხეონ, որჲ ამარანაკიჲს ეძინს `ძრავახთიქ და ქირაკ აძინაკი ასაკიჲს და კიყაღანს.”

²⁵⁹ For P'arsman and Mirdat, see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 50–54 = Thomson trans., 60–65.

²⁶⁰ If the diarchy is genuine, it may represent fierce discord between two powerful dynastic groups: king sitting in Mc'xet'a and the *bidaxš* who had (possibly) taken up residence in Armazis-q'evi (at a minimum, the site served as the *bidaxšate*'s necropolis). These *bidaxšes* probably administered the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands, although it is not impossible that at least some of them were (simultaneously?) imperial officials of Parthia. Alternately, these *bidaxšes* might have set themselves up as rival kings on the royal grounds of Armazis-c'ixe.

²⁶¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 50₁₁: “... c'oli *sparsi*, *nat'esavi mep'et'a*” (ცოლი სპარსი, ნათესავი მეფეთა).

²⁶² Q'evi (კევი), mod. *xevi* (ხევი), lit. “gorge, valley, defile”, was a principal unit of territorial organisation in late antique and medieval eastern Georgia: Javaxišvili 1998, 120–132, esp. 120–121. Q'evi is functionally equivalent to Arm. *gawar* (გაუარ), “district, canton”, for which see Garsoian in *Epic Histories*, “Gawar”, 526. Other geo-political units examined by Javaxišvili include: *k'ueqana*[y] (ქუეყანა[ო], mod. *k'veqana*, ქვეყანა), “land”; *sop'eli* (სოფელი), “settlement and adjacent land, land, world”; *k'alak'i* (ქალაქი, Arm. *k'alak'*, *ქალაქ*), “city”; and *daba*[y] (დაბა[ო]), “village”.

accordance with local convention, all-out combat was preceded by duels waged by champions. Pre-Bagratid historiographies refer to these specialist warriors as “heroes” (sing. *gmiri*, გმირი < Gimirrai, “Cimmerian”),²⁶³ “giants” (sing. *goliat’i*, გოლიათი) and especially *bumberazis* (sing. ბუმბერაზი). In the days leading up to the Battle of Rkini Valley were conducted numerous *bumberazi* contests, one-on-one brawls to the death. In order to prove their worthiness, King P’arsman and his general P’arnavaz challenged several enemy champions.²⁶⁴ In the early stages P’arsman killed seventeen Parthian *bumberazis* and P’arnavaz, twenty-three. The author emphasises a particular contest:

At that time there was among the Iranians [i.e., Parthians] a gigantic [*goliat’i*] man by the name Jumber [Juanšer?],²⁶⁵ who [once] had caught a lion with his hands.²⁶⁶ He challenged King P’arsman to single combat [*bržola t’avis-t’av*]. And King P’arsman happily armed himself and went forth. And they both shouted out with a great cry and rushed on each other. And they began to fight with sabres, and the noise of their combat resembled the sound of the crashing of thunder. P’arsman rose up, threw [Jumber], and slew him. He turned back towards his own army and shouted out in a loud voice: “Aha, ferocious lions, the sheep [are] beaten down by hail”. Then the K’art’velians and Armenians rushed on the Iranians, put them to flight and destroyed them; myriads were taken captive, and Mirdat [again] fled to Iran [i.e., Parthia].²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Cf. Arm. *hskay* (հսկայ), “giant”, lit. “a good Saka [i.e., Scythian]”: Russell 1986–1987, 267.

²⁶⁴ The most worthy K’art’velian kings are said to have participated personally in *bumberazi* duels, although none is specifically called *bumberazi* since this constituted a warrior stratum distinct from the dynastic monarch.

²⁶⁵ Jonber (ჯონბერ) in the Anaseuli redaction and Jumber (ჯუმბერ) in Mariamseuli. The important Mc’xet’ian variant of K’art’lis c’xovreba – written in *nusxuri* – gives Juanšer (ჯუანშერ): K’avt’aria, C’agareišvili and Sarjvelaže eds., 66₃. Arm/A and other variants of the Armenian adaptation, *Patmut’iwn Vrac’*, read Jewanšēr (Ջևանշէր; Abulaže ed., 56_{11–12}). If Anaseuli and Mariamseuli preserve the correct name, Jumber is the uncorrupted form as Qauxč’išvili contends. In this case, Jumber would have been misread as Juanšer, in part because of the confusion of ž (յ) and b (յ) in a *nusxuri* exemplar. Context suggests Juanšer to be the proper form; Iranian Juwānšēr denotes “young lion”. However, Juanšer is not an unusual name in late antique Caucasia and its corruption as Jumber is difficult to explain. See also Thomson 1996a, 62 (fn. 23).

²⁶⁶ For the Armenian king Trdat ripping apart a lion and a bear with his hands, see the Arabic (Va) redaction of Agat’angelos, Thomson 2010 trans., 267.

²⁶⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 52_{1–9} = Thomson trans., 62: “მაშინ იყო სპარსთა შორის კაცი ერთი გოლიათი, სახელით ჯუმბერ, რომელი ღომსა კელითა შეიპყრობდა. და მან სთხოვა ბრძოლა თავის-თავ მეფესა ფარსმანს. ხოლო ფარსმან ქუელი სიხარულით აღიჭურა და განვიდა. და აღიზახნეს ორთავე კმითა სასტიკითა, და მიეტევნეს ურთიერთას, და იწყეს ბრძოლად კრძლითა. და კმა ბრძოლისა მათისა ემსგავსა კმასა ქუხილისა და ტეხისასა. აჯობა ფარსმან, ჩამოაგდო და მოკლა, და მოიქცა სპისა თუსისა კერძო, და კმა-

Mirdat regrouped in Parthia and the following year returned with a larger host. The opposing forces met at Jač'wi, where over the course of several days *bumberazis* grappled with one another. P'arsman smote twelve Parthian *bumberazis* and his *spaspeti* P'arnavaz defeated another sixteen. The K'art'velian king seized the offensive and dispatched his troops against the numerically superior Parthian forces. P'arsman emerged triumphant, "his fortune [*sue*, i.e., *xwarrah*] gave him victory".²⁶⁸ Because the Parthians could not defeat P'arsman on the battlefield, they resorted to dishonourable methods. A treacherous cook poisoned the king, and P'arsman K'ueli's reign came to a premature end. As we have seen, *gōsāns* mourned P'arsman's death.²⁶⁹ This reference possibly signals the author's reliance upon an oral tradition about P'arsman's exploits and shocking demise.²⁷⁰

The story of P'arsman K'ueli is by no means an isolated literary showcase of the *bumberazis* and their exceptional prowess. The one-on-one matches waged by champions are a defining characteristic of the pre-Bagratid components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, especially *The Life of the Kings* and, as we shall see, *The Life of Vaxtang*.²⁷¹ This contrasts sharply with the hagiographical texts examined in Part I as well as the brief historiographical narratives of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, all of which are devoid of *bumberazis* and their conventions. In addition, champions and their pre-conflict duels are rarely attested in Bagratid-era historiographical works produced from the eleventh century onward and are absent from the Bagratid conception of royal authority.

The word *bumberazi* (ბუმბერაზი) is a curiosity. *Mumbarezi* (მუმბარეზი), its first attested form, occurs in the earliest extant Georgian-language manuscript of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, the Anaseuli redaction of the late fifteenth century.²⁷² *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, the medieval Armenian adaptation of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, uses the transcribed *mumberiz* (մութիւրիզ).²⁷³ Because *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*'s oldest manuscript

ყო კმითა მადლითა და რქუა მათ: 'აჰა, ღომნო მძუნვარენო, ცხოვარნი დასეტყუნნი!' | მაშინ მიეტყვნეს ქართველნი და სომეხნი სპარსთა ზედა, აოტნეს და მოსწყდნეს და ტყუე ყვნეს ურიცხვნი, და წარვიდა მირდატ მეოტი სპარსეთადუქ".

²⁶⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 52₁₇₋₁₈ = Thomson trans., 63, "და მოსცა სუემან მისმან ძღვეა ..."

²⁶⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 53₁₀ = Thomson trans., 63.

²⁷⁰ P'arsman's murder facilitated Mirdat's return to K'art'li. The *spaspeti* P'arnavaz fled to Armenia with P'arsman's son and wife, daughter of the Armenian king. With "Greek" and Megrelian assistance the Armenians launched an invasion of eastern Georgia and battled Mirdat's Parthian and K'art'velian troops on the banks of the Liavxi River at Req'ay (mod. Rexa). Both sides incurred heavy losses. In the end, Mirdat was killed and P'arsman's son Adami was enthroned as the sole king of K'art'li.

²⁷¹ Rapp 2009, 663–667; Rapp 2003, 154–156 and 204–215; and Rapp 2001 and 2004.

²⁷² Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts Q-795.

²⁷³ E.g., *Life of the Kings* in *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 44₅. The Armenian adaptor sometimes employs *menamart* (մենամարտ), "one who engages in single combat", and

was copied in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century, Anaseuli's *mumbarezi* would seem to be the original Georgian formulation. *Mumbarezi* echoes Iranian *mumbāriz* ("fighter") and Arabic *mubariz*, both of which may designate one who takes part in a physical contest or single combat.²⁷⁴

The Life of the Kings's initial reference to the *bumberazobay* – the institution of *bumberazi* combat and conduct – occurs in the account of the Artašesid-P'arnavaziani Bartom (63–30 BC), well before P'arsman K'ueli. In a skirmish between the forces of Bartom and Mirvan (son of the previous king P'arnajom) along the banks of the Berduji River, *bumberazis* engaged in daily contests for an entire month. Mirvan killed thirteen K'art'velian and Armenian *bumberazis*, whereas "... King Bartom did not himself fight with him, because Bartom did not possess the stature of a giant [*t'ana goliat'oba{y}*]"'.²⁷⁵

Although the pronounced *bumberazi* imagery of *The Life of the Kings* is temporally concentrated during the sway of the Parthian Arsacids,²⁷⁶ it has been projected through Sasanian and post-Sasanian filters. Together, *gmiri*, *goliat'i* and *bumberazi* are the K'art'velian analogues of the terminology associated with élite Sasanian warriors, the *aswārān*. The *aswār* (cf. OPers. *asbāra*) was a specialist in single combat (*mard-u-mard*) and an expert horseman. He accumulated honorifics bearing witness to his expertise and virility, including *hizārmard* (i.e., possessing the strength of "a thousand men"), *pahlawān* ("hero"), *jahān pahlawān* ("hero of the world"), *mumbāriz* (cf. Geo. *bumberazi*) and *zih sawār* ("exceptional rider").²⁷⁷ Portrayals of pre-Bagratid K'art'velian hero-kings and their *bumberazis* are remarkably consistent with those of the late Sasanian *aswārān*.²⁷⁸

axoyean (აქოეან, *axoian*), "hero, champion, rival": *Life of Vaxtang in Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 60₈ (*axoyean*) and 173₈ (*menamart*). See also Thomson 1996a, 47 (fn. 77).

²⁷⁴ Thomson 1996a, 45 (fn. 24). See also Gaffarov 1974, vol. 2, 729.

²⁷⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 32₃₋₄ = Thomson trans., 45: "... ვერცაღა თუთ ბარტომ მეფე ებრძოდა მას, რამეთუ არა იყო ბარტომის თანა გოლიათობა". The representation of the Iranian king as a titan is voiced in a letter by Xusrō I, quoted by the Roman historian Menander Protector, in which the *šāhan šāh* describes himself as *gigas gigantōn* (γίγας γιγάντων), "giant of giants". Menander the Protector, frag. 6.1, Blockley ed., 62₁₈₂. Widengren 1960, 42–49 *et sqq.*, for the synthesis of Semitic and Iranian traditions of giants and rulership in the Parthian epoch (with reference to Nimrod, for whom see further).

²⁷⁶ Most of the text addresses pre-Sasanian times. It ends just prior to the baptism of Mirian in the 320s or 330s.

²⁷⁷ Rapp 2009, 663–664.

²⁷⁸ For the *aswārān*, see: Zakeri 1993, 68–87, 113–114, *et sqq.*; and Zakeri 1995. In a general sense, single combat (Gk. *monomachia*, μονομαχία), including that waged before all-out battle, has a long multicultural history in the Near East and Mediterranean. See, e.g.: Oakley 1985; and Glück 1964. However, pre-Bagratid historiography makes clear that the primary socio-cultural framework of the *bumberazobay* is the Iranian world.

The Iranic Ties That Bind: Hunting, Vengeance, Foster Parentage and Marriage

The Life of the Kings provides other glimpses of K'art'li's enduring membership in the Iranian world.²⁷⁹ Hunting, *nadirobay* (ნადირობა), an activity cherished and often monopolised by the aristocracy, figures prominently in late antique and early medieval Georgian texts. P'arnavaz's discovery of *xwarrah*-endowing treasure during an unescorted hunt is legend pure and simple, but it was a highly effective literary device demonstrating his royal destiny. In Georgian literature's most famous hunting episode, *The Life of Nino* relates how King Mirian lost his way during a summer's hunt on Mt T'xot'i after the Sun darkened at midday.²⁸⁰ Having implored his idols Armaz and Zaden for aid, the panicked monarch supplicated the Christian God. The disk of the Sun subsequently perforated the black sky, Mirian regained his bearings, and upon his return to Mc'xet'a the king converted to Christianity. In a less dramatic example, the apostate *bidaxš* Varsk'en went hunting as his Christian wife Šušanik languished in her cell.²⁸¹

Vengeance is another prominent Iranic convention of late antique Caucasia. As was the case with their counterparts in Armenia Major, K'art'velian kings had the responsibility to "seek blood", *zieba sisxlsa* (ძიება სისხლსა), for murdered kinsmen and nobles, an act that strengthened social cohesion.²⁸² The first instances in *The Life of the Kings* involve legendary pre-Achaemenid²⁸³ Iranian monarchs who sought revenge against defiant Caucasians. The literary stage was set with Hayk's defeat of the Iranian Nimrod, the first king upon the Earth. Later, the catalyst for the formation of the K'art'velian monarchy at Mc'xet'a was the vengeance sought by P'arnavaz against Alexander's men for their slaughter of his father and uncle. The Macedonian governor Azon paid with his life. At least two civil wars chronicled in *The Life of the Kings* were incited by blood feuds. While some instances do not directly concern the K'art'velians, all are set within

²⁷⁹ Rapp 2009, 671–675.

²⁸⁰ E.g., *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 134₄₀–136₁₆. On the possibility of Mirian having experienced the solar eclipse of 6 May 319, see now: Gigolašvili *et al.* 2007; and Sauter *et al.* forthcoming.

²⁸¹ E.g., *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 15₆. Hunting as the literary backdrop for change also features in Armenian literature and in *The History of the Albanians*. See Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.1, for Babik's discovery during a hunt of a relic-laden church buried under a mound of soft dirt. Additionally, hunting is a common theme in the Iranic epic poetry revered at the height of Bagratid rule. For hunting, see also pp. 117–120

²⁸² For Armenia, see Garsoïan 1976, 2. The vendetta was by no means exclusive to the monarchy. Its prevalence at all levels of Caucasian society continued until the Russian conquest and beyond. For the context of the blood feud in imperial Russian times, see Grant 2009.

²⁸³ From the Sasanian perspective, the Achaemenids were the last manifestation of the Kayānid dynasty: Canepa 2009, 41.

the Iranian Commonwealth. Thus, the Alans/Ovis²⁸⁴ and the Armenian Sumbat Bivritiani (Smbat Bagratuni) attempted to win vengeance against one another.²⁸⁵ The K'art'velians were eventually drawn into this conflict.

Since it also appears in early hagiographical contexts, references to foster parenthood in pre-Bagratid historiographical narratives are not surprising. *Mamamžuze* (მამამძუჲე) and *dedamžuze* (დედამძუჲე),²⁸⁶ “foster father” and “foster mother”, normally impart the idea of “tutor”. As we have seen, foster parenting is attested in the oldest surviving work of original Georgian literature, the late fifth-century *vita* of Šušanik. It is also mentioned in *The Life of the Kings* and *The Primary History of K'art'li*.²⁸⁷ The first example in *The Life of the Kings* occurs in the account of P'arnajom: after P'arnajom fell in battle, the one-year-old Prince Mirvan was escorted to Parthia by his *mamamžuze*.²⁸⁸ In another instance, foster fathers shepherded away children in their care as civil war raged in Armenia Major.²⁸⁹ Foster parentage is also mentioned in connection with Mirian III, whose supposed father, the Sasanian *šāhan šāh* “Xusrō” (Geo. K'asre), entrusted the prince's upbringing to a *mamamžuze* named Mirvanoz, the *de facto* regent.²⁹⁰ Like the *vita* of Šušanik, *The Life of the Kings* uses the associated term *žuzusmte* (ძუძუსმტე), “foster brother”.²⁹¹

Throughout pre-modern times, marriage was a palpable bond drawing together elite families of Caucasia and Iran. P'arnavaz's mother is described as a native of Spahān (Isfahān). The second king Saurmag reportedly married a daughter of the Persian/Iranian official (*erist'avi*) based at Partaw (Geo. Bardavi).

²⁸⁴ For Alan/Ovisi forces as “the army of the North” (*banaki č'rdiloysa*, ბანაკი ჩრდილოისა), see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 47₄.

²⁸⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 47. Movsēs Xorenac'i, II.37–53, for the heroic tale of Smbat, son of Biwrat Bagratuni. The identity of this historical figure is probed in Toumanoff 1963, 316 and 323 (fn. 78); *ibid.*, 344 (fn. 16), for Arm. Biwratean and Geo. Bivritiani. According to Toumanoff, Sumbat Bivritiani represents a Bagratid line established at Ožrq'e (Odzrkhe) in eastern Georgia between the second and fifth century. Toumanoff notes that Armenian and Georgian traditions about Smbat/Sumbat “show no traces of dependence on each other” (p. 316). See also Toumanoff 1960a, 86–87. Sumbat Bivritiani lived in the late first/early second century and should not be confused with the famous Armenian king Smbat I Bagratuni “the Martyr” (r. 890/891–914), whose coronation is described by Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, XXX.24–25. This later figure is mentioned in the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 262–264.

²⁸⁶ Č'xeize 1979; Sarjvelaže 1979; Rapp 2003, 271; and Rapp 2009, 673 (fn. 77).

²⁸⁷ *Primary History of K'art'li*, §8, Rapp trans., 259, Abulaže ed., 82, set during the reign of Azoy (cf. Azon), whom the subsequent *Royal List I* identifies as the first king to sit at Mc'xet'a.

²⁸⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 30_{3,22}.

²⁸⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 62₁ (late third century AD).

²⁹⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64₂₀. For another reference to Mirvanoz as *mamamžuze*, see *ibid.*, 65₁₂.

²⁹¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 51₁₁.

But as we know it in documentary sources, Partaw did not exist in the early Hellenistic period; Partaw, called Pērōzabād by the Sasanians, was actually a late antique capital of Albania, the residence of a Sasanian *marzbān* from the early 460s, and one of the most important cities of Caucasia under Arab rule. If the report is based on a kernel of truth, the unnamed woman may have been the offspring of a former Achaemenid official. In any event, because no male progeny resulted from the marriage King Saurmag wed his daughter to Mirvan, an Iranian “Nimrodid” prince. In another example, P’arsman K’ueli’s adversary, the diarch Mirdat I, married a Parthian Arsacid princess. The case of Mirian III, the first king to sit upon the K’art’velian throne after the collapse of the P’arnavaziani regime, will be specially investigated below. Suffice it to say that Mirian was an Iranian; as noted, *The Life of the Kings* describes him as the illegitimate but first-born son of the Sasanian *šāhan šāh*. Once he had taken up residence in eastern Georgia, Mirian wedded Abešura, daughter of the last K’art’velian Arsacid king, Asp’agur.

Even if not always authentic, these professions of high-profile matrimonial unions symbolise what must have been hundreds of genuine marriages linking the Iranian and Caucasian aristocracies from antiquity through the end of the Sasanian Empire and beyond.

The Sasanian Empire during Mirian’s Pre-Christian Phase

When Ardaxšīr ousted the last Parthian Arsacid king Ardavān IV (var. Ardawān) in 224, acculturated Arsacids were already well entrenched in Caucasia. Early in the first century AD the Arsacids, known locally as Aršakunis, had secured control of the Armenian monarchy. They reigned as kings of Armenia until their ouster by the Sasanians in 428. The eastern Georgian throne had been won for the Arsacids late in the second century when the Armenian Arsacid Vałarš II (r. ca. 180–191) acquired the position for his son, Rev I.²⁹² Because his mother was the sister of the former P’arnavaziani king Amazasp II, Rev united the Arsacid and P’arnavaziani houses. In Albania, Arsacids took the reins of kingship in the first half of the second century and governed with some interruption until 510.²⁹³ Many of their names have been lost.

The Life of the Kings says virtually nothing about the five known Caucasian Arsacid monarchs of K’art’li. Here the text is chiefly concerned with the sequence of succession from father to son beginning with Rev (r. 189–216), followed by Vač’e (r. 216–234), Bakur I (r. 234–249), Mirdat II (r. 249–265) and Asp’agur (r. 265–284). A short paragraph devoted to Rev Mart’ali, “the Just”, reports his marriage to a Greek named Sep’elia (Sephelia). *The Life of the Kings* emphasises that although Rev was a polytheist he was acquainted with the Gospels “and he possessed some

²⁹² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 57.

²⁹³ Toumanoff 1990, 568; and Toumanoff 1984, 87 (but “[t]he surviving Arsacids of Albania continued as dynasts of Azbēt’ until the beginning of the VIIIth century”).

love for Christ”.²⁹⁴ Drawing on his putative Christian sympathies, Rev prohibited the sacrificing of children to idols. Kings Vač’e, Bakur and Mirdat receive no narrative consideration at all. It is worth noting that Rev’s sobriquet, *mart’ali*, “[is] an obvious translation of δίκαιος [*dikaios*], one of the epithets most frequently used in the *intitulatio* of the Arsacid Great Kings ...”²⁹⁵ The only K’art’velian Arsacid described in any detail is Asp’agur, the last male representative of the Arsacid-P’arnavazianis. Augmented by Ovsī/Alan, Lek and “Khazar” allies, Asp’agur joined the Armenian Arsacid king in an anti-Sasanian coalition.

The Arsacid neglect exhibited by the anonymous historian – and his source(s) – was thus directed against all Arsacids, whether Parthian or Caucasian. But the inattention is particularly noticeable for the core Parthian family: not a single specific Parthian Arsacid monarch is named or intimated in *The Life of the Kings*. By contrast, the text devotes far more consideration to the subsequent Christian Chosroid kings, acculturated Parthian Mihrānids who posed as Sasanians.

Earlier we saw how *The Life of the Kings* situates Parthia’s demise anachronistically within the reign of Asp’agur:

In his time K’asre Anušarvan Sasaniani became king in Iran. He put an end to the Ažayaniani [i.e., Parthian Arsacid] kings and was known as Ardašīr, as is written in *The Life of the Iranians*.²⁹⁶

This confusion is by no means limited to chronology: while Ardašīr is correctly associated with the rise of the Sasanian dynasty, he is identified simultaneously with the renowned sixth-century Xusrō I Anūšīrwān. This egregious misidentification is duplicated in the treatment of Asp’agur’s successor Mirian.²⁹⁷ Because he was sometimes called Hormizd-Ardašīr, it might seem prudent to identify this particular *šāhan šāh* as Hormizd I (r. 270–271), whose short tenure is fully contained within Asp’agur’s. However, anachronistic allusions to Xusrō and Anūšīrwān make this unlikely. What is more, pre-Bagratid historiography

²⁹⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 58, = Thomson trans., 69: “... და აქუნდა რამე სიუერული ქრისტიანო”.

²⁹⁵ Toumanoff 1969a, 17, fn. 75.

²⁹⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 59_{8–10}, based on Thomson trans., 70. For the Georgian text, see p. 193 (fn. 27). This nominative form of Ardašīr’s name, Ardabirobay, is odd. The confusion of š (ჟ) and b (ბ) is commonplace in *nusxuri*, but the *-obay* suffix marking abstract nouns added to Ardašīr is difficult to explain. The source must have referred to the descendants of Ardašīr. Cf. P’arnavazianobay (ფარნავაზიანობა), i.e., P’arnavaz + *-ian* + *-obay*: *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 32₁₅. But Ardabirobay does not follow the convention of joining the suffix *-iani* (pl. *-ianni*) to the founder’s name, e.g., T’argamosiani, K’art’losiani, Ažayaniani and Sasaniani. See also Thomson 1996a, 71 (fn. 53). For treatments of the collapse of Arsacid Parthia in Armenian historiography, see: e.g., Agat’angelos, §18; and Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.69–71.

²⁹⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 64₁₄, and K’avt’aria, C’agareišvili and Sarjvelaže eds., 78₁₁.

commonly styles *šāhan šāhs* by the generic “Xusrō”. While the name could be read as the Middle Iranian honorific *xusrō* (*husraw*), “famous, of good repute”, the correlation of Xusrō and Anūšīrwān rules out its interpretation as anything but a proper name.²⁹⁸ Not only was there no *šāhan šāh* Xusrō during the reigns of Asp’agur and Mirian, but Xusrō I was not enthroned until 531.²⁹⁹ This passage is another example of the projection of information about Persia, Parthia and Iran through late- and post-Sasanian lenses. And it shows the significant confusion and distortion introduced into *The Life of the Kings*.

The turmoil accompanying the rise and consolidation of the Sasanians reportedly provided the Caucasian kingdoms some breathing space and allowed them to seize the offensive. At the time, the three monarchies were ruled by acculturated/acculturising Parthian families. According to *The Life of the Kings*, the Armenian Arsacid Xosrov II (Geo. Kosaro, r. 279/280–287) attacked the forces of the Sasanian “Xusrō” (Geo. K’asre), who chronology dictates must be Bahrām II (r. 274–293).³⁰⁰ The K’art’velian Arsacid Asp’agur assisted the Armenians by securing reinforcements from northern Caucasia and Bahrām was put to flight. Xosrov’s campaign against the Sasanian newcomers is also conveyed in the Armenian witness of Agat’angelos. It emphasises Xosrov’s quest for vengeance, *k’i nut’ iwn* (քի նուտ’ իւն), after the ejection of his Parthian relatives.³⁰¹ His anger was interminable:

[Xosrov] attempted to eradicate, destroy completely, extirpate and overthrow the Persian dominion [*tērut’ iwn Parsic’*] and aimed at abolishing its institutions.³⁰²

The desperate *šāhan šāh* put his trust in the Armenian prince Anak, Xosrov’s relative and a descendant of the Parthian Sūrēns,³⁰³ who promised to win recompense for the Sasanians. During a royal hunt, Anak and his brother

²⁹⁸ The use of Xosrov as a proper name by the Armenian Arsacids long anticipated that by the Sasanian *šāhan šāhs*. The first Armenian Xosrov reigned from ca. 191 to ca. 216/217. Similarly, the name P’eroz was employed by an acculturated Mihrānīd *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands already in the mid-fourth century.

²⁹⁹ Four *šāhan šāhs* coincide with Asp’agur’s reign: Šāpūr I (r. 240–270), Hormizd I (r. 270–271), Bahrām I (r. 271–274) and Bahrām II (r. 274–293).

³⁰⁰ Portraits of Bahrām II and his family, including his cousin and Queen Šāpūrduxtag, adorn a Sasanian silver cup found at Zargveši in Egrisi/Colchis: Harper 1974, 63–64 and 70–74; Harper and Meyers 1981, 30; Rose 1998, 43; and Braund 1994, 242.

³⁰¹ Agat’angelos (Aa), §§19–23. Reminiscent of *The Life of the Kings*, Agat’angelos does not explicitly name Bahrām II. He also reports the participation of the K’art’velians and northern Caucasians.

³⁰² Agat’angelos (Aa), §19 = Thomson 2010 trans., 128: “Ճնջել ի միջոյ ի բաց կորուսանել, խլիլ քակիլ, հիմն ի վեր ջանալոր առնել, համարէր բառնալ զօրէնս տէրութեանն Պարսից:”

³⁰³ Anak is described as “a leading *nahapet* of the Parthian dominion [*Part’ewac’ tērut’ eann*]” (գլխաւոր նահապետ էր Պարթեաց տէրութեանն) in Agat’angelos (Aa), §25, Thomson 2010 trans., 131.

murdered Xosrov. In the ensuing chaos, Anak's two sons and his brother were taken away and sheltered by their foster fathers.³⁰⁴ One of the boys was Anak's son Gregory, the future Grigor Lusavoriĉ, Gregory the Illuminator. Through Gregory's intercession King Trdat IV (Geo. T'rdat, r. 298/299-ca. 330) embraced Christianity ca. 314, a decade or two before his K'art'velian counterpart.³⁰⁵ In its testimony about Xosrov, *The Life of the Kings* follows enough of the basic thread of Agat'angelos that it must have been known to him in some manner. Because we have no evidence of a written version of Agat'angelos having been at the disposal of the K'art'velian historian or his source, this familiarity almost certainly entailed oral transmission.³⁰⁶

Mihrrānids Enthroned

When the Iranians returned to Caucasia, Asp'agur absconded to the highlands of Alania-Ovset'i where he passed away. The uncertainty enveloping eastern Georgia's political life was heightened by Asp'agur's failure to produce a male heir. Because he had only a daughter, what remained of the male P'arnavaziani line whimpered to a halt. Under the guidance of the *spaspeti* Maežan, eastern Georgia's *erist'avis* convened in Mc'xet'a to deliberate what might be done to alleviate the precarious situation. A plan conceived by Maežan was accepted by the *šāhan šāh*: the Sasanian king of kings would marry one of his sons to Asp'agur's daughter Abešura.³⁰⁷ This was part of a wider effort to placate the Iranians, who were rebounding from the destructive campaign waged by the Armenian Arsacid Xosrov. At the Sasanian court K'art'velian emissaries stressed the auspicious convergence in Abešura of three royal lines: the Nebrot'ianis, the ancient royal Iranians descended from Nimrod; the Aršakunianis (არშაკունյան), here also called *didebulis* (დიდებულნი),³⁰⁸ which could include both Parthian and Caucasian Arsacids; and the indigenous P'arnavazianis. Bahrām II, who is not expressly named, sensed an opportunity to strengthen the Sasanians' hand in Caucasia and to exploit Mc'xet'a's prime location as a gateway to the strategic

³⁰⁴ Agat'angelos (Aa), §34, Thomson 2010 trans., 135: "Only two infant sons from among the sons of the Parthian [Anak] did someone save and rescue through their *dayeaks*, who took them and fled: the one to Persian territory and the other to Greek territory", "Բայց միայն երկուս մանկունս փոքրեւնս յորդեղն Պարթեւին պրծեալ ոմն ապրեցուցաներ ի ձեռն զայեկաց ուրումն. զմին ի կողմանս Պարսից, և զմին ի կողմանս Գունաց առեալ փախչէին:"

³⁰⁵ Ananian 1961. Some observers have dated this event as early as 284.

³⁰⁶ It is unknown whether the full text of Agat'angelos was translated or adapted into Georgian in the pre-Bagratid period. On the medieval Georgian fragment (aFg) housed in the Cambridge University library (Cambr. MS.5/MS.Add.1890.3), see: Abulaže 1960; Garitte 1948 and 1962; and Blake 1932, 216–221. For the Georgian version of Agat'angelos, see also: Muradyan 1982; and Melikset-Bekov 1916.

³⁰⁷ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxĉ'išvili ed., 62–64.

³⁰⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxĉ'išvili ed., 63,.

passes through the Caucasus Mountains. So important was the initiative that the *šāhan šāh* reportedly travelled in person to Mc'xet'a, where Abešura wed the seven-year old Prince Mihrān. This Sasanian prince was "... the offspring of a handmaid, and was called Mihrān [Geo. Mihran] in Persian, but Mirian in Georgian".³⁰⁹

At first glance, this account might seem to be tinged with anti-Arsacid bias because the Arsacid bloodline is linked not to kings but to *didebuli*, usually translated "grandees, nobles".³¹⁰ But in my view, the original meaning of *didebuli* evinced the possession of *xwarrah*, which in surviving Georgian texts is expressed by *didebay*. Hagiographies commonly deploy the adjective *didebuli*, "glorious". Its oldest surviving usage occurs in the *vita* of Šušanik. In this late fifth-century reference, the holy woman's relics are described as "glorious", which might represent the application of a Christianised *xwarrah* to the martyred Armenian princess.³¹¹ In another context, *The Life of the Nino* says that the place in Mc'xet'a where Nino baptised nobles exuded "considerable grandeur", *p'riad didebul* (ფრიად დიდებულ).³¹² The site was in close proximity to the city's Iranian quarter. *Didebuli* as the adjective "glorious" is also used in hagiographical titles, e.g., *Camebay cmidisa da didebulisa mocamisa arč'ilisi* (წამებავა წმიდისა და დიდებულისა მოწამისა არჩილისი), *The Passion of the Holy and Glorious Martyr Arč'il*.³¹³ But by this time the original connection to *xwarrah* may have been forgotten. In *The Life of the Kings*, the solitary instance of *didebuli* occurs in the aforementioned passage about Abešura. *The Life of the Kings's* deliberate attachment of the noun to the Aršakunianis is the oldest usage of *didebuli* in extant Georgian historiography. I am convinced that it must have a connection to "glory". If so, the Aršakunianis were exalted with *xwarrah*.³¹⁴ Later, under the Bagratid regime, a desacralised *didebuli* was popularised as a social designator extended to all high-ranking aristocrats.³¹⁵

The tradition enshrined in *The Life of the Kings* intentionally exaggerates Mirian's origins by making him the son of the *šāhan šāh* and, more than that, the first-born – albeit illegitimate – son! As his name and those of his successors strongly suggest, however, Mirian-Mihrān was in reality a scion of the Parthian Mihrānid house. Mirian's removal to K'art'li marks the inauguration of an acculturating Mihrānid branch called Xosroiani (ხოსროიანი). The Chosroid dynasty thus claimed descent from a certain Xusrō.³¹⁶ In the late- and post-Sasanian eras "Xusrō" would naturally have been associated with the sixth-

³⁰⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64₈ = Thomson trans., 75: "... ნაშობი ძვეულისა, რომელსა ერქვა სპარსულად მიჰრან, ხოლო ქართულად მირიან".

³¹⁰ The nobility is usually designated *carč'inebuli* (წარჩინებული).

³¹¹ Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 19, Abulaže ed., 28₂₄.

³¹² *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 146₂₂₋₃₅. For the passage, see p. 141 (fn. 186).

³¹³ *Vita Arč'il*, Abulaže ed., 208₁₋₂.

³¹⁴ *Didebuli* appears in neither *The Life of Vaxtang* nor Ps.-Juanšer.

³¹⁵ Toumanoff 1963, 266–268.

³¹⁶ E.g.: Toumanoff 1963, 83–84 (and fn. 105); and von Wesendonk 1927.

century *šāhan šāhs* of that name. Not surprisingly, at least one Georgian historiographical work, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, explicitly refers to the Sasanians as Xuasro[v]anni (ხუასროლ[ვ]ანნი).³¹⁷ As it is associated with both Sasanians and Chosroids, “Xusrō” represents the founder of the Sasanian house. By extension, the Chosroids – as Sasanians – were endowed with *xwarrah*.

The downfall of the Parthian Arsacids had by no means spelled the end of the Mihrānid family. Under the Sasanian regime the Mihrānids and other Parthian nobles exercised power over a large swathe of the northern Iranian world. A number of rival Parthian houses, including the Kārin,³¹⁸ Ispahbudān, Sūrēn and Kanārangīyān also thrived to varying degrees.³¹⁹ Even after the famous reforms of *Šāhan šāh* Xusrō I, the Mihrānids retained their lofty position within the later empire.³²⁰ Both *kūst-i Ādurbādagān* and *kūst-i Xwarāsān*, the northern and eastern homelands of the Parthian dynastic aristocracy, remained under Parthian dominion throughout the Sasanian era. Indeed, the participation of the illustrious “seven great houses” in some ways enabled and sustained the Sasanian enterprise.

As Mirian demonstrates, Mihrānid branches were also ensconced beyond the empire in Caucasia, the southeastern territories of which overlapped with *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*.³²¹ When they had implanted themselves among non-Iranians, Parthian élites tended to assimilate to the dominant *ethnie*. Because in many ways the socio-cultural distance between Iran and Caucasia was remarkably short, Parthian assimilation prospered in K’art’li. Here the Parthians adopted the Georgian language and embraced indigenous Mazdaisms before converting to Christianity in the course of the fourth century. These Parthians actively contributed to the religious life of eastern Georgia and helped shape the local, syncretic strains of Mazdaism and Christianity.

Like other aristocratic families in Caucasia, the Mihrānids cultivated beneficial marriage links. Sometimes these extended to the Sasanians. King Mirian probably had some Sasanian blood running through his veins, yet there are no historical grounds to accept his audacious identification as the son of a *šāhan šāh* (let alone the first-born son!). The same phenomenon is observed in neighbouring Albania, where another Mihrānid branch forged real and

³¹⁷ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 136₁₈ = Thomson trans., 150: “... [the Iranian] kings descended from Xosro”, “... ძეგვთა ხუასროლანთა [... *mep’et’a xuasrovant’a*]”. The Mariamseuli redaction corrupts the name as Xovasrovani, which is based on an error in shifting between scripts. A similar term is sometimes encountered in Persian.

³¹⁸ Var. Karēn. Armenian Kamsarakans may have been descended from the Kārins: Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.28, Abelean and Yartut’iwnian eds., 146_{17–18}. See also Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Kamsarakan” and “Karēn”, 382–383.

³¹⁹ E.g., Pourshariati 2008, 42.

³²⁰ Pourshariati 2008, 102, 115–116, *et sqq.* For an overview of the reforms, see Frye 1984, 325–334.

³²¹ On *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*, see Gyselen 2000.

imaginary genetic links to the Sasanians. Movsēs Dasxuranc'i goes so far as to make the Albanian Mihrānids an offshoot of the Sasanian house; he mentions the “Mirhean [branch] of the Sasanian family ...”, “... *Միրհեանն, որ ի Սասանեանն առհմէն...*”³²² which, having migrated from Iran, established itself among Albania's nobility. Similarly, the first Christian king of Albania, the Caucasian Arsacid Ūrnayr, was “the husband of the sister of Šapuh [i.e., Šāpūr II], king of Persia”.³²³ Dasxuranc'i further depicts the Albanian Arsacid Vač'ē II (r. mid- to late-fifth century) as the nephew of Hormizd III and Pērōz.³²⁴ In this fashion, Partho-Caucasian families, including the Caucasian Arsacids, attempted to boost their royal standing though inflated biological associations with the Sasanians.

Because the Sasanians asserted a monopoly over *xwarrah* *ikayān*, a prerequisite to Iranian kingship, affirmations of *xwarrah* by non-Sasanian kings elsewhere in the commonwealth were often accompanied by declarations of biological linkages to the Sasanian house. So desirable was the connection that enthroned K'art'velian Mihrānids envisioned themselves as full-fledged Sasanians. These Chosroids imagined themselves as wholly autonomous *šāhan šāhs* who governed Iranic societies just beyond the northwestern edge of the empire. In accordance with prevailing Iranic historiographical conventions, *The Life of the Kings* endows the first Chosroid, Mirian, with a Sasanian pedigree – and one which made him the first-born son of a conveniently unnamed *šāhan šāh*.³²⁵ Thus, through the combination of their royal status and the propagation of real and fictive bonds with the Sasanians, Partho-Caucasians laid claim upon *xwarrah*.³²⁶

Caucasian Arsacids also asserted possession of *xwarrah*. According to Agat'angelos, the Armenian Arsacid Trdat called on “the protection from our heroic Parthians, from the glory [*p'ar'k'*] of [our] kings and brave [*k'aj'*] ancestors”.³²⁷ In an intriguing reversal, the fifth-century author of *The Epic Histories* has the Sasanians benefit from the *xwarrah* of the Armenian Arsacids. During an invasion under Šāpūr II, the Iranians

opened the tombs of the former kings of Armenia, of the most valiant [*k'ajac'*] Aršakuni [i.e., Arsacids], and they carried off into captivity the bones

³²² Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, III.22 (23), Aṛak'elyan ed., 338₂₁, Dowsett trans., 225. See Toumanoff 1990, 570, for later Mihrānid presiding princes of Albania.

³²³ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.9, Aṛak'elyan ed., 14₁₄, “... *քեռայր Շապուհ Պարսից արքայի*”, and Dowsett trans., 8 (including fn. 1: “Ūrnayr is nowhere else mentioned as Šapuh's brother-in-law ...”). Toumanoff 1990, 91, places Ūrnayr's reign sometime around the year 370. Its duration is unknown.

³²⁴ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, I.10, Aṛak'elyan ed., 15_{13–14}, Dowsett trans., 9.

³²⁵ Within Iran proper it was a Mihrānid who successfully disrupted the Sasanian royal monopoly. Bahrām Čōbīn attempted to shatter the Parthian-Sasanian “confederacy” in order to restore the Parthians to the imperial throne: Pourshariati 2008, 397–404.

³²⁶ Garsoïan 1976, 39. For the Parthian Arsacids, see Curtis 2012.

³²⁷ Agat'angelos (Aa), §127, Thomson trans., 138–139, “... *ի մեր դիւցախառն Պարթևաց հասցէ աշցիւութիւն, ի փառաց Թագաւորաց և ի բաջ նախնեաց*.”

of the kings ... [so] that the glory [*p'ark'*] of the kings and the fortune [*baxt*] and valor [*k'ajut'awn*] of this realm might go from here with the bones of the kings and enter into [the Iranian] realm.³²⁸

Back in K'art'li, with Mirian's position secure the *šāhan šāh* reportedly entrusted his son with south-central and southeastern Caucasia: Somxit'i – i.e., the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands – as well as the Albanian territories of Rani and Movakani (south and north of the Kura/Mtkuari River respectively) and Heret'i (far western Albania).³²⁹ Because Mirian was still in his minority, the *šāhan šāh* appointed Mirvanoz (Mlr. Meherwān, Mihrawān)³³⁰ as *mamamzuze* and “guardian” (*ganmgebeli*, განმგებელი), the latter expressing the sense of “regent”. The provisions of the marriage of Prince Mirian to Abešura, daughter of King Asp'agur, stipulated the stationing of 40,000 Sasanian “select mounted warriors/cavalry” in far eastern Georgia, Albania and Somxit'i-Gugark' but not K'art'li proper. However, the king of kings ordered Mirvanoz to accept the garrisoning of 7,000 Iranian mounted troops in Mc'xet'a, ostensibly to vouch for Mirian's safety.³³¹

A prominent theme of *The Life of the Kings* is the ethno-linguistic condition of eastern Georgia and, more specifically, the idealised sense that a viable K'art'li must be culturally and linguistically homogeneous. This is a reflection of a relatively small but distinctive community being aware of its precarious existence in a highly cosmopolitan environment which, simultaneously, was ground zero for the imperial tug-of-war between Ctesiphon and Rome/Constantinople. The K'art'velians are thus made to voice concerns about the mingling of Iranians and K'art'velians, a circumstance brought to a head with Mirian's importation from Iran. Before departing K'art'li, the *šāhan šāh* appealed for calm: “My son will observe both religions, the fire-worship [*c'ec'xlis-msaxurebay*] of our fathers and

³²⁸ *Epic Histories*, IV.xxiv, 1883 ed., 121₆₋₈ and 122₁₂₋₁₅, Garsoïan trans., 157 and 158, “*Եւ Բանաւ յին [Պարսք] զգերեզմանս զառաջին թագաւորացն Հայոց զարանց քաջաց զարչակունոյ, և ի ազաջուցանէին ի գերութիւն զուսկերս թագաւորացն ... թէ վանն աշտորիկ բարձեալ տանիմք զուսկերս թագաւորացն Հայոց յաշխարհն մեր, զի փառք թագաւորացն և բախտն և քաջութիւն աշխարհիս աստի դնացեալ ընդ ոսկերս թագաւորացն յաշխարհն մեր եկեցեցն:*”.

³²⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64. The distinction between Rani and Movakani is, in part, a memory of the joining of the lands south of the Kura/Mtkuari to the Albanian kingdom (Arm. Ałuank'). According to Garsoïan (in *Epic Histories*, “Ałuank'”, 438–439), “The eastern marchlands south of the Kur River were disputed between Armenia and Ałuank'. The Armenian *sparapet* Mušel Mamikonean successfully reconquered them ca. 370, thus pushing the Armenian border northward to the Kur River ..., but the marchlands reverted to Ałuank' after the partition of Greater Armenia ca. 387”.

³³⁰ Mirvan, here with the Greek nominative suffix -oz (i.e., -os). For the name, see Andronikašvili 1966, 482–484.

³³¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 65₁₋₄.

the worship of your idols', because he had previously given his oath [p'ic'i] for this".³³² As the regent Mirvanoz kept watch over the kingdom,

Mirian grew up in the worship of the seven idols and of fire. He loved the K'art'velians, forgot the Persian language and learned the Georgian language. He augmented the embellishment of idols and altars [sing. *bomoni*], and treated the pagan high-priests³³³ [*k'urumni kerpt'ani*] well; more than all the kings of K'art'li he carried out the worship of the idols, and he embellished the tomb of P'arnavaz. He did all this for the sake of pleasing the K'art'velians; and he treated the K'art'velians well, with gifts and all kinds of honours. So all the K'art'velians loved him more than all [their other] kings. Mirian reigned in this fashion over K'art'li, Somxit'i, Rani, Heret'i, Movakani and Egrisi.³³⁴

Mirian acculturated to the K'art'velian environment and his subjects regarded him as one of their own.³³⁵ Once again we see the dynamic of social conversion at play in the pluralistic Caucasian crossroads.

Abešura passed away at the tender age of fifteen. Because the young couple had no children the primary P'arnavaziani line came to a complete end. Mirian eventually remarried, taking as his second wife a Greek from Pontos named Nana. She was the daughter of a certain Oliyotos,³³⁶ perhaps to be identified as the Bosporan king Theothōrsēs (d. 309).³³⁷ On the eve of Nana's and then Mirian's conversion, the queen consort and king of eastern Georgia were foreigners. More than that, the ruling couple represented the physical fusion of Greek and

³³² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 65₇₋₉ = Thomson trans., 77: "და იყოს შვილი ჩემი ორსავე სჯულსა ზედა: მამათა ჩუენთა ცეცხლის-მსახურებასა და თქუენთა კერპთასა', რამეთუ პირველვე ამას ზედა მოეცა ფიცო".

³³³ Lit. "high-priests of the idols". Sing. *k'urumi* (ქურუმი), via Arm. *k'urm* (քում), "pagan' priest" < Syr. *kumrā*, "priest". See: Abulaže 1973b, 459; Russell 1987b, 495; and Garsoiān in *Epic Histories*, 539–540.

³³⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 65₁₅₋₂₃ = Thomson trans., 77: "... აღიზარდა მირიან მსახურებასა მას შინა შუდთა მათ კერპთასა და ცეცხლისასა. ხოლო შეიყუარნა ქართველნი, და დაივიწყა ენა სპარსული და ისწავა ენა ქართული. და ჰმატა შემეკობა კერპთა და ბომონთა, კეთილად იპყრნა ქურუმნი კერპიანი, და ყოველთა მეფეთა ქართლისათა უმეტეს აღასრულებდა მსახურებასა მას კერპთასა, და შეამკო საფლავი ფარნავაზისი. ხოლო ესე ყოველი ქართველთა სათნოებისათეს ქმნა, და კეთილად იპყრნა ქართველნი ნიჭითა და ყოვლითა დიდებითა. და შეიყუარეს იგი ყოველთა ქართველთა უმეტეს ყოველთა მეფეთასა. და მეფობდა ესრეთ მირიან მცხეთით გაღმართ ქართლს, სომხითს, რანს, პერეთს, მოვკანს და ეგრეს".

³³⁵ In a different context and at a later time, the expatriate Arab perfumer Habo (d. 786) similarly acculturated: Iovane Sabanis-ze, *Vita Habo*, Abulaže ed., 57.

³³⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 66₇₋₈.

³³⁷ Settapani 2006, 406.

Iranian culture.³³⁸ As it happens, the contribution of outsiders to K'art'li's fourth-century Christianisation was even more pronounced. According to her medieval *vita*, the illuminatrix Nino was a foreigner who had migrated from the eastern Roman Empire. A later tradition makes her a Cappadocian.

Having wed Nana, the king launched a new expedition against pastoralist highlanders ("Khazars"). Mirian was keen not only to secure the strategic Darband Pass in northeastern Caucasia but also to acquire control of the commercial and communications corridor running south along the Caspian Sea to the Abşeron Peninsula and on to the Šarwān Plain and Kura/Mtkuari River. In doing so, Mirian maneuvered to shield the approach not only to his kingdom but also to the imperial Iranian heartland.

Šāhan šāh Mirian?

Mirian's bloodline came into play at the auspicious age of forty when his father passed away.³³⁹ This would have occurred ca. 317. Attempts to correlate the episode with an actual *šāhan šāh* have proven futile.³⁴⁰ Chronological flags in *The Life of the Kings* place Mirian's birth around 277.³⁴¹ If Mirian was the son of a reigning king of kings, his father must have been Bahrām II (r. 274–293). But Bahrām died in 293. To complicate matters, between Mirian's accession in 284 and ca. 317 there were five *šāhan šāhs*, none of whom died at the end of this span. Šāpūr II was invested – perhaps *in utero!* – in 309. There is another snag: at the conclusion of *Royal List I*, which is uniquely preserved in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, the last two monarchs are "Lev, father of Mirean".³⁴² Both the name and the person Lev are unknown elsewhere. Lev is almost certainly a corruption of Rev;³⁴³ *nusxuri* ႁ (r) and ႁ (l) are prone to confusion especially if the central stroke of ႁ is sloppily executed or illegible, hence ႁႁႁႁ (Rev) and ႁႁႁႁ (Lev). Notwithstanding this figure's garbled name and uncorroborated existence, the

³³⁸ A cross-cultural condition – expertly revealed by Rostovtzeff 1922 – extending north beyond the Caucasus Mountains to the steppes of present-day Ukraine and Russian Federation. It transcended sedentary and nomadic communities.

³³⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 67–68.

³⁴⁰ K'art'lis c'xovreba's version of *The Life of Nino* refers to an (alleged) invasion of Roman Anatolia by Mirian and "his nephew, the great king of Iran" just prior to Constantine's recognition of the Christian God: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 95₁₃.

³⁴¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64.

³⁴² *Royal List I*, §26, "ლევ, მამაო მორეანო".

³⁴³ Ingoroqva 1941b, 317 (and fn. 13); and Melik'išvili 1959, 61–62. Rev II (r. 345–361), son of Mirian III and co-king with him, is attested in *The Life of the Kings*, the *vita* of Nino, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, *The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer, and within the Juanšeriani authorship passage attached to the end of *Vita Arč'il*. Rev, son of Mirian, is also mentioned at the beginning of *Royal List II*, §§1–2. It is not impossible that *Royal List I* has confused Mirian's son with his father.

divergent tradition about Lev/Rev in *Royal List I* heaps more suspicion upon the veracity of Mirian's avowed Sasanian lineage.

Back in Iran, *The Life of the Kings* relates the accession of Mirian's younger brother Bartam to the Sasanian throne. As the eldest son, Mirian had been unfairly brushed aside, so he marshalled his troops and made for Ctesiphon ("Baghdad") to claim his rightful place.³⁴⁴ Forces loyal to Mirian and Bartam converged on the Nisibis Valley in northern Mesopotamia:

When the elders and *marzbāns* of Iran saw that they were going to lay sword on each other, they stood between them as envoys and arbiters. And the two kings agreed to their mediation. And they sat down to arbitrate, and then Mirian spoke to defend himself: "I am the first-born of my father, and [on me] were conferred as an appanage foreign lands conquered by the sword. There, all my days I have been occupied in fighting the Khazars, often with my own blood have I saved Iran from the Khazars. Therefore, the throne of my father is mine".

Then Bartam spoke concerning this as follows: "Mirian may be the first-born, yet he is the offspring of a handmaiden. And the fate [*sue*] of the offspring of a handmaiden was to receive royal lands [*samēp'oni*]. But I am the offspring of the daughter of the king of India [*Hindo{e}t'i*], the queen of Iran. You have heard the testament [*anderzi*] of my father, and you have seen that he placed the crown on my head with his own hands".³⁴⁵

The grandees resolved that Bartam should succeed his father. In reality, of course, there was no *šāhan šāh* Bartam! In recompense the council transferred to Mirian's authority key Sasanian domains in Mesopotamia: Jazira (Jaziret'i,

³⁴⁴ Šāpūr II acquired the throne through court intrigue shortly before his birth and following the murder of the oldest son of the deceased Hormizd II. Thus, the tale of Mirian may be connected to a warped memory of Šāpūr II's accession, which potentially makes the first Chosroid a son of Hormizd II (r. 302–309).

³⁴⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 67^{6–17} = Thomson trans., 79: "და ვითარცა იხილეს მოხუცებულთა და მარზაპანთა სპარსეთისათა, ვითარმედ მახვლი დაეცემის ურთიერთას, აღდგეს მათ შორის მოციქულად და ბჭედ, და დასჯერდეს ორნივე მეფენი ბჭობასა მათსა. და დასხდეს რა ბჭობად, მაშინ მირიან იტყოდა სარჩლად: 'პირმშო შეილი ვარ მე მამისა ჩემისა და საუფლისწულოდ ებოძნეს ქუეყანანი უცხონი მკლავითა წახმულნი, და მუნ ყოველნი დღენი ჩემნი დამიყოფიან ბრძოლასა შინა ხაზართასა, და მრავალგზის სისხლითა ჩემითა დამიცავს სპარსეთი ხაზართაგან. ამისთვის ჩემი არს საყდარი მამისა ჩემისა'. | ხოლო ბარტამ იტყოდა ამისთვის, ვითარმედ: 'თუმცა პირმშო მირიან არს, არამედ ნაშობი არს მჭევლისა, და ნაშობსა მჭევლისასა ეყოფის სუედ რომელ მას მიხდომიან სამეფონი. ხოლო მე ნაშობი ვარ ჰინდოთა მეფისა ასულისა, სპარსთა დედოფლისა, და მოგისმენია ანდერძი მამისა ჩემისა, და მოგინახავს, რამეთუ კვლითა მისითა დამადგა გურგუნი თავსა ჩემსა'".

ჰაბორი) in northern Syria and Iraq, half of Šām (Šami, შამი) in Syria³⁴⁶ and Ādurbādagān. From this moment, Mirian's power – as officially recognised by the Sasanian central administration – is imagined to have encompassed the better part of southern Caucasia and to have spilled into northern Iran, Iraq and Syria. These were the Sasanian provinces in closest proximity to K'art'li. Significantly, at least the northern part of this area was under the dominion of the Mihrānids and other Parthian noble houses. And this was a space embroiled in the imperial tug-of-war between Ctesiphon and Rome/Constantinople.³⁴⁷

The legendary story about Mirian's efforts to secure the Sasanian throne enshrines another historical reality: the support of great Parthian families could affect the rise and fall of Sasanian *šāhan šāhs*. Sometimes their support could prove decisive, as when Mihrānid backing helped catapult Pērōz to power in 459.³⁴⁸ Echoes of Parthian support for the Sasanians are scattered throughout Caucasian sources. One example has already been mentioned: the prominent reference to Pērōz in the foundational inscription of Bolnisi Sioni in southern K'art'li. This is especially remarkable because at the time the K'art'velians were governed by Vaxtang Gorgasali, a Christian Chosroid-Mihrānid to whom an entire Georgian historiographical work is devoted.³⁴⁹ But eastern Georgia's military and political might under Vaxtang was not as great as his royal biography asserts.³⁵⁰ The southern sector of his realm fell under the local control of other acculturated Mihrānids, some of whom entertained close political ties to the Sasanian court. Bolnisi Sioni's builders conspicuously dated the raising of the basilica according to the accession of Pērōz, the *bidaxš*'s suzerain. And Pērōz's enthronement had been cemented with the support lent by their Mihrānid kinsmen in Iran.

As it happens, Pērōz was renowned as a builder.³⁵¹ While there is no evidence for his direct sponsorship of any Christian edifice in Caucasia, the builders of Bolnisi Sioni might have been encouraged in their efforts by imperial construction projects throughout Sasanian domains. The striking Iranian-like sculptures on the basilica's exterior and interior (most notably, in the latter case,

³⁴⁶ For Šami as Syria, see the Geo. witness of Antiochos Stratēgos, Conybeare trans., 504 (and fn. 10).

³⁴⁷ The treaty of 298 stipulated that the monarchs of K'art'li would receive their insignia from the Roman emperor: Dignas and Winter 2007, 128. For Sasanian-Roman diplomacy, see *ibid.*, 119–151.

³⁴⁸ Pourshariati 2008, 70–75 and 379.

³⁴⁹ This is the first such case in extant Georgian literature and the only instance involving a pre-Bagratid *mep'e*. Mirian III is not the sole focus of the hagiographical *Vita Nino*. *Vita Arč'il* (perhaps of the ninth century) concentrates on the martyrdom of a prince during the *interregnum*. Both *vitae* were incorporated wholesale into *K'art'lis c'xovreba*.

³⁵⁰ Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 383–479.

³⁵¹ Pourshariati 2008, 381. Giorgi Č'eišvili and T'amila Mgaloblišvili (personal communication, 15 September 2011) rightly stress the absence of the *bidaxš* in the inscription. But this could be a reflection of tensions between the *bidaxš*ate and the bishop(s) attached to it, e.g., the apostasy of Varsk'en.

the head of a sacred bull,³⁵² which may betray a Mithraic influence) are not signs of immediate Sasanian patronage.³⁵³ Nor is the spread wings motif commonly incorporated in early Christian Georgian art, including crosses carved in relief on the exterior of churches at Bolnisi Sioni and Juari (in Mc'xet'a) and repeatedly on the interior walls of Cilkani. It was also used in the decorative schemes of numerous stelae and stone crosses.³⁵⁴ The precise origin and meaning(s) of the spread wings are still debated, but in the words of M. Compareti "it is quite clear that they had something to [do] with Mazdaean divinities (*yazatas*), whose hypostases, in some cases, were birds ... [S]pread wings [are present] in a context, which undoubtedly has a religious aspect or is celebrative of the sovereign, who is in any case legitimated by the divinity or through his animal hypostasis".³⁵⁵ And, so, bulls, spread wings and other motifs, including boars, are emblematic of Caucasia's long-term, cross-cultural dialogue with Iran. In the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands they exemplify the *bidaxšate*'s intimate relationship with the Sasanian Empire in the late fifth century – as is evidenced by Varsk'en's rapprochement with Ctesiphon at the start of *The Passion of Šušanik*. At the same time, Bolnisi Sioni's construction shows that the arc of Christianisation in Somxit'i-Gugark' was not derailed by particular *bidaxšes* aligning themselves closely with the Sasanians, even when alignment entailed the adoption of Sasanian Zoroastrianism.

Insofar as Mirian is concerned, unremitting skirmishes with highland pastoralists and another "Khazar" incursion forced the king's return to Darband.

³⁵² Boyce 1990, 165, for the bull as "[u]niquely-created, representing beneficent animals in the creation myth".

³⁵³ For additional images, see Amiranašvili 1963, pls. 24–27. Sasanian and post-Sasanian motifs are evident later in Tao-Klarjet'i: "One notices a great variety of motifs among the mythological and animal representations in King Gurgen's chapel [at Iṣxani] and in other major churches of Tao-Klarjet'i ... These are doubtless of Mesopotamian derivation and were transmitted unchanged or in a modified form by Sasanian Iran into the neighboring countries, such as Armenia, Georgia and Byzantium, through the medium of metalwork or textiles. Typical Sasanian features found on birds and beasts in Tao-Klarjet'i churches are pearl-studded necklaces on the eagle in Oški ... and Parḥali [i.e., Parxali] ..., and from the beaks of griffins in Oški ...; and also the ornate collars with ribbons on the griffins in Ḥaḥuli [i.e., Xaxuli] ... These ornamental motifs have no dogmatic, moralistic, or religious meaning but confer a royal investiture or honor (Xwaranah) upon the zoomorphic beings which thereby acquire a sacred nature to a certain degree" (Djobadze 1992, 207–208, and 81, 103, 117 and 151).

³⁵⁴ For stelae and stone crosses, see: Javaxišvili G. 1998; and Mačabeli 2008. See also Compareti 2010, esp. 211, fn. 20. The destruction of the undulating ribbons of a cross carved in relief at Cilkani may have been deliberate (*ibid.*, 211–212). Compareti, however, errs in his observation that "the history of [the Iberians and Albanians] is mostly known through the information found in Armenian historical literature". For the motif, see also Soudavar 2003, esp. 19–25.

³⁵⁵ Compareti 2010, 205 and 207–208.



Figure 4.4. Sculpture of a sacred bull, interior of Bolnisi Sioni.

Meanwhile, Goths (Geo. *gut'ni*, გუთნო) invaded “Greece”, the Roman Empire based at Constantinople.³⁵⁶ With the two armies standing at the ready, the Gothic chieftain challenged his Roman counterpart to single combat. However, with few exceptions, pre-Bagratid historiography restricts the *bumberazobay* to the Iranian world. Not surprisingly, the unnamed emperor quietly dismissed the proposition. Instead, the visiting Armenian Arsacid Trdat disguised himself as the emperor and gave battle to the opponent. Trdat, a “giant” (*goliat'i*),³⁵⁷ prevailed and the Roman army subsequently overpowered the Goths.³⁵⁸ This is the solitary instance of the *bumberazobay* in *The Life of the Kings*’s account of Mirian’s reign, an

³⁵⁶ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 68.

³⁵⁷ *The Life of Vaxtang* describes Trdat as a *gmiri*, “hero”. But the text affords Trdat little space because of its later chronological focus: *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 161₁₀.

³⁵⁸ According to a later Roman source, Bahrām V (r. 420–438) sent a letter to Roman forces proposing single combat (Gk. *monomachia*) during battle in 421. The Iranian champion Ardazanēs met the warrior selected by the Romans, a Goth named Areobindos. Fighting on horseback with lances, the Goth bested his opponent: John Malalas, XIV.23, Thurn ed., 285.



Figure 4.5. Cross with spread wings motif, exterior of Bolnisi Sioni.



Figure 4.6. Cross with spread wings motif, exterior of Juari (Mc'xet'a).



Figure 4.7. Cross with spread wings motif, interior of Cilkani.

odd circumstance considering the Iranian origin of Mirian and the strong Iranic imagery of the entire text. What is more, this instance has been appropriated from a foreign source. According to the Armenian (Aa) version of Agat'angelos, the “prince” (*išxan*, *իշխան*) of the Goths led an assault upon the Romans.³⁵⁹ As a “[rival] champion” (*axoyean*, *ախոյեան*) he proposed single combat against the Roman emperor. The latter was stricken by fear “because they did not accept battle in fixed order, army opposing army”.³⁶⁰ Masquerading as the emperor, Trdat proceeded to worst the Goth.

Augmented by troops committed by the thankful emperor, *The Life of the Kings* reports Trdat's assault upon K'art'velian and Iranian forces engaged in Armenia Major. Reinforcements were provided by Mirian's relative P'eroz, the Mihrānīd *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian frontier and not the later *šāhan šāh*. As a reward P'eroz married Mirian's daughter and was appointed by the king as *erist'avi* over the western zone of Albania, between Xunani and the city of Partaw.³⁶¹ The clash of the K'art'velian and Armenian armies, backed by Sasanian and Roman troops

³⁵⁹ Agat'angelos (Aa), §§39–46.

³⁶⁰ Agat'angelos (Aa), §40, Thomson trans., 55: “... բանդի օրինօք կազմութեամբ, զունդ առ զունդ ճակատիկ ոչ առնուին յանձն ...”

³⁶¹ An anachronism since Partaw was founded – or at least substantially reconstructed – during the reign of *šāhan šāh* Pērōz.

respectively, dragged over several years. In the meantime, none of the Iranian soldiers dared to enter into *bumberazi* combat against Trdat, who “became renowned [*saxelovani*] in the whole land and was victorious in all his battles, as the tale about him is written in *The Life of the Armenians*”.³⁶² In this way, *The Life of the Kings* acknowledges the ultimate source of this tradition: *C’xorebay somext’asa*, that is to say, an oral or perhaps written version of Agat’angelos.

Not surprisingly, Agat’angelos paints Trdat as an Iranic hero. This Armenian Arsacid king participated in the Greek Olympics and “seemed as strong as a giant”;³⁶³ wounded, he swam across the Euphrates River with his horse and armour on his back;³⁶⁴ and he threw guards and donkeys over the walls of Rome.³⁶⁵ Trdat was “brave” (*k’aj*, *քաջ*), “virtuous” (*arak’ini*, *առաքինի*) and “mighty” (*užel*, *ուժեղ*), and was a monarch who “has done deeds in battle worthy of champions [*əmpšamart*, *ըմպամարտ*, lit. ‘wrestler’] and giants [*skay*, *սկայ*]”.³⁶⁶ He was “endowed with great strength and vigor; he had solid bones and an enormous body; he was incredibly valiant [*k’aj*] and warlike, tall and broad of stature”.³⁶⁷ Trdat possessed “giant strength like Hayk’s”.³⁶⁸ And, in a fascinating inversion, when the martyr-to-be Hrip’simē resisted his advances, “she vanquished the [yet unbaptised] king who was renowned for his incredible strength ... now [he] was vanquished and worsted by a single girl through the will and power of Christ”.³⁶⁹

For its part, *The Life of the Kings* does not adorn Mirian in the Iranic imagery typical of his K’art’velian predecessors and his Armenian contemporary Trdat. The ca. 800 author of the received text – or, more likely, the medieval editor Leonti Mroveli – deemed it inappropriate for the first Christian K’art’velian ruler to be portrayed as a Sasanian-like hero-king *even prior to his conversion and baptism*.³⁷⁰ A clue to this curious circumstance is provided by this account’s preface, which seems to acknowledge a written source: “Here we shall recount the life of Mirian, son of K’asre Ardašir the Sasanian” (սԳ յաճեցեալոց Եւրոպեայի միւրաւանսի,

³⁶² *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 69₇₋₉ = Thomson trans., 81: “და სახელგოვან იქმნა იგი ყოველსა ქუეყანასა, და სძლო ყოვლადვე მბრძოლთა მისთა, ვითარცა წეროდ არს ამბავი მისი ცხორებასა სომეხთასა”.

³⁶³ Agat’angelos (Aa), §202, Thomson trans., 209: “*Հսկայազօր երեւալ*”.

³⁶⁴ Agat’angelos (Aa), §202.

³⁶⁵ Agat’angelos (Aa), §42. Cf. the Syriac (Vs) witness, Thomson 2010 trans., 143.

³⁶⁶ Agat’angelos (Aa), §12: “*որ ըմպամարտ սկայազօր քաջութիւնս գործեաց ի մարտս պատերազմաց*”.

³⁶⁷ Agat’angelos (Aa), §123: “*այլ ուժով անդուլեանս, հարստութեամբ, բուռն ուկիրօք և յաղթ մարմնով, քաջ և պատերազմով անհաւարին, բարձր և լաշն հասակաւ*”.

³⁶⁸ Agat’angelos (Aa), §767: “*առեալ սկայազօրն հայկաբար*”.

³⁶⁹ Agat’angelos (Aa), §181: “*... պարտեալ լինէր զթագաւորն իսկ զայն, որ անհաւարն համարեալ ուժով ... արդ յաղբրեանէ միջէ պարտեալ վատթարանալը կամօք և գօրութեամբն Քրիստոսի*”; see also §249. Russell 2004b creatively explores the lost Armenian epic tradition.

³⁷⁰ But the contemporaneous writer of *The Life of Vaxtang* did not hesitate to depict his Christian hero in this way.

ძისა ქასრე არდაშირისი სასანიანისა, *Ac vaq'senot' c'xovreba mirianisi, zisa k'asre ardaširisi sasanianisa*).³⁷¹ This is a rare instance of early Georgian authors identifying Sasanians by their family name. *C'xovreba[y] mirianisi* (ცხოვრება[ო] მირიანისი), “the life of Mirian”, should probably be read as a title: *The Life of Mirian*. If the preface belongs to the text as it was written around the year 800, it might alternately be interpreted as a sign that the final part of *The Life of the Kings*, about Mirian, had once existed as a separate composition. Only later would it have been absorbed into the larger *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*, the tripartite suite built upon *The Life of the Kings*. In my view, however, *C'xovreba[y] mirianisi* is a later subtitle fabricated – probably by the archbishop-editor Mroveli – in order to legitimise the reconceptualised account of Mirian's pre-Christian reign and to obscure its later provenance.³⁷² This interpretation is supported by the intervening -v- in *c'xovreba*; *c'xorebay* is the archaic form.

The bewildering de-Iranisation of Mirian, a Parthian Mihrānīd prince boldly presented as the first-born son of a Sasanian *šāhan šāh*, will be further explored in the Epilogue.

The Conversion of Constantine

According to *The Life of the Kings*, Bartam's death brought another of Mirian's siblings to the Sasanian throne. The new *šāhan šāh* made overtures to the K'art'velians and proposed a joint military operation against Arsacid Armenia and the Roman Empire.³⁷³ This claim, fabulous as it is, has thunderous narrative consequences. Having plundered Armenia Major, the combined army rushed into Roman Anatolia where Constantine the Great's forces crumbled. The distressed emperor's hopes were lifted by some Christians in his retinue who guaranteed a conclusive victory should he embrace the one true God. Constantine heeded their counsel and was baptised, “as is clearly written in *The Conversion of the Greeks*”.³⁷⁴ Carrying before him the sign of the Cross, the emperor crushed the numerically superior adversary. As presented, Constantine's conversion was triggered by an Irano-K'art'velian invasion and not by the civil war ignited by the unravelling of

³⁷¹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64₁₄. See also *Life of the Kings*, K'avt'aria, C'agareišvili and Sarjvelaže eds., 78₁₁.

³⁷² The subtitle also distinguishes Mirian's reign from earlier ones. Cf. *The Life of P'arnavaz*.

³⁷³ According to Agat'angelos (Aa), Trdat campaigned against Sasanian Iran throughout his reign, particularly targeting Syria (Asorestan): §123. But an alliance was established between the (nominally) Christian monarchs Trdat and Constantine during their supposed meeting in Rome: *ibid.* (Aa), §877.

³⁷⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 69₂₁: “... ვითარცა წერილ არს ესე განცხადებულად მოქცევასა ბერძენთასა ...” Old Georgian historiographical literature rarely distinguishes between Greece and the Roman and Byzantine Empires, all of which are designated *Saberznet'i*, “Greece”.

Diocletian's tetrarchy and, more immediately, Constantine's defeat of Maxentius at Milvian Bridge in October 312.³⁷⁵ Needless to say, this is a radically different account of Constantine's Christianisation than is conveyed in the works of Lactantius, Eusebios of Caesarea and subsequent church historians, some of which are subsumed here under the rubric *Conversion of the Greeks*.³⁷⁶ Even so, the K'art'velian author does not seem to have had direct or meaningful knowledge of any of these ecclesiastical histories, and he certainly did not repeat their representation of Constantine's conversion. The spuriousness of the medieval Georgian tale is further evidenced by Constantine's immediate baptism, which actually took place on the emperor's deathbed in May 337.

³⁷⁵ The K'art'lis c'xovreba recension of *The Life of Nino* conveys that during the third year of Nino's stay in Mc'xet'a "... King Mirian and his nephew [zmisculi], the great king of Iran [didi sparst'a mep'e], went to Greece. And Constantine, king of the Greeks, put those kings to flight by the power of Christ and the guidance of the Cross; and their innumerable troops he destroyed", "... იყო შესვლა მირიან მეფისა და ძმისწულისა მისისა, დიდისა სპარსთა მეფისა, საბერძნეთად, ოდეს კოსტანტინე ბერძენთა მეფემან ძალითა ქრისტესითა და წინამძღურობითა ჯუარისათა იოტნა მეფენი და სპანი მათნი ურიცხუნი მოსრნა" (*Vita Nino* [K'C'], Qauxč'išvili ed., 95¹³⁻¹⁵ = Thomson trans., 103). Yet more variation is found in the witnesses of *The Life of Nino* in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*. In the Šatberdi Codex we read this decontextualised account: "Then the Lord looked down upon Greece and enlightened King Constantine. And he and his mother and all their palace [palati] came to believe in Christ, in the year 5404 from the Creation of the world, and 311 from the Ascension of Christ. And all of Greece followed the Christian way ...", "მაშინ მოხედა უფალმან საბერძნეთსა და პრწმენა მეფესა კოსტანტინეს და ქრისტე აღიარა მან და დედამან მისმან და ყოველმან პალატმან მათმან დასაბამითგანთა წელთა ხუთ ათას ოთხას ორმოც და ოთხსა, ხოლო ქრისტეს აღმადგელობითგან სამას და ათერთმეტსა და წარემართა ყოველი საბერძნეთი ქრისტეანობასა" (*Vita Nino* [MK'], Abulaže ed., 114²⁷⁻³⁵ = Lerner trans., 161). There is still more divergence in the Čeliši variant where "Lord" is replaced with "God" (*ymert'i*, ღმერთი), "palace" is rendered as "palace-camp" (*palat-banaki*, პალატ-ბანაკი), and the Creation date is 5841: *Vita Nino* (MK'), Abulaže ed., 114²⁷⁻³⁶ (Čeliši [9] variant). In the lost prototype, the dates must have been rendered by alphabetic characters according to standard practice. The *nusxuri* letters representing 400 (*u*, *uy*) and 800 (*q*, *q*) can be confused. 1 and 4 are distinct in *nusxuri* (*a*, *ⵏ*; *d*, *ⵔ*) although they are somewhat similar in *asomt'avruli* (ⴌ and ⴐ). 5404 is undoubtedly an error, for the Romans/Byzantines reckoned the passing of 5508 years from Creation to the birth of Christ and the K'art'velians – 5604. But Čeliši's date according to the Romano-Byzantine calendar corresponds to ca. 333 (and an impossible 237 according to the K'art'velian reckoning).

³⁷⁶ Thomson 1996a, 82 (fn. 63), favours Sōkratēs. We have no definitive evidence of the complete translation into Old Georgian of the works of Eusebios, Sōkratēs and other church historians – including Sōzomenos (Sozomen), Theodōrētos (Theodoret) and Rufinus. However, Sōkratēs' *Ecclesiastical History* was adapted into Classical Armenian. For fragments of Eusebios' *Ecclesiastical History* in Georgian, see: Kekeliže 1960, 497; Tarchnishvili 1955, 388; and Xint'ibize 1996, 47 and 54.

That Constantine was catapulted into the Christian fold as a result of an Irano-K'art'velian assault is tendentious. But it is a deliberate claim with a two-fold purpose. First, it endowed the eastern Georgians with a visible role in the Christianisation of the Romans by connecting the K'art'velians with the empire's openly Christian phase *from its inception*.³⁷⁷ Of course, it also broached the possibility of linking early K'art'velian Christianity directly to Constantine the Great, a bond realised in Georgian literature already in the seventh-century *Conversion of K'art'li*.³⁷⁸ Second, Mirian's retreat from Roman Anatolia and the turmoil unleashed by the failed campaign set the stage for his own conversion to Christianity. Sensing his volatile position, "... he dispatched a messenger to King Constantine and begged for peace. He promised to be subject to him, to defect from the Iranians, and to ally himself to [the Romans]".³⁷⁹ A coalition was forged and Mirian sent his son Bak'ar – the future Bak'ar I (r. 363–?380) – as a hostage to the Roman court. In a bid to enhance Roman influence in Caucasia, Constantine reconciled the K'art'velian and Armenian monarchs, both of whom in fact became Christians in the early fourth century. To seal the new relationship, Mirian's son Rev married Trdat's daughter Solomē (Geo. Salome).³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ The region's fourth-century royal conversions cemented Caucasia's role in the making of the Eastern Christian (first Byzantine) Commonwealth.

³⁷⁸ This spurious tradition was forged earlier, for it features in Rufinus. But in my view the connection to Constantine was first invented (by Bacurius? Rufinus?) with the aim of endowing the Roman Empire with a direct role in Caucasia's Christianisation and not the other way around. Could it be that Rufinus' informant, a high-ranking officer in the Roman army and future *bidaxš* of Somxit'i-Gugark', exaggerated Constantine's role in an effort to flatter his Roman overlords and to enhance Roman claims *vis-à-vis* his chief rival, the monarchy based at Mc'het'a? Starting in the seventh century, the tradition proved useful in the post-schism environment.

³⁷⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 70₈₋₁₀. Thomson trans., 83: "და ამისთვისცა წარგზავნა მოციქული წინაშე კონსტანტინე მეფისა, და ითხოვა მისგან მშვიდობა, და აღუთქუა მას მსახურება და განდგომა სპარსთაგან და შემოდგომა მისდა".

³⁸⁰ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 70₁₄. Constantine is also credited with revamping the boundary between eastern Georgia and Armenia Major.

Chapter 5

The Life of the Successors of Mirian

The Life of the Kings comes to an abrupt close with the arrival of the holy woman Nino, whose labours secured the conversion of Queen Nana and then of her husband Mirian. It is highly unlikely that the original version of this ca. 800 text ended sharply *within* Mirian's reign, on the eve of his acceptance of the Christian God. Nonetheless, ever since Leonti Mroveli assembled *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* in the eleventh century, Mirian's Christian phase has been exclusively narrated in *K'art'lis c'xovreba* by *The Life of Nino*, a *vita* of the ninth/tenth century.¹ The first incarnation of *The Life of the Kings* – or, at the very least, its source – must have incorporated an independent historiographical account of Mirian's Christianisation. This elaboration of the Christian Mirian would have had rather different interests and aims than the hagiographical vision of the subsequent *Life of Nino*. If the overall tone of the received *Life of the Kings* is any indication, its lost treatment of the Christian Mirian would have shone the spotlight more fully on the king than on the holy woman. And it would have openly celebrated the Iranic dimensions of Mirian's authority and royal image, not unlike Trdat's representation in *Agat'angelos*. As presented in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, *The Life of Nino* picks up the tale as Mirian turned his back on polytheism – which is intertwined with Nino's backstory – and concludes with Mirian's death and burial at Mc'xet'a's Upper Church, site of the later Samt'avro.

K'art'lis c'xovreba's recension of *The Life of Nino* is followed by a brief historiographical text describing the reigns of Mirian's immediate Christian successors. Tracing the Chosroid-Mihrānid kings from Bak'ar (r. 363–?380) to Mirdat IV (r. 409–411), the untitled third component of the suite *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* is set entirely within the Sasanian period. Exactly when the text I call *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* was written is unclear: in its received state it was produced sometime between ca. 800 and the mid-eleventh century. Because this historiographical work lacks the conspicuous Iranic qualities and Iranian orientation of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* (the latter of

¹ Nino's *vita* was composed at least a century after *The Life of the Kings*; it shows no signs of having been deliberately created as a replacement for *The Life of the Kings*'s account of the Christian Mirian. Considering the archbishop's prominence in the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the Bagratid "Golden Age", Mroveli was moved to expunge the Iranic treatment of the Christian Mirian from *The Life of the Kings*, to replace it with an established hagiographical text accepted by the Church, and to sanitise the received narrative of Mirian's pre-Christian years.

which is analysed in the next chapter), I favour a date in the tenth or eleventh century. Mroveli himself might have compiled this tract in order to bridge the awkward gap between Mirian's death and the reign of the celebrated Vaxtang Gorgasali. Whatever the case, the incorporation of some old material into the anonymous *Life of the Successors of Mirian* is beyond doubt, though this information was heavily filtered in the post-Sasanian era and specifically under the Bagratid regime. Because the missing section of the original *Life of the Kings* (and its source) probably pushed beyond Mirian and into the reigns of his Christian successors, it may well have served as the template for *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*.²

The Life of the Kings, *The Life of Vaxtang* and *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* share a few noteworthy correspondences in basic content and structure. First, all three works highlight dynastic K'art'velian monarchs. Second, these texts neither supply explicit dates nor identify their authors. Finally, all are relatively succinct narratives despite their wide chronological coverage.

An Evolving Onomasticon

Notwithstanding these commonalities, the treatment of K'art'velian kingship and society in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* appreciably diverges from its counterparts. In particular, the dense Iranic imagery of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* is scarcely detectable. Nevertheless, one of the most enduring markers of eastern Georgia's membership in the Iranian Commonwealth could not be concealed by the author: the names of the early Christian monarchs. The six (Christian) Chosroid successors of Mirian bear Iranic names, all of which are confirmed in the related *Royal List II*.³

363–?380 **Bak'ar I**

Bakur in *Royal List II*, §1; Bahkar, cf. Pakur < Mir. *bagpuhr*, “son of a god”;⁴ Arm. Bakur (Բակուր);⁵ Gk. Pakoros/Bakour (Πάκορος/Βάκουρ); Lat. Pacorus/Bacurius.

² The fact that *Royal List I* ends with Mirian is deliberate. Its purpose was to provide succinct historical background to the monarchy's conversion. We might wonder, therefore, whether the compiler/editor of the first *Royal List* was responsible for amputating the theorised Christian section of *The Life of the Kings* – or its source.

³ For these names, see Andronikašvili 1966, 448, 463–464, 470–472, 474 and 502. The identity and sequence of these kings somewhat differs in the second *Royal List*.

⁴ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 363–364.

⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.54, Abelean and Yarut'iwnean eds., 328₁₇. Xorenac'i mentions this Bakur (his rendering) alongside two other K'art'velian figures: Bishop Movsēs (Մովսէս) and Jałay (Ջալայ), the translator who allegedly assisted Maštoc' in fashioning the first Georgian script. Movsēs, bishop of C'urtavi, is specified in the Armenian *Book of Letters*: Girk' T'lt'oc', Polarean ed., #75, 328, Fr. trans. in Garsoïan 1999b, 556.

365–380	Mirdat III	Mehrdād, “created by Mehr/Mihr”; Arm. Mihrdat (<i>Միհրդատ</i>).
380–394	Varaz-Bak’ar II	Varaz-Bakur in <i>Royal List II</i> , §3; Varāz-Pakur < MPers. <i>varāz</i> , “wild boar”; Arm. Varaz (<i>Վարազ</i>); ⁶ for Bak’ar, see above, Bak’ar I.
394–406	Trdat	Tīrdād, “created by Tīr”; Arm. Trdat (<i>Տրդատ</i>); Gk. Tiridatēs (Τιριδάτης). ⁷
406–409	P’arsman IV	Farsamana; Arm. P’arsman (<i>Փարսման</i>); Gk. Pharasmanēs (Φαρασμάνης).
409–411	Mirdat IV	See above, Mirdat III.

For K’art’velian and Georgian culture this was a formative period. As we have seen, the Georgian script was invented at the turn of the fourth/fifth century. From this point we have the possibility of *contemporaneous* written sources ranging from inscriptions to mature narratives. The oldest dated specimens of Georgian writing are inscriptions from the end of the fifth century. In the earliest epigraphical materials, secular figures tend to have Iranic names, e.g.: P’arn... (P’arnavaz or P’arnevan?) and Azar[d]juxt (Bolnisi Sioni, late fifth century); T’at’varaz (Ukangora, fifth to sixth century); and Abaz (Dmanisi, fifth to sixth century).⁸ This Iranic pattern accords with names of political and military figures in early Georgian literary works. But there are already signs of Judaeo-Christian names creeping into secular ranks. During the reign of Vaxtang (447–522), the king’s royal biography mentions *erist’avis* Demetre (Demetrios) and Grigol (George), both of whom were stationed in the far eastern territories of the K’art’velian kingdom close to Albania.⁹

However, the continued dominance of an Iranic onomasticon was challenged by Christian bishops (sing. *episkoposi*, յթովյոթօրեօ < Gk. ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*) and other clerics whose professional names were often drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition.¹⁰ Among those attested in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*

⁶ The wild boar was “one of the incarnations of the Zoroastrian god Vərəθraγna”: Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 422–424.

⁷ See: Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 416–417; and Č’xeize 1987, 98. Two Parthian Arsacid kings were named Tīrdād (Tiridatēs): Tīrdād I (second half of the first century BC) and Tīrdād II (r. 36 AD).

⁸ Šošiašvili 1980, 69–70, 89–90 and 92–93. For P’arnavaz (or P’arnevan) and Azarduxt, see also Silogava 1994, 27–33. The princes Step’anos and Demetre – along with their Roman honorifics – are attested in inscriptions on the exterior of Juari of the late sixth/early seventh century: Šošiašvili 1980, 95–97. For Abaz, see also: Čilašvili 2004, 16–17 (for Abaz in an early inscription from Nekresi); and *Royal List I*, §1, Abulaže ed., 82₃₇ (for the diarch P’arsman Avaz).

⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 185_{14–15}.

¹⁰ See also pp. 52 and 265.

are Iakob (Jacob), Elia/Ilia (Elijah) and Swmon (Simon).¹¹ This tendency is evident in other early texts, too, including *The Conversion of K'art'li*, the second and third *Royal Lists* and *The Life of Nino*, not to mention the subsequent historiographical components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. Inscriptions from the fifth century to the first half of the seventh century verify the trend, but unfortunately their evidence is slight. Bishops and other ecclesiastics recorded epigraphically include Mik'ael (Michael; presumably first half of the fifth century), Davit' (David; late fifth century), Zak'aria (Zacharia; fifth century), and Petrē (Peter; fifth to sixth century).¹²

A public display of their devotion to Christ, hierarchs and monks from Caucasia and adjacent regions regularly shunned traditional Iranic names having obvious Zoroastrian and Sasanian connections.¹³ Two well-known examples are Murvan(os)-Nabarnugios¹⁴ becoming Peter the Iberian and the Iranian Gwrobandak's transformation into Evstat'i (Eustathios) after his baptism in Mc'xet'a.¹⁵ But for the early Christian period the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of these religious figures is not always clear. Some were undoubtedly K'art'velians, while others were Armenians, Greeks, Syrians, Iranians and so forth. In some cases, however, high-ranking bishops in eastern Georgia had Iranian/Iranic names. Among those coming down to us are T'avp'eč'ag/T'avp'ač'ag, Č'ermag/Č'imga and Izid-Bozid (MPers. Yazdbōzēd).¹⁶ These names are unattested in other Georgian sources and have no close analogues. It is therefore quite possible that these three men were not K'art'velians.

¹¹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 131 and 138. For a list of the chief prelates of the early K'art'velian Church, see Rapp 2003, 329–331. Cf.: Alek'size's introduction to *Sin.Geo.N.50*, facsimile ed., 25–28; and Metreveli 2000.

¹² Šošiašvili 1980, 62–63, 64–66 and 67–68, 70–71 and 89–90. These men are attested in inscriptions at Urnisi Sioni, Bolnisi Sioni, Zemo Nik'ozi and Ukangora (on a cross) respectively.

¹³ We have already encountered a noteworthy exception: Pharanousēs, the solitary attested in a fourth-/fifth-century Greek inscription found near Cilkani: Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999–2000, vol. 2, #188, 213–214. For the later ex-P'arsman Arseni, see p. 228.

¹⁴ Murvan(os): *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Geo.), caps. 2ff., Abulaže ed., 217₂₄ff.; Nabarnugios: *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), cap. 5, Horn and Phenix Jr trans., 7 ("In the language of their country, he first had the name Nabarnugios. Yet when he was deigned worthy of the holy habit of the monks, then the name of Peter was [given] to him instead, being the name of the chief of the apostles").

¹⁵ In an Armenian context, the later Vardan Arewelc'i (cap. 20) reports that King Trdat was renamed Yovhannēs (John) after baptism. See also Thomson in Vardan Arewelc'i, 164 (fn. 2). Trdat's daughter, who was married to a son of Mirian, is known as Sołomē (Salome), a Christian name probably taken at baptism.

¹⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 206; and *Royal List III*, §5, Rapp trans., 312. For Izid-Bozid, see also Andronikašvili 1966, 473. For the Christianised Zoroastrian priest Maxož known to the Armenians as Yazdbōzid, see Garsoïan 1999b, 228–229. See also Menander Protector, frag. 13.3–4, Blockley ed. and trans., 144–145 (Ἰσαοζίτης, Isaozītēs).

Indeed, outsiders played a prominent role in the administration of the early church in K'art'li. A large proportion – if not all – of the earliest chief prelates were foreigners. Greeks and Greek speakers were particularly common. Iovane (John) and Iakob (Jacob), the first two bishops of Mc'xet'a, were Greeks allegedly sent by Constantine the Great.¹⁷ In addition, Iona (Jonah or Yunan) may have been Greek.¹⁸ Archbishops came from a variety of other backgrounds, too, including Armenian (e.g., Iob Somexi, that is, Job the Armenian¹⁹), Iranian (including Mobidan || Glonok'or[?]²⁰) and perhaps Syrian.²¹ In these oldest examples, the taking of an ecumenical Christian name could deliberately mask a non-K'art'velian provenance. Only in the first half of the sixth century, several decades after the establishment of the katholikate, did K'art'velians permanently seize the highest ecclesiastical posts for themselves, a giant leap towards the realisation of an *ethnie*-privileging “national” church.²² But ecumenical Judaeo-Christian names are not necessarily a sign of foreign extraction. As the epigraphical evidence shows, early Christian clerics and ascetics of K'art'velian heritage also adopted them.

Imagining Early Chosroid Kingship

Although the royal image is not well developed in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, the stark text divulges a few attributes of kingship, most of them Christian. The anonymous author emphasises when a particular king was *morcmune* (მორწმუნე), “pious, faithful, a believer”, a royal characteristic typically linked to the construction and embellishment of churches²³ King Bak'ar built the Cilkani church near Mc'xet'a; Mirdat III raised churches in Klarjet'i, Erušet'i and Cunda; Trdat erected churches in Rust'avi and at Nekresi (var. Nekrisi) in Kaxet'i, the last of which is probably the large basilica – now in ruins – built in the city itself; and P'arsman IV is credited with the construction of a church at Bolnisi

¹⁷ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §§10 and 22.

¹⁸ Thomson 1996a, 157 (fn. 9). The name was current among Syriac and Iranian Christians, especially in the East Syrian Church. In the early seventh century the Sasanians dispatched Bishop Yunan to administer Edessa's Jacobite community: Segal 1970, 98–99. Cf. MPers. Yauna- and Arm. Yoynk' (ያጎንክ), “Greeks”.

¹⁹ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 132₅₋₆; and *Royal List II*, §2, Rapp trans., 303. In both texts Iob is a deacon (*diakoni*, დიაკონი) of the Armenian *katholikos* Nersēs.

²⁰ Cf. *mowbed* (*mōbed*): Andronikašvili 1966, 484–485.

²¹ See also Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 370–372.

²² *Royal List II*, §15, Abulaže ed., 94₁₄₋₁₉ = Rapp trans., 307, for “two native families” of Mc'xet'a dominating the katholikate starting with the prelate of Dasabia (i.e., Saba I, ca. 523–552). Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 207₁₃₋₁₅ reports that the *katholikoi* after Saba were “of noble descent” (*carč'inebult'a nat'esavni*, წარჩინებულთა ნათესავნი).

²³ Not all cases are necessarily literal. It is the image of the Christian king as the builder of churches that is most important.

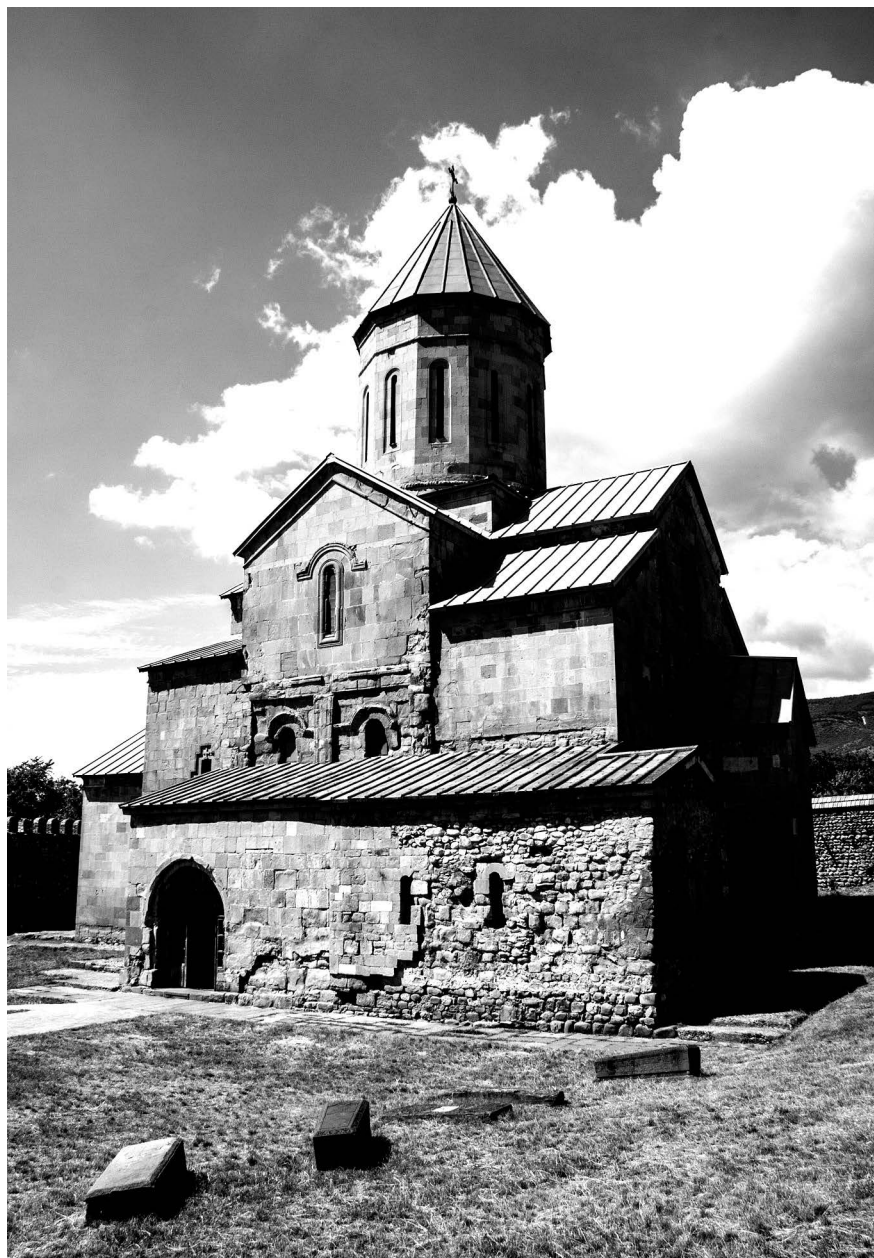


Figure 5.1. Cilkani, credited to King Bak'ar.

(an error if Bolnisi Sioni is intended).²⁴ Conversely, the historian admonishes rulers who strayed from the Christian path, lapsed into heresy²⁵ or did not apply monarchical power to enlarge the faith. Varaz-Bak'ar “was an impious [*urcmuno*, ურწმუნო] man and a hater of [the] religion ...”²⁶ Fearing retribution from his subjects, Varaz-Bak'ar concealed his renunciation of Christianity. At the same time, he neither sponsored the building of new churches nor adorned existing structures. As punishment for his sins, the Sasanians invaded. Varaz-Bak'ar foolishly ignored the advice of his nobles and an Armenian proposal for alliance; he blockaded himself inside Kaxet'i and was forced to cede neighbouring Albanian Rani and Movakani to Iran. The king's legitimacy lost, the inhabitants of Klarjet'i rebelled and went over to the Romans. As a result, Varaz-Bak'ar was stripped of territories in the southwest, too.

In rare cases *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* tempers devotion to Christianity with attributes of kingship having little if anything to do with religion. Mirdat IV, a relative of Bak'ar and Rev (the rival sons of Mirian III),

... was a valiant man, an intrepid mounted warrior, without belief in or fear of God, insolent and arrogant, confident in his prowess [*mq'edrobay*]. He did not serve God, nor did he build churches, nor did he increase those built. Through his insolence he became an enemy of [both] the Greeks and the Iranians.²⁷

This passage is an unusual example of the deployment of the heroic imagery characterising *The Life of the Kings*. But *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* offers only a few decontextualised words and concise phrases: Mirdat was “valiant” (*k'ueli*) and an “intrepid warrior” (*mq'edari šemmart'ebeli*). These qualities accentuate the king's physical strength and expertise, yet they were blemished by his negligence of Christianity. Here Christian aspects of kingship intentionally trump Iranic ones, the latter of which are scarcely acknowledged. While *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* and the subsequent *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* (which commences with Mirdat's death) do not expressly credit Mirdat's demise to his sins, the implications of his unbelief are plain enough. On a more practical level, Mirdat irresponsibly made enemies of both great imperial powers and in the end

²⁴ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 131, 137 and 138. There was at least one other early church building in Bolnisi, e.g., K'uemo (mod. K'vemo) Bolnisi. Its surviving structure, now greatly restored, postdates nearby Sioni. On Bolnisi, see also Menabde 1961, 204–208.

²⁵ The author does not spell out what constituted orthodoxy and heresy.

²⁶ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 135₂₃ = Thomson trans., 149: “... იყო კაცი ურწმუნო და მოძულე სჯულისა ...”

²⁷ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 138₈₋₁₁ = Thomson trans., 152: “და იყო ესე მირდატ კაცი ქუელი, მკედარი შემმართველი, ურწმუნო და უშიში ღმრთისა, ღალი და ამპარტავანი, და მინდობილი მკედრობასა თჳსსა. არა მსახურა ღმერთსა, არცა ადაშენა ეკლესია, არცარა მატა შენებულთა, და სიღალთა მისითა მტერ ექმნა ბერძენთა და სპარსთა”.

was captured at Gardabani by a Sasanian army under the command of Up'rob, a figure identified as the imperial *Bidaxš* Varaš in *Royal List II*.²⁸ Varaš delivered the K'art'velian king to Ctesiphon where he died.²⁹

Only once does *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* clothe a devout Christian K'art'velian king in heroic imagery. This fleeting instance is deliberately presented and is stripped of obvious connections to the Iranian world. In contrast to his brother and successor Mirdat, P'arsman IV was “a pious man, an intrepid mounted warrior” (*kac'i morcmune, mq'edari šemmart'ebeli*).³⁰ What's more, P'arsman took care not to alienate both empires. He entered into an alliance with the Romans and withheld tribute from the Sasanians.

Institutions having prominent Iranian and/or Iranic dimensions are downplayed or are completely disregarded. Significantly, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* ignores the *bumberazobay* and does not employ the associated concepts *bumberazi*, *goliat'i* and *gmiri*. A solitary allusion is made to a *mamamžuze*, “foster father, tutor”. But the text circumvents the term and vaguely reports the “raising” (*zrdida*, ზრდიდა) of a young boy by the *erist'avi* of Samšwile.³¹

Because the diminution – and in the case of kingship, abandonment – of Iranic imagery exemplifies the historiography produced under the Bagratids, and that circulating within predominately ecclesiastical environments, we have more reason to associate *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* with the eleventh-century archbishop Leonti Mroveli.³² Had *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* been

²⁸ *Royal List II*, §7.

²⁹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 138; and *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 139.

³⁰ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 137₂₁ = Thomson trans., 151: “... კაცი მორწმუნე, მკვლარი შემმართველი”. For his part, P'arsman's elderly predecessor Trdat was “pious, wise and intelligent” (*morcmune, brzeni da gonieri*): Qauxč'išvili ed., 137₁₂₋₁₃ = Thomson trans., 151: “... მორწმუნე, ბრძენი და გონიერი ...”. A similar, highly restricted use of heroic imagery for Christian rulers in the Georgian milieu occurs in the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li*. It portrays the Ap'xaz king Giorgi as “perfect with complete kindness [*siket'e*], courage [*simq'ne*] and heroism [*axovneba*]. A lover of God, he was an even greater builder of churches, compassionate to the poor, generous and humble, filled with all goodness [*ket'ili*] and virtue [*sat'noeba*]”, “იყო იგი სრული ყოვლითა სიკეთითა, სიმჴნითა და ახოვნებითა; ღმრთის-მოყუარე იყო, უმეტეს ყოველთა მაჴენებელი ეკლესიათა, მოწყალე გლახაკთა, უხუ და მდაბალი, და ყოვლითა კეთილითა და სათნოებითა სრული” (Qauxč'išvili ed., 265₇₋₉, cf. Thomson trans., 267–268).

³¹ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 137₁₀₋₁₁.

³² Heroic imagery is sporadically applied to certain Bagratid monarchs. Thus, Davit' II is described as *goliat'i* and *axovani* (“hero, champion”): *Life of King of Kings Davit'*, cap. 28, Šaniže ed., 173₂₋₃, Šaniže ed. (Metreveli general ed.), 312₂, Thomson trans., 321. To make absolutely clear the superiority of Bagratid kingship, Davit's royal biographer declares: “... those who earlier were kings, *goliat'is*, *gmiris*, long since renowned [*saxelovanni*], brave [*mq'neni*] and strong [*zlierni*], renowned for various deeds – all these he so subjected that they were like animals by comparison”, “... პირველ ყოვლისი მეფენი, მსაჯულნი,

subjected to comparable redaction, it would be difficult to discern from them the intimate socio-cultural bond of Caucasia and Iran. As it has reached us, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* says more about Bagratid-era attitudes towards Iranian K'art'velian culture than about Late Antiquity itself.

Sasanians and Xuasrovanis

Although *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* unfolds entirely within the Sasanian period, Iran and Iranians are ambiguously presented. In such cases, which are infrequent, they are usually associated with military operations. For example, a Sasanian force entered K'art'li through Somxit'i-Gugark' and raised a fortress between the passes of Tp'ilisi opposite the Mc'xet'a fortress.³³ This supposedly occurred during the tenure of Varaz-Bak'ar and well before the traditional foundation of Tp'ilisi by Vaxtang Gorgasali (r. 447–522).

The one seemingly direct reference to a *šāhan šāh* occurs in the opening account of the reign of Bak'ar (363–?380).³⁴ If its “Xuasro” is a historical king of kings, then Šāpūr II (r. 309–379) is probably meant. But there was also a short coincidence of no more than a year between Bak'ar and Ardaxšīr II (r. 379–383). According to *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, this unspecified *šāhan šāh* – Bak'ar's “father's nephew” (*mamis žmisculi*) – brokered a land transfer: King Bak'ar ceded territories in Albania (Rani) as far as the (future?) city of Partaw to the Mihrānid prince and *bidaxš* P'eroz, son-in-law of Mirian III. In return, lands from Samšwīde to Aboc'i were given over to the K'art'velians. The text also reports the acceptance of Christianity by P'eroz and his entourage. Thereafter, Bak'ar, P'eroz and a Sasanian force together struck the Armenians based in Javaxet'i (Arm. Javaxk').

The Life of the Successors of Mirian alludes to another “Xuasro”. In a revealing passage, a Sasanian general (*erist'avi*) invokes the Iranian Xuasrovanis (ხუასროვანი), Iranian royalty descended from “Xusrō”.³⁵ Early Georgian historiographies, as we have seen, assign an identical family name to the

გოლიათნი, გმირნი კაცნი იგი, საუკუნითგან სახელგონნი, მკნენი და ძლიერნი, და რათაცა საქმეთა ზედა სახელგონ-ქმნიდნი, ყოველნივე ესრეთ დასხნა, ვითარცა პირუტყუნი ყოველსა საქმესა და ყოველსა სახლსა შინა” (cap. 77, Šanize ed., 206^{15–18} [and Šanize ed. {Metreveli general ed.}, 335^{14–17}], and Thomson trans., 342–343).

³³ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 136. See also above, p. 81.

³⁴ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 130–131.

³⁵ *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 136: “... მეფეთა ხუასროვანთა”. Other references to Xuasro[v]anis are found in the ninth-century (?) *Vita Arč'il*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 247¹, and the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 250¹². The term also appears in the preamble of the thirteenth-century *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 2⁹, where Bagratid and pre-Bagratid imagery are uncharacteristically mixed in order to enhance the legitimacy of Queen T'amar. In Persian the word is used in

Chosroid-Mihrānids. The dynasty's founder Mirian III was the reputed first-born son of a *šāhan šāh* and thus a Sasanian prince. The simultaneous application of the dynastic label Xuasrovani to Sasanians and Christian Chosroid-Mihrānids reflects the latter's efforts to enhance royal legitimacy through high-profile biological ties to the Sasanians (both imagined and real) and, by extension, through the possession of a Christianised *xwarrah*.³⁶

a variety of ways, including “royal”. For Xuasrovani as a proper name in the late eleventh century, see *Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos* (Geo. version), 31.2, Šaniže ed., 116 (and 233).

³⁶ As noted, contemporary K'art'velians traced the lineage of the Sasanians to a legendary founder Xusrō, an origin predicated on an anachronistic simplification of Sasanian genealogy at the end of Late Antiquity. For Xusrō as the first Sasanian in the Georgian tradition, see pp. 42, 193 and 245.

Chapter 6

The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali

The quarter century before the Bagratids' seizure of the presiding principate was among the most productive historiographical periods in pre-modern Georgia. To this short span belongs *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* and its untitled continuation by Ps.-Juanšer Juanšeriani. The last two comprise K'art'lis c'xovreba's second ensemble: C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa. Although deriving from the same era and fused since at least the mid-eleventh century (if not earlier, perhaps shortly after their inception), *The Life of Vaxtang* and its continuation were written by different authors who had distinctive interests, approaches and aims. *The Life of Vaxtang* commences in 411 with the death of Mirdat IV, Vaxtang's great-grandfather. Following concise treatments of Arč'il (r. 411–435) and Mirdat V (r. 435–447), the narrative is locked on the larger-than-life exploits of the hero-king Vaxtang I Gorgasali. The length and exact dates of Vaxtang's reign are disputed; I accept Toumanoff's calculation of 447 to 522, which places Vaxtang's birth in 440. Ps.-Juanšer picks up the narrative with Vaxtang's son and successor Dač'i (r. 522–534), covers all but the final third of the *interregnum* and concludes with the Chosroid prince of Kaxet'i Arč'il (r. 736–786).

The Life of Vaxtang's rich and colourful details are atypical among early Georgian historiographical compositions and are especially reminiscent of the Iranian epic's treatment of Bahrām V Gōr, Vaxtang's contemporary.¹ This longest narrative of any single pre-Bagratid reign is the first set piece in Georgian historiography. Its structure was emulated by subsequent historiographical works, including the textual celebrations of the powerful Bagratid monarchs Davit' II (r. 1089–1125) and T'amar (r. 1184–1213). Shared vocabulary, syntax and content have led some to postulate a common authorship for *The Life of Vaxtang* and *The Life of the Kings*.² This hypothesis cannot be ruled out altogether. But at least some of the commonalities have more to do with the identical ca. 800 origin of the received texts³ and shared editing, including the redactional

¹ Allen 1932, 77. See also Frye 1984, 319: "So many stories are told about Bahram V Gōr 'the wild ass (hunter)' in the *Shāhnāme* and elsewhere that one may say Bahram became a prototype of the heroic king, militant, a great hunter, pleasure loving and in general leaving affairs in the hands of his ministers ..."

² E.g.: Kekeliže 1957d; and Kekeliže and Baramiže 1969, 132–134. Bogveraže 1968 catalogues the correlations of C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a and C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa.

³ This explains, *inter alia*, anachronisms peculiar to the late eighth and early ninth centuries: Rapp 2003, chs. 1 and 3; and Rapp 1997, vol. 1, esp. 46–135.



Figure 6.1. Modern statue of Vaxtang Gorgasali outside the Metexi church, T'bilisi.

activities of Leonti Mroveli in the eleventh century.⁴ Both authors espouse an unshakeable devotion to dynastic kingship along an Iranian pattern. But whereas *The Life of the Kings* takes up over twenty P'arnavaziani⁵ and Caucasian Arsacid reigns, *The Life of Vaxtang* fully treats three Chosroid-Mihrānid kings and focuses most of its attention on Vaxtang Gorgasali. For all its internal correspondences, pre-Bagratid historiography was not monolithic. Nevertheless, the striking similarities of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* require explanation. We shall return to this crucial issue in the Epilogue.

Royal Progeny of Nimrod

Before the Christianisation of the monarchy, *The Life of the Kings* prioritises royal descent from its first *mep'e* P'arnavaz. With the extinction of the P'arnavaziani line, Mirian took up residence in K'art'li, assumed the throne and established

⁴ Rapp 2003, 238–239. On the editorial homogenisation of *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*, see Xoštaria-Brose 1996.

⁵ Including P'arnavaziani-affiliated dynasties, especially the Nebrot'ianis (Nimrodids) and Artašēsids (Artaxiads).

the Chosroid (Xosroiani) dynasty. Although Mirian III was a Parthian Mihrānid and his first wife a P'arnavaziani princess, the Chosroids came to emphasise an ancestry from "Xusrō", the supposed founder of the Sasanians. The Chosroids thus represented themselves first and foremost as a K'art'velian branch of the Sasanians endowed with legitimising *xwarrah*. So as to make the connection as clear as possible, *The Life of the Kings* fabulously depicts Mirian as the first-born but illegitimate son of an unspecified *šāhan šāh*.⁶ The historical Mirian almost certainly had a biological connection to the Sasanians, but he was actually a Parthian Mihrānid prince whose new K'art'velian offshoot quickly acculturated to its Caucasian surroundings.

The claimed ancestry of Vaxtang is more complex and reflects the expansion and refinement of Christian Chosroid kingship in eastern Georgia. While on campaign against the Romans in eastern Anatolia (an alleged episode explored below), Vaxtang addressed his army after its Iranian contingent had rampaged against local Christians. Reminding the soldiers of his unique legitimacy and fitness to rule, the young K'art'velian hero-king quashed any doubt of his religious allegiance: "[a]nd we share in the religion of the Greeks [i.e., Romans], confessing Christ who is the true God of all".⁷ Vaxtang then singled out three definitive moments in later Roman history: Constantine's conversion, the "pagan" setback under Julian the Apostate (r. 361–363), and the Christian recovery under Jovian (r. 363–364). Allusions to later Roman emperors are unusual in received pre-Bagratid sources, a fascinating circumstance given their ca. 800 provenance, an era when K'art'velo-Byzantine relations were ascendant. The deficit is partly the result of the Iranic sources exploited by their later authors and K'art'li's orientation towards Iran in Late Antiquity. It is especially remarkable that no surviving Georgian text emits even the faintest echo of the unprecedented (and much earlier) audience of the K'art'velian king P'arsman III (r. 135–185) with Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161).⁸ About the visit to Rome in the early 140s, Cassius Dio writes: "When Pharasmanēs the Iberian came to Rome with his wife, [Antoninus] increased his domain, allowed him to offer sacrifice on the Capitol, set up an equestrian statue in the temple of Bellona [Gk. Enyō], and viewed an exercise in arms in which this chieftain, his son, and

⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 159. This notice also includes an unusual synchronism: between Mirian and Vaxtang 157 years elapsed, during which there had been eight generations and ten monarchs. See also *ibid.*, 151.

⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 160.^{16–17} = Thomson trans., 175: "და წუენცა ვართ სჯულსა ზედა ბერძენთასა აღმსარებელ ქრისტესა, რომელ არს ღმერთი ჭეშმარიტი ყოველთა".

⁸ For the visit and P'arsman's refusal of Hadrian's earlier invitation, see: *SHA*, Antoninus Pius, IX.6, Magie trans., vol. 1, 122–123 ("Pharasmanes, the king, visited him at Rome and showed him more respect than he had shown Hadrian", "Pharasmanes rex ad eum Romam venit plusque illi quam Hadriano detulit"). Cf. *SHA*, Hadrian, XIII.9. See also Braund 1994, 232–234.

the other prominent Iberians took part”.⁹ Likewise, we find no trace, not even a distorted one, of the earlier invasions of Pompey and Lucullus in the first century BC, at which time Rome – as a result of the Mithridatic Wars – emerged as a significant force along the eastern rim of the Black Sea, including western Caucasia.¹⁰

In his speech the Christian Vaxtang accentuated another wellspring of royal legitimacy, one resonating loudly with his Caucasian and Iranian troops:

You, O inhabitants of K’art’li,¹¹ kin to the kings of K’art’li, today stand in the rank of *mt’avori* [i.e., prince] [appointed] by us kings who are descended from the hero [*gmiri*] Nimrod, who before all [other] kings became famous upon the Earth. With his strength he led a lion as if it were a kid; on foot he captured wild asses and gazelles. For his strength he became so great that all the descendants of Noah obeyed him,¹² so that he was able to build a city in which he used gold for the stones and silver for the bases. He surrounded it with bricks and mortar; the tops of the gates and windows he fashioned from rubies and emeralds, from whose light the night could not become dark. Within it he built palaces [sing. *tažari*] and towers/pavilions [sing. *koški*] which it is impossible for us to conceive, and the skill which he devoted to each detail is incomprehensible ...¹³

⁹ Cassius Dio, LXIX.15.3, Cary and Foster ed. and trans., vol. 8, 470–471: “Ὅτι Φαρασμάνῃ τῷ Ἰβήρῃ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς ἐλθόντι τὴν τε ἀρχὴν ἐπιῤῥήσῃ καὶ θύσαι ἐν τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ ἐφῆκεν, ἀνδριάντα τε ἐπὶ ἵππου ἐν τῷ Ἑννεΐῳ ἔστησε, καὶ γυμνασίαν αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τοῦ υἱέος τῶν τε ἄλλων πρώτων Ἰβήρων ἐν ὅπλοις εἶδεν”.

¹⁰ See Braund 1994, ch. 5, “Mithridates, Pompey, and the Emergence of Iberia”. The Black Sea empire of Mithradatēs VI Eupatōr is not directly mentioned in received Georgian literary sources. Egrisi/Colchis was explicitly incorporated into Mithradatēs’ enterprise; K’art’li/Iberia was not. Burney and Lang 1972, 196: “From the standpoint of world history, the most dramatic era in the annals of Armenia and Georgia is certainly the titanic struggle waged over several decades by King Mithridates Eupator of Pontus in alliance with his son-in-law, King Tigranes the Great of Armenia (95–55 BC), against the encroachments of the Roman Republic in the East”. And yet these players are very poorly documented in surviving Georgian sources. Not surprisingly, the contemporary K’art’velian Artasēsīd-P’arnavaziani king Artag (Artōkēs, Ἀρτώκης; Lat. Artoces) is the first eastern Georgian ruler to be specified in Classical literature (Cassius Dio, XXXVII.1–2, etc.), for which see: Toumanoff 1969a, 11; and Braund 1994, 152–168.

¹¹ The Armenian adaptation reads: “And you, inhabitants of Virk’ [i.e., eastern Georgia] and Iran ...”, “*Եւ դուք՝ բնիկ[ք]դ Վրաց և Պարսից ...*” (*Life of Vaxtang in Patmut’iwn Vrac’*, Abulaže ed., 155^{14–15}). The Armenian historian Vardan Arewelc’i adapted *Patmut’iwn Vrac’*’s account of Nimrod and the Tower: Thomson in Vardan Arewelc’i, 131 and 147.

¹² Including the Caucasian descendants of Togarmah who, according to *The Life of the Kings*, successfully rebelled against Nimrod.

¹³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 161^{10–21} = Thomson trans., 177: “ხოლო თქვენ, მეკვდრო ქართლისანო, ნათესავნო მეფეთა ქართლისათანო, რომელნი დღეს მთავრობასა ზედა დადგინებულ ხართ ჩუენ, მეფეთაგან, რომელნი ვართ ნათესავნი ნებროთ გმირისანი, რომელი უწინარეს ყოველთა მეფეთა გამოჩნდა

Vaxtang then associated his ancestor Nimrod with the Tower of Babel:¹⁴

[F]inally [Nimrod] raised it up to a height of three days' journey; he constructed steps in the walls by which to ascend, since he wished to go up to the sky and see the inhabitants of Heaven. But when he had gone through the zone of the air and had entered the zone of the stars, the builders were no longer able to build because the gold and silver melted. For in those regions the force of the fire of the ether is such that it flames from the powerful turning of the firmament. He heard there the conversation of the seven companies of Heaven, of which the sons of Adam were terrified. Each man with his own family became a speaker of his own language; no more did they mutually comprehend their neighbour's speech, so they departed.

Then he said to Nimrod in the Persian language: "I am the angel Michael, who has been appointed by God over the principality [*mt'avroba{y}*] of the East.¹⁵ Depart from this city, because God will hide this city until the manifestation of paradise, which is located close to this building of yours. Between them is this mountain, from which rises the Sun and from which flow out two rivers, the Nile and the Gihon. For the Gihon brings out of paradise a scented tree and an herb which blends with musk. Now go hence and dwell between the two rivers, Euphrates and Jila; let these kinsmen [go] as each may wish, because they are sent by the Lord. Your kingdom will rule over all kings. But in the last times will come the ruler of Heaven, whom you wish to see, among a despised people. Fear

ქუეყანასა ზედა, რომელი ღომსა ძალითა ვითარცა თიკანსა მოიყვანებდა, კანჯართა და ქურციკთა ქუეითი იპერობდა. რამეთუ ეზომ განდიდნა ძალი მისი, რომელ დაემორჩილნეს ყოველნი ნათესავნი ნოესნი, ვიდრემდის შეუძლო ჰქნად ქალაქი, რომლისა ქვად შექმნა ქვა ოქროდ, და ხარისხად ვეცხლი, და გარემოს მისსა მოიქმნა აგურითა და კირითა, ხოლო ქუდნი კართა და სარკმელთანი იაკინთისა და ზურმუხტისანი შექმნა; რამეთუ მათისა ნათლისაგან ვერ შეუძლებდა დაბნელებად ღამე. და ჰქნა მას შინა ტაძრები და კოშკები, რომელ ვერ შესაძლებელ არს გაგონებად თქუენდა, მოუგონებელ არს თუთოეულისა სიბრძნე მისი".

¹⁴ For the Mesopotamian basis of the legend associating Nimrod with the Tower of Babel, see Gmirkin 2006, 119–125. Thomson 1996a, 179 (fn. 66), reminds us that "The tower and stairway leading to heaven are important themes in the *Teaching [of Gregory]*", for which see *The Teaching of St Gregory*, §§297 and 577–586. At least two Armenian apocryphal works address the Tower of Babel; see: Stone 1996, 639; and Stone 1982, 91–93. See Movses Xorenac'i, I.9, for the tower's construction by a "race of giants" (*azg skayic'*, *აզგ ასაკიყე*). The tenth-century Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, I.21–22, Emin ed., 14, connects Hayk to the "colossal giants" (*vit'xari skayic'*, *վիթխարի ასაკիყե*) who raised the tower. Yet other medieval sources from the Near East associate Nimrod and the Tower, including Michael the Syrian, II.3.

¹⁵ An indication of the intensifying Byzantine orientation of élite K'art'velian culture. Cf. Caucasia as the North.

of him will dispel the delights of the world; kings will abandon their kingdoms and seek poverty. Then God will see you in distress and save you”.¹⁶

Afterwards the various cultural-linguistic communities settled in their own lands: Indians in India (Hindoet'i), Sinds in Sindia (Sindet'i), Romans in Rome (Hromi), Greeks in Greece (Saberznet'i),¹⁷ Ag and Magug (cf. Gog and Magog)¹⁸ in Maguget'i, and Iranians in Iran (Sparset'i). The original language of all these peoples is said to have been *ena asurebri* (ენა ასურებრი), “Assyrian”, that is to say, Aramaic. The tradition about Nimrod's tower and the dispersion of peoples, Vaxtang says, had been handed down from the ancient K'art'velians in a “secret” (*dap'aruli*, დაფარული, also “hidden”) book.¹⁹

The fundamentally positive appraisal of Nimrod is noteworthy because the whole of *The Life of Vaxtang* is set within Christian times, more than a century

¹⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 161₂₁–162₂₀ = Thomson trans., 177–179: “... რომელი მიეცა მას ვიდრემდის აღმართა სამისა დღისა სავალსა, რომელი ექმნა აღსავალად ხარისხად ზღუდეთა ზედა. და ენება, რათა აღვიდეს ცად და იხილნეს მყოფნი ცისანი. ხოლო ვითარცა განვლო საზღვარი ჰაერისა და შევიდა საზღვარსა ვარსკულავთასა, ვერღარა უძღვებდეს საქმედ მოქმედნი, რამეთუ დადნებოდა ოქრო და ვეცხლი; რამეთუ მუნიტგამო ვიდრემე არს კელმწიფება ცეცხლისა ეთერისა მის, რომელი ეგზების მძლავრიად სამყაროსა ქცევისაგან. და ესმა მუნიტ საზრახავი შვდთა გუნდთა ზეცისათა, რომლისაგან შესლბეს ადამიანნი. და იქმნა ყოველი კაცი თვით ნათესავითურთ მეტყუელ თვით ენასა, და არღარა ერჩდეს ურთიერთას პირსა მოუყისა თვისასა, და წარვიდეს. | ხოლო ნებროთს ენითა სპარსულითა რქუა: ‘მე ვარ მიქაელ ანგელოზი, რომელი დადგინებულ ვარ ღმრთისა მიერ მთავრობასა ზედა აღმოსავლისასა. განვედ ქალაქით მაგით, რამეთუ ღმერთი ჰფარავს ქალაქსა მაგას ვიდრე გამონჩნებადმდე სამოთხისა, რომელი-ესე დგას მახლობლად ნაშენებსა მაგას შენსა, რომელსა შორის არს მთა ესე, რომლისაგან აღმოვაღს მზე და გამოვლენ მისგან ორნი მდინარენი: ნილოსი და გეონი. რამეთუ გეონსა გამოაქუს სამოთხით ხე სულნელი და თავი, რომელი შეეზავების მუშესა. აწ წარვედ შენდა. და დაჯედ ორთავე მდინარეთა შორის, ეფვრატსა და ჯილასა, და განუტევენ ნათესავნი ესე, ვითარცა ვინ ინებოს, რამეთუ წარუვლენიან უფალსა. ხოლო მეფობა შენი მეფობდეს ყოველთა ზედა მეფეთა, არამედ უამთა უკანასკნელთა მოვიდეს მეუფე ცისა, რომლისა შენ გნებავს ხილვა მისი, ერსა შორის შეურაცხსა; შიშმან მისმან განაქარენეს გემონი საფლისანი, მეფენი დაუტეობდენ მეფობასა და ეძიებდენ სიგლახაკესა. მაშინ გიხილოს შენ ჭირსა შინა და გიკსნეს ღმერთმან’”. The Armenian adaptation's account is somewhat different: *Life of Vaxtang* in *Patmut' iwn Vrac'*, Abulaze ed., 158₃₋₂₂ = Thomson trans., 179.

¹⁷ The distinction between Greeks and Romans is unusual in early Georgian literature and may indicate the influence of a foreign tradition.

¹⁸ See: Alexander 1985, esp. 185–192; and van Donzel and Schmidt 2009. For Gog and Magog, see pp. 130–140.

¹⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 163₂₋₃.

after Mirian's baptism.²⁰ The text attained its received state well after this, at the turn of the eighth/ninth century. One of its major themes is Vaxtang's – and the Chosroid dynasty's – extraction from the Iranian Nimrod (Geo. Nebrot'i),²¹ a genealogy also delineated in Ps.-Juanšer's continuation.²² According to this tradition, Nimrod was a "hero" (*gmiri*), the first king of renown upon the Earth and the mastermind of the Tower of Babel. That the imagined Vaxtang should affirm this pedigree for himself is a logical fusion and extension of traditions about Nimrod, on the one hand, and about Mirian and the Chosroids, on the other. Nimrod was the initiator of Perso-Iranian kingship while Mirian was ostensibly a Sasanian prince. Because the authenticity of Mirian's outstanding Sasanian extraction was dubious already in medieval times,²³ a direct biological tie to Nimrod – the quintessential pre-Sasanian royal antecedent – proved a clever literary device to shroud and rectify the fact that the Chosroids were not Sasanians. So as to reinforce the monarchy's affirmative connection to Nimrod, and hence to the source of Iranian royal authority, the K'art'velian *spaspeti* Juanšer proclaimed the youth Vaxtang to have been "in all respects perfect, like unto the hero Nimrod ..." (*qovlit'ave sruli, msgavsi nebrot' gmirisa*, ყოველითავე სრული, მსგავსი ნებროთ გმირისა).²⁴

Late antique K'art'velians were not alone in this appraisal of Nimrod. Consider, for example, the ca. 600 hagiographer of Mar Qardagh, the former Sasanian *bidaxš* (Syr. *paṭāḥšā*) and *marzbān* of northern Iraq who was stoned to death for abandoning and disputing Zoroastrianism. The priestly writer does not hesitate to celebrate his Christian hero's purported descent from Nimrod: "[Mar Qardagh's] father [Gušnōy] was descended from the renowned lineage of the house of Nimrod, and his mother from the renowned lineage of the house of [the ancient Assyrian king] Sennacherib".²⁵ Other ecclesiastical contexts give

²⁰ In a rather different context, cf. the Christian portrayal of the Mongol Chingiz Khān as "a mighty hunter before the Lord" (i.e., Nimrod's description in Genesis 10.8–9): John of Plano Carpini, cap. 5, Dawson trans., 19.

²¹ Arm. Nebrov't'. See also *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 181₃₋₄. For Nimrod's Mesopotamian provenance and probable connection to the Mesopotamian deity Ninurta, a warrior, hunter and patron of kings, see Hendel 2005.

²² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 240₆.

²³ *Royal List I*, §26, Abulaže ed., 83, Rapp trans., 261, for Mirian's father Lev.

²⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili 148₁₉ = Thomson trans., 164. Similar imagery is encountered in early Armenian literature. Koriwn, the fifth-century author of the *vita* of Maštoc', asserts that all the inspired books have commemorated brave warriors; he specifies Nimrod, Samson and David. See Koriwn, cap. 2, Abelian ed., 26₁₇₋₁₈. Nimrod-Bēl features in the eighth-century history of Movsēs Xorenac'i, I.5, I.7, and "From the Fables of the Persians". Nonetheless, Xorenac'i paints Nimrod-Bēl negatively (but heroically) because he is the chief adversary of Hayk, forefather of the Armenians.

²⁵ *History of Mar Qardagh*, cap. 3, Walker trans., 20. See also: Walker 2006, 248 and 259; and Payne 2012, esp. 219–220, a splendid study reaching me too late to be fully incorporated here. It probes the ca. 600 *History of Karka*, a text prefaced "with an account

similar assessments. Thus, “be like unto Nimrod” was regarded a blessing by an East Syrian biblical commentator in the late ninth century, not long after the writing of *The Life of Vaxtang*.²⁶

From within both the Iranian Commonwealth and its emergent Eastern Christian counterpart, the K’art’velians elaborated a theory of Christian kingship independent of Eusebios’ formulation of imperial Christian Roman power. This K’art’velian conceptualisation of royal authority looked first and foremost to Iranic and Near Eastern paradigms and, to a lesser extent, to the Hebrew Bible. As a result, the Christian Chosroids endorsed Nimrod as the ultimate temporal source of political power. The New Testament and Christian apocrypha were of limited utility because of their underlying assumption that the end of times was imminent. The preparation of one’s soul for the Day of Judgment was the priority, not the establishment of Christian polities about which Jesus and the apostles are silent. So effective and ingrained were these Iranic traditions that they endured for more than five centuries after Mirian’s conversion and weathered the twin calamities of the collapse of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab conquest.

It is worth noting that the Georgian branch of the Bagratid dynasty also looked back to biblical antiquity as the superlative fount of legitimacy already by the ninth and certainly in the tenth century. But these Bagratids, who had intermarried with the Chosroids, abandoned a royal pedigree from Nimrod in favour of the King-Prophet David. Yet the positive assessment of Nimrod was occasionally invoked by the Bagratids. The anonymous author of the thirteenth-century *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned* exploited a broad range of royal models and, in a few considered instances, pre-Bagratid imagery, including one of its hallmarks, the *bumberazobay*. This unconventional depiction of the Bagratids belonged to a concerted effort to shore up the precarious position of Queen T’amar, the first female *mep’e* of Georgia. In this era we also observe the unprecedented historiographical application of Classical motifs and comparisons to renowned Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman figures, a circumstance arising from Georgia’s closer relationship to the Byzantine Empire and its participation in the Byzantine Commonwealth. In some instances competing and divergent models of kingship were combined and synthesised. The very title *Istoriani da azmani šaravandedt’ani* (ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი), *The Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, hints at this blending of traditions: it features both the Greek term *istoria* (ისტორია)²⁷ and the Iranic *šaravandedi* (შარავანდედი). As noted in Part I, *šaravandedi* denotes “consecration, corona/rays of the

of [the city’s] foundation at the hands of Assyrian, Seleucid and Achaemenid kings” (p. 205).

²⁶ Walker 2006–2007, 503 (and fn. 98). For the source, see Levene 1951, 85 (cited by Walker).

²⁷ In Georgian literature, *c’xo[v]reba[y]*, lit. “life”, takes precedence. See also the Epilogue.

Sun, crown” and parallels the undocumented Middle Persian **šahrawand* (cf. Armenian *ašxarawand*, *աշխարհամանդ*, “crown tie”).²⁸ Within the main narrative, *The Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned* brazenly proclaims Giorgi III (r. 1156–1184), T’amar’s father and predecessor, “a new Nimrod, Alexander and Achilles” (*axali nebrot’*, *alek’sandre da ak’ilev*, ახალი ნებროთ, ალექსანდრე და აქილეე).²⁹ Nimrod occasionally appears in other Bagratid-era literary works, including Ioane Šavt’eli’s *Abdulmesiani*, an Iranic ode celebrating T’amar and her great-grandfather Davit’ II.³⁰

Vaxtang’s suggestion of a “hidden” or “secret” book about Nimrod is intriguing. A parallel account in the slightly later *Life of Nino* adds a few details:

King Mirian possessed a book about Nimrod, and in that book he found written as follows: “At the building of the tower there came a voice from Heaven to Nimrod, which said: ‘I am Michael, who have been charged by God with the principality of the East. Depart from this city, because God protects this city. But at the end of time will come the ruler of Heaven, whom you wish to see [and who] is despised among the people. Fear of him will dispel the delights of the world. Kings will abandon their kingdoms and seek poverty. He will look on you in your distress and save you’”. Then King Mirian understood that the old and new books bore witness and *The Book of Nimrod* [*nebrot’ is cigni*] confirmed it. He was possessed with a desire for the religion of Christ. But the secret enemy fought against him and prevented him from confessing Christ ...³¹

²⁸ See above, p. 59.

²⁹ *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 23₂₁–24₁ = Kekelize trans., cap. 12, 186. Insofar as purported Davidic origins are concerned, a similar phenomenon is observed in the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum. For the Solomonic claims of the *Kebrä Nägäst*, see: Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 528 (fn. 139); and Rapp 2003, 396. See now Haas 2008; cf. Haas 2014.

³⁰ Ioane Šavt’eli, *Abdulmesiani*, 46.2 and 91.3, Lolašvili ed., 132 and 147 (with a reference to Nimrod’s Tower). For the poem, see Rayfield 1994, 84–86.

³¹ *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 105_{14–23} = Thomson trans., 114–115: “და წიგნიცა რომელი ჰქონდა მირიან მეფესა ნებროთისი, და მასცა წიგნსა შინა პოვა წერილი ესრეთ: აღშენებასა მას გოდლისასა ჰმა იყო ზეცით ნებროთის მიმართ, რომელი ეტყოდა: ‘შე ვარ მიქაელ, რომელი დადგინებულ ვარ ღმრთისა მიერ მთავრობასა ზედა აღმოსავალისასა; განვედ ქალაქით მაგით, რამეთუ ღმერთი ჰვარავს ქალაქსა მაგას. ხოლო უკუანასკნელთა ჟამთა მოვიდეს მეუფე იგი ცისა, რომლისა-იგი შენ გნებავს ხილვა ერსა შორის შეურაცხსა. შიშმან მისმან განაქარვნეს გემონი სოფლისანი; მეფენი დაუტეობდენ მეფობასა და ეძიებდენ სიგლახაკესა; მან გიხილოს ჭირსა შინა და გაკსნეს შენ’. მაშინ გულისხმა ყო მეფემან მირიან, რამეთუ ძუელნი წიგნნი და ახალნი ეწამებოდეს და ნებროთის წიგნიცა დაამტკიცებდა, და შეექმნა სურვილი ქრისტეს სჯულისა”. Cf. *Vita Nino* in *Patmut’ iwn Vrac’*, Abulaže ed., 101_{11–13} = Thomson trans., 115: “And Mirian possessed a book which related the history of

We do not know whether such a tome ever existed.³² If *The Book of Nimrod* is to be equated with a known text, an attractive candidate is *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*. Originally written in Syriac perhaps as early as the sixth century, this apocryphal work has come down to us in a medieval Georgian version. However, the received translation was executed in the eleventh century and postdates pre-Bagratid historiographies and the *vita* of Nino.³³ In any event, the Georgian *Cave of Treasures* mentions a “book”, *cigni* (წიგნი), of Nimrod’s visions, perhaps an indication of the translator’s awareness – or assumption of the existence – of a yet earlier narrative.³⁴ The author of *The Life of Vaxtang* seems to have been familiar with oral traditions related to the Syriac original.

Several additional Syriac apocryphal and apocalyptic texts feature Nimrod, including the apocalypse of Ps.-Methodios (second half of the seventh century)³⁵ and the derivative *Book of the Bee* (compiled in the thirteenth century). The former portrays Nimrod as the world’s first king and places the Sasanians in his direct biological line: “... Babylonian kingship was handed down in succession from the seed of the mighty Nimrod until the reign of mighty Hormizd”.³⁶ This idea is instilled in pre-Bagratid historiographical narratives, which envisage Achaemenids and Sasanians – and begrudgingly, it would seem, Parthian Arsacids – as sharing a royal pedigree stemming from Nimrod. Consequently, Vaxtang was a Nebrot’iani (Nimrodid) because his famous ancestor Mirian is described in *The Life of the Kings* as the son of the *šāhan šāh*, and the Sasanians in turn were descended directly from Nimrod. While we cannot identify a particular known

the race of Nimrod [Nebrovt’] and of the building of K’at’an”, “*ნ. შირქანს იძნერ ეტრე ძი. ირ ყაათილერ კაგაღი ადღენ ზებროქშაჲს ლ. ჯინოქხანს წაგაძინაჲს*”.

³² Rapp 2003, 218–222. See also: Kekelize 1960, 437–441; and Janašvili 1901.

³³ The Georgian *Book of the Cave of Treasures* was affixed to the beginning of an early-modern redaction of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*, the Mariamseuli manuscript of 1633–1646 (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts S-30), and to a slightly later and dependent variant, the Mač’abliseuli manuscript of 1731 (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts H-2135). *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* was not regularly incorporated into the corpus; it is transmitted in no more than a handful of early-modern manuscripts belonging to a single recension of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*. Nevertheless, it is included in the new critical edition of *K’art’lis c’xovreba*: Metreveli general ed., text ed. by K’urc’ikize, 657–711.

³⁴ *Book of the Cave of Treasures* (Geo.), XLV.11, K’urc’ikize (Kourcickidzé) ed., 120. See also Rapp 2003, 126. Kekelize suggests that Leonti Mroveli – traditionally credited with *The Life of the Kings* and undoubtedly one of the earliest (if not the first) editors of *K’art’lis c’xovreba* – was the Georgian translator of *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, for which see K’urc’ikize ed., introduction, vi. See also Ri 2000, 61–62.

³⁵ This text enjoyed great popularity throughout Christendom. Its Syriac original, probably produced before 690, was quickly translated into Greek, Latin and, perhaps, Armenian. For the possible existence of a complete Armenian adaptation of Ps.-Methodios, see T’op’č’yan *unpub.* I am grateful to Dr T’op’č’yan for making available this unpublished essay.

³⁶ Ps.-Methodios, trans. in Alexander 1985, 38. See also Rapp 2003, 128–129.

text or texts as its source (assuming the existence of a definite literary basis, which is not certain), the Georgian Nimrod is a manifestation of the favourable traditions about the biblical giant circulating widely in the Christian Near East.³⁷

The Christian Bumberazi-King

The Iranic depictions of Vaxtang, his kingdom and especially his royal authority show that conversion to Christianity did not obligate eastern Georgia's abandonment of its long-standing membership in the Iranian world. This circumstance is even more striking than it first appears: although the historical Vaxtang ruled a century after Mirian, his received biography was composed around the year 800, nearly five centuries later. At least one pre-Bagratid historian thus deemed it appropriate to depict *Christian* K'art'velian monarchs as Iranic hero-kings. The contemporary reality proves that this is not simply a later image superimposed upon Vaxtang. Rather, the historical Vaxtang and his peers would have conceived of their authority within the contours delimited in his biography. In the age of Vaxtang we observe the adjustment of certain Iranic aspects of eastern Georgian kingship so as to increase their compatibility with Christianity. This was but one expression of the enlargement of K'art'velian Christianity and especially the consolidation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy during Vaxtang's reign, a well-known exponent of which is the founding of the katholicate at the end of the fifth century.³⁸ Be that as it may, as this phase of Christianisation proceeded, many – and probably most – Iranic elements so fundamental to late antique K'art'velian kingship survived. The outright rejection of Iranic paradigms coupled with a sustained reorientation of local royal authority towards Romano-Byzantine patterns transpired only under the Bagratids from the tenth century.³⁹ This coincided with the rejuvenation of the Islamic Commonwealth, including its permanent extension into Caucasia thanks in large measure to Turkic interventions. Though Caucasian Christianity had sown seeds that might blossom into a durable Romano-Byzantine orientation

³⁷ Rapp 2003, 222. On the positive and negative images of Nimrod, see: Uehlinger 1999; and Rapp *forthcoming B*. When introduced at the start of *The Life of the Kings*, Nimrod is the opponent of Caucasia's eponymous forefathers, including K'art'los.

³⁸ Georgian sources attest the proliferation of episcopal sees under Vaxtang. There seems to be a literary dimension to this development. Extant Georgian *polykephala* (*mravalt'avis*) show evidence of having been extensively created/edited in the late fifth century, perhaps in connection with the acceptance of Zēnōn's *Henōtikon* in eastern Georgia and probably as a result of warming ecclesiastical relations with the Roman Empire: van Esbroeck 1975, 299–300; and especially Mgaloblišvili in Klarjet'ian *mravalt'avi*, 182–201 and 486–488.

³⁹ Rapp 1997 and 2001. But in this case, too, the Georgians did not adopt Byzantine models wholesale but creatively adapted them to local conditions.

and coalition, its triumph by no means guaranteed the seeds would germinate and thrive.

The first reign fully addressed in *The Life of Vaxtang* exhibits the endurance of Iranic images of royal power and the ongoing Christianisation of kingship. Having expelled Iranian Zoroastrians from eastern Georgia, and with his forces attacking the Sasanian Empire, Vaxtang's grandfather Arč'il sent heralds throughout the realm, proclaiming:

“Not through our own strength or courage or wisdom or by the multitude of [our] troops did we defeat the enemy, but through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who gave us his honourable cross to guide and protect us”.⁴⁰

But the most abundant and thrilling examples of Christianised Iranic kingship involve Vaxtang. When he came to power, Sasanian influence in Caucasia was on the rebound. The Romans responded by playing upon the Christian affiliation of the K'art'velians, Armenians and Albanians. One of the main themes of *The Life of Vaxtang* is its protagonist's titanic efforts to counterbalance Sasanian and Roman power while maintaining the autonomy and distinctiveness of his kingdom. Through it all, however, Vaxtang's royal depiction has far more in common with the conventions and values of the Iranian Commonwealth, to which early Christian Caucasia most fully belonged, than with its emergent Eastern Christian/Byzantine counterpart, to which the region simultaneously contributed. Caucasia was a dynamic interface between these rival commonwealths. Despite their Christian affiliation and charter membership in Eastern Christendom, the late antique kingdoms of southern Caucasia remained more akin to the Iranian world socially, culturally and politically.

As presented, Vaxtang's royal status is predicated upon three pillars embodying Caucasia's cultural and geo-political condition.⁴¹ In addition to descent from the world's first monarch of renown, the Iranian Nimrod, *The Life of Vaxtang* accentuates its hero's unwavering Christian piety as well as his extraordinary physical strength, prowess and intelligence as a Sasanian-like hero-king.⁴² The vignettes of Vaxtang's triumphs in single combat are punctuated by syncretic

⁴⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 140₁₃₋₁₆ = Thomson trans., 154: “არა ძაღითა ჩუენითა, არცა სიმჴნითა, არცა სიბრძნითა, არცა სიმრავლითა სპათათა ვსძღუო მტერთა, არამედ ჯუარითა უფლისა ჩუენისა იესო ქრისტესითა, ძისა ღმრთისათა, რომელმან მოგუცა წინამძღურად და საჭურველად ჯუარი მისი პატოისანი”.

⁴¹ On Vaxtang's royal image, see also Martin-Hisard 1983.

⁴² Southern Caucasia was not unique in this respect. For a similar fusion of Sasanian and Christian ideals in Iraq, see Walker 2006, esp. ch. 2, “‘We Rejoice in Your Heroic Deeds!’ Christian Heroism and Sasanian Epic Tradition”, 121–163.

strands of Christian and Sasanian kingship. *The Life of Vaxtang* devotes special attention to four *bumberazi* encounters pitting Vaxtang against

two successive champions from northern Caucasia, the “Khazar” T’arq’an and the Alan/Ovsi Baqat’ar;

the Roman (“Greek”) *logothetēs* Polykarpos;

the king of India (Hindoet’i);

and the king of Sindia (Sindet’i).

Significantly, Vaxtang and his champions never engaged in *bumberazi* contests against Iranians. Instead we read about Iranian – presumably Zoroastrian – *bumberazis* under Vaxtang’s command who competed on his behalf.

Around the year 450, when Vaxtang was but ten years old, K’art’li was ravaged by an Alan (Geo. Ovsi) raid during which his sister Mirianduxt was taken captive.⁴³ Five years later the adolescent king summoned the nobility of eastern Georgia, including his *spaspeti* Juanšer, “the two bishops”⁴⁴ and the three highest tiers of the secular-military administration: *erist’avis*, *at’asist’avis* and *asist’avis*.⁴⁵ Vaxtang counseled them “like an old and wise man, and like one raised among philosophers”.⁴⁶ He vowed to exact vengeance upon the Alans through his belief in God and the consubstantial and eternal Trinity with the cross as his “guide and armour” (*cinamžyuri da sačurveli*, წინამძღური და საჭურველი).⁴⁷ The *spaspeti* heaped praise upon Vaxtang, propitiously comparing him to his forebear Nimrod. But the realm’s leading general, the king’s right hand, was apprehensive: although the monarch was “perfect in wisdom and power, in courage and stature” (*srul xar sibrznit’a da zalit’a, simq’nit’a da asakit’a*, სრულ ხარ სიბრძნითა და ძალითა, სიმკნითა და ასაკითა),⁴⁸ he was nevertheless an untested juvenile. Vaxtang insisted his fidelity to Christianity would turn the tide in the K’art’velians’ favour.

⁴³ For K’art’velo-Alanian relations in the period, see Miller 2004, 44–66.

⁴⁴ See further, p. 315, for the distinction between the *katholikos* and the bishop of Mc’xet’a.

⁴⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 147. Vaxtang sat on the highest throne while the *spaspeti* and the two bishops were seated on lower ones.

⁴⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 147_{6–7} = Thomson trans., 162: “... ვითარცა მოხუცებულმან და ბრძენმან და ვითარცა აღზრდილმან ფილოსოფოსთა თანა ...” “Philosopher” is rendered by the transcribed Greek *p’ilosop’osi* (Gk. *philosophos*, φιλόσοφος) instead of Georgian *brzeni* (ბრძენი); cf. *berzeni* (ბერძენი), “Greek”.

⁴⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 148₇.

⁴⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 149_{7–8} = Thomson trans., 164.

When he was sixteen, ca. 456, Vaxtang finally set out for Alania (Geo. Ovset'i) at the head of an army. Auxiliary troops were furnished by his uncle Varaz-Bakur (Varāz-Pakur), the leading Sasanian official based in Albania. The K'art'velians reportedly mustered 100,000 mounted warriors (*mq'edarni*) and 60,000 infantry. Varaz-Bakur contributed another 12,000 cavalry.⁴⁹ At T'ianet'i "all the kings of Caucasia" – the rulers and chieftains of northern Caucasia – added 50,000 cavalry to Vaxtang's impressive force. Making their way through the Darial Pass (*kari darialanisa*, კარი დარიალანისა)⁵⁰ north-northeast of Mc'xet'a, the K'art'velian army penetrated Alania.

The foes met along the Aragwi River,⁵¹ the K'art'velians and their allies poised on one bank and the Alans and their "Khazar" partners on the other. *Bumberazis* engaged in one-on-one contests along the river's edge for seven days before the eruption of all-out fighting.⁵² A mighty "Khazar" *bumberazi* named T'arq'an (mod. T'arxan)⁵³ challenged Vaxtang's men. The call was answered by P'arsman-

⁴⁹ In a departure from *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang* occasionally supplies troop counts. According to the considerably earlier testimony of Strabōn (first century BC–AD), the K'art'velians (Iberians) fielded a smaller army than the neighbouring Albanians, who could muster 60,000 infantry and 22,000 cavalry (XI.4.5).

⁵⁰ The various passes through the Caucasus Mountains were of immense strategic importance and are attested in numerous local and foreign contemporary sources: Kavtaraze 2000, 195ff.; Braund 2000; Braund 1994, 44–46 *et sqq.*; and Braund 2013, 97–98. Their significance is explicitly acknowledged in *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 64_{1–3}. Kavtaraze 2000, 227–228, emphasises the crucial role of such passes for the establishment and subsequent history of the K'art'velian kingdom: "Thus the concept of the Iron Gate can rightly be applied to the Caucasian or Dariali Gate as the reflection of the concrete political function of the Georgian statehood – the control of one of the most important strategic passes of the world". An extant fragment of the lost fifth-century history of Priskos mentions an attempted Saraguri invasion of Iran through the Caspian Gates. Thanks to Sasanian fortifications, the Saraguri were diverted to K'art'li and then Armenia: Priskos, cap. 47, Blockley ed. and trans., 352–355. Menander the Protector, frag. 6.1 *et sqq.*, Blockley ed. and trans., 66 *et sqq.*, reports the posturing and negotiations of the Romans and Sasanians over Suania (Suanet'i, mod. Svanet'i, Svanetia), a mountainous region on "the Scythian [invasion] route/passage" ("Σκυθῶν πάροδος", frag. 6.1) from which could be launched attacks on coastal Lazika (frag. 9.1, where archaizing "Colchis" denotes Lazika). In Mikhail Lermontov's "The Demon", the Darial Pass is the abode of serpents (cf. notions of the North).

⁵¹ Aragvi could designate not only the main river called by this name today (mod. Aragvi) but also sources of the Terek River: Giorgi Č'eišvili (personal communication, 15 September 2011).

⁵² For *bumberazi* contests waged between the two armies, see *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 151–155.

⁵³ T'arxan and the Turkic title *t'arxan* (թարխան) are attested in Movsēs Daxuranc'i, II.16 and II.42. See also Dowsett in Daxuranc'i, 104 (fn. 2). Tarchan (Ταρχάν) is identified as a Turkic title by Menander the Protector, frag. 10.3, Blockley ed. and trans., 122–123 (and 265, n. 139). See also Moravcsik 1983, vol. 2, 299–300.

P'arux,⁵⁴ an Iranian soldier renowned for catching lions with his bare hands. The combatants yelled and rushed one another, but on the first encounter T'arq'an split the helmeted Iranian from head to shoulder. P'arsman-P'arux had been the K'art'velians' foremost champion and his demise plunged Vaxtang's forces into despair. The darkness of night fell. Vaxtang secluded himself in his tent and prayed: "He requested help from God, and with trust in God desired himself single-combat with T'arq'an. For he was as fearless as one incorporeal, and he had hope in God and in his own strength".⁵⁵ As a Christian hero-king, Vaxtang's physical might was necessarily complemented by unwavering piety. The noteworthy phrase "fearless as one incorporeal", *ušiš vit'arc'a uq'orc'o* (უშიშვი ... ვითარცა უკორცო), has a direct parallel in *The Life of the Kings*, where the pre-Christian royal hero P'arsman K'ueli is described with the same phrase.

Despite Vaxtang's infectious enthusiasm, K'art'velian nobles continued to bemoan their king's inexperience. Having mounted his steed, Vaxtang descended to the river's bank with lance in hand. T'arq'an openly savoured his chances: "I am one who fights with giants [sing. *goliat'i*] and tried heroes [sing. *gmiri*], not with children ..."⁵⁶ After the routine exchange of shouts, the warriors grappled. Vaxtang fatally struck T'arq'an's belt; his lance effortlessly penetrated the "Khazar"'s armour and sliced all the way through his torso. The K'art'velian super-*bumberazi* dismounted and fell to the ground. Having credited victory to the Christian God, the king severed his adversary's head and paraded it among his troops.

T'arq'an's defeat established beyond any doubt the juvenile Vaxtang as a formidable and legitimate Christian hero-king. But his work in Alania was unfinished. The next day a gigantic *bumberazi* stepped forward from among the enemy. The Alan Baqat'ar (mod. Baxat'ar; Os. Bāqātar)⁵⁷ endeavoured to strip Vaxtang of his newfound glory and was quick to point out that the vanquished T'arq'an had not been a true *goliat'i*. Vaxtang responded with supreme confidence: "Not through my strength did I overcome T'arq'an but through the strength of my Creator. I am not afraid of you any more than of a dog. For the

⁵⁴ Cf. the name P'afox in *Primary History of Armenia*, Thomson trans., 363.

⁵⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 152¹³⁻¹⁵ = Thomson trans., 167: "... ითხოვდა ღმრთისაგან შეწყევნასა. და მინდობითა ღმრთისათა ეგულებოდა თუთბრძოლა თარჴანისი, რამეთუ უშიშ იყო ვითარცა უკორცო, და იმედი ჰქონდა ღმრთისაგან და ძალისა თჳსისაგან".

⁵⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 153¹²⁻¹³ = Thomson trans., 168: "მე გოლიათთა და გამირთა გამოცდილთა მბრძოლი ვარ, არა ემაწუროილთა ..."

⁵⁷ ΠΑΚΑΘΑΡ is attested in an Old Ossetic inscription – written in Greek characters – of the tenth/eleventh century found along the Zelenčuk River: Zgusta 1987, 58. This inscription is the oldest written monument of the Ossetic language. Blake and Frye in their ed. and trans. of Grigor Aknerč'i, 121 (389), fn. 53, note Mongol Bahatur, lit. "hero, champion", and its connection to Rus. *bogatyř* (богатырь), "hero". Andronikašvili 1966, 134–135, catalogues references to the name in later Georgian texts.

power of Christ is with me, and his honourable cross is my armour”.⁵⁸ Having lifted his tiger-skin shield, which, the author says, had proven impervious to swords, Vaxtang mounted his armoured horse. As Baqat’ar traversed the river he discharged a volley of arrows, which the king’s steed adeptly avoided. One missile finally hit the mark. His horse stumbling, Vaxtang lunged at Baqat’ar and sliced his shoulders to his heart. In a split second, Vaxtang leapt onto Baqat’ar’s horse and the contest was over.⁵⁹ The king dismounted and again gave thanks to his god. Thereafter, the two armies pounced upon one another. Vaxtang fought alongside two esteemed mounted warriors: his foster brother (*zuzusmte*) Artavaz, son of the *spaspeti* Saurmag; and Prince Bivritiani, who must be a scion of the Bagratid house.⁶⁰ Facing obliteration, the Alans agreed to exchange Vaxtang’s sister Mirianduxt for 30,000 prisoners in K’art’velian custody.

Vaxtang’s next *bumberazi* engagement took place during his putative invasion of Roman Anatolia. By this time the king was in his early 20s and his stature as a warrior was secure:

[h]e was taller than other men of that time, more handsome of face and more powerful in strength. In armour and on foot he could catch a deer, seize its antler and kill it. He could lift an armoured horse on his shoulders, and go up from Mc’xet’a to Armazis-c’ixe [i.e., the fortress of Armazi].⁶¹

Buoyed by his Sasanian and Armenian troops, Vaxtang laid siege to the city of Theodosiupolis (Geo. Karnu-k’alak’i, older form Karaxpola;⁶² Arm. Karin; mod. Erzurum) but was unable to overcome its formidable walls.⁶³ The K’art’velian king diverted his main force into Pontos and, the source claims, pushed in the direction of Constantinople. If the chronology is correct, Leōn I (r. 457–474) sat as Roman emperor. It was during this phase of the conflict that Vaxtang reminded his soldiers of his descent from Nimrod, a declaration of a different

⁵⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 154_{14–17} = Thomson trans., 169–170: “არა ძალითა ჩემითა ესძლე თარჳანს, არამედ ძალითა დამბადებელისა ჩემისათა. და არა მეშინის მე შენგან, ვითარცა ძაღლისა ერთისაგან, რამეთუ ძალი ქრისტესი ჩემ თანა, და ჯუარი მისი პატიოსანი საჭურველ ჩემდა”.

⁵⁹ Unseating a rival champion from his steed was especially humiliating because of the importance of equestrian prowess in the Iranian world: Garsoīan in *Epic Histories*, 311 (n. 5).

⁶⁰ For Sumbat Bivritiani (Smbat, son of Biwrat) and the establishment of an earlier Bagratid line in eastern Georgia, see p. 239 (fn. 285).

⁶¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 159_{3–6} = Thomson trans., 174: “... და იყო იგი უმაღლეს კაცთა მის ჟამისათა, და უშუენიერეს სახითა და ძლიერი ძალითა, რომელ ჭურვილი ქუეითი ირემსა მიეწიის, უკერის რქა და დაიჭირის, და ცხენი ჭურვილი აღიღის მჭარათა ზედა და მცხეთით აღვიდის ციხესა არმაზისასა”. Cf. Trdat in Agat’angelos (Aa), §202.

⁶² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 159₂₁.

⁶³ We possess no independent evidence of this alleged siege.

kind of Christian kingship even as he campaigned against the Romans on their own territory.

Vaxtang then experienced a divinely inspired dream in which he was censured for invading the Christian Roman Empire.⁶⁴ The dream begins with St Nino commanding Vaxtang to approach the enthroned kings of Heaven and Earth. Vaxtang gazed at Nino and saw that she had the face of Constantine the Great.⁶⁵ The K'art'velian king drew near the two thrones. Seated upon one was an old man in a white robe and wearing a crown of light. He is identified as "Gregory, the great prince [*mt'avari*] of heaven". In a sign of obedience, Nino sat at Gregory's feet. On the second throne was a youthful warrior, a *čabuki* (ჭაბუკი),⁶⁶ covered in armour and adorned with a terrestrial crown. Meanwhile, Vaxtang's right hand was held by Petre (Peter) and his left by Samoel (Samuel), two ecclesiastics introduced earlier in the account. The priest (Geo. *mydeli*) Petre had been a pupil of "Gregory the Theologian" (Geo. Grigoli *ymrt'ismetquelisa*), the famous Gregory Nazianzenos (d. 389/390), and had served as an attendant of his tomb. Samoel is identified only as a monk (*monazoni*, მონაზონი).

Just before falling asleep, Vaxtang had been admonished by Petre for allowing his soldiers to defile Christians and their places of worship. But Petre's role is not simply to scold Vaxtang for the indiscretions of wayward troops. The priest impressed upon the king the divinely established primacy of the Roman Empire: "Do you not know that the Greeks are the People of God because of His promise, when He called them sons of God and gave them the seal by which he destroyed Hell – and that is this cross?"⁶⁷ In the dream world Vaxtang had to come to terms with Petre's words. First, the elderly Gregory – who is probably Gregory Nazianzenos – rebuked Vaxtang and said he would have taken revenge had the Virgin Mary not interceded on Nino's behalf. While this may strike us as a threat more befitting of the Hebrew Bible, the notion of revenge resonated strongly with the peoples of the Iranian Commonwealth. Gregory duplicated his crown of light and instructed Vaxtang to place it on the head of the priest Petre.

⁶⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 167–169. See also: Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 413–415; and van Esbroeck 1988.

⁶⁵ The association of Nino and Constantine reflects a tradition – developed particularly after Duin III but having its roots in the late fourth/early fifth century – whereby eastern Georgia's Christianisation was linked directly to Constantine the Great. At the same time, the gender of K'art'li's evangelist was troublesome to many (male) ecclesiastics. The supplanting of her face with Constantine's encapsulates both phenomena. For the comparison of Nino's face to an angel, see *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 126.

⁶⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 167. For *čabuki*, see p. 232.

⁶⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 165^{21–24} = Thomson trans., 182: "და არა უწევია, რამეთუ ბერძენნი ნათესავნი ღმრთისანი არიან აღთქმისა მისთვის, რაჟამს უწოდა მათ შვილად ღმრთისა და მოსცა მათ ბეჭედი, რომლითა შემუსრა ჯოჯოხეთი და არს იგი ჯუარი?"

Petre, in turn, crowned the monk Samoel.⁶⁸ The royalist author's conception of "church-state" relations could not be clearer. If the basic chronological scheme of *The Life of Vaxtang* is correct, the imperial throne was occupied by Leōn I, the first emperor to have been crowned by a patriarch. Here the tables have been turned: it is Vaxtang who crowns Petre, the future chief prelate of the K'art'velian Church.

Nino escorted Vaxtang before the enthroned youth.⁶⁹ The unnamed boy-king represents the Christian Roman emperors; he may be a specific but twisted memory of Leōn's grandson Leōn II the Little (r. 474), who as a six-year-old emperor transferred power to his father Zēnōn (Zeno, r. 474–475, 476–491).⁷⁰ After embracing one another, the emperor presented Vaxtang with a ring (*bečedi*, ბეჭედი, also "seal, signet") encrusted with a brilliant gem and offered a crown (*gwrgrwni*, გვრგვნი; mod. *gvirgvini*, გვირგვინი) if he would promise to give battle to the enemies of Christianity. The emperor had the Sasanians in mind, but the issue was complicated for the Iranic Vaxtang. In front of the K'art'velian king stood a cross with a crown suspended from one of its arms. Vaxtang was stricken with fear; Nino, Petre and Samoel spoke on his behalf and guaranteed his fidelity. The young emperor then crowned Vaxtang by his own hand, an indication not only of the desired relationship of K'art'li and the Roman Empire but also of the latter's claim to occupy a privileged, sacral position within Christendom.⁷¹ But even in this Roman-dominated dreamscape, eastern Georgia's ancient Iranian heritage could not be swept aside. Petre makes this explicit in his declaration: "Vaxtang, Vaxtang, Vaxtang! You will be the most pious [*morcmune*] of all among the Iranian peoples [*nat'esavsasparst'asa*]"⁷²

Still within the dream, Petre and Samoel played the role of interpreters. Awake, the king summoned the two men who claimed to have experienced the

⁶⁸ Crowns and coronations are fairly muted in pre-Bagratid historiographical works. Cf.: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 130, for Mirian crowning his son Bak'ar; and *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 185¹⁰, for Vaxtang crowning his son Dač'i.

⁶⁹ Styled *keisari* (კეისარი), *caesar*, in Petre and Samoel's interpretation of the dream: *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 169⁴.

⁷⁰ Zēnōn's accession is anachronistically reported at the end of *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 203.

⁷¹ Vaxtang later acknowledged in a purported letter to the emperor: "But you are the first-born sons of God and are continuously his", "ხოლო თქვენ პირმშონი შვიდნი ხართ ღმრთისანი, და მარადის მისნი ხართ" (*Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 176¹⁷⁻¹⁸ = Thomson trans., 193).

⁷² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 168⁸⁻¹⁰ = Thomson trans., 185: "ვახტანგ, ვახტანგ, ვახტანგ! უმეტეს მორწმუნე იყო შენ ყოველთა შორის ნათესავსა სპარსთასა". The ancient association of eastern Georgians and Iranians is highlighted elsewhere in Near Eastern literature, including the earlier *Sibylline Oracles*, V.113–117 = Charles trans., 399: "... Go to the East, to the senseless Persian tribes, and signify to them the present and that which is to be. The stream of the Euphrates shall bring on a flood and it shall destroy Persians and Iberians and Babylonians, and Massagetae lovers of war ..."

same vision. Vaxtang took the message to heart and made cautious overtures to Constantinople, dispatching Petre as his emissary. The emperor rejoiced and “declared with strong promises and oaths that [Vaxtang] should *be equal with his royal authority* [*mep'obay*] ...”⁷³ This is extraordinary, for a contemporary Roman emperor would have affirmed no such thing. Soon after, an imperial envoy secretly presented a cross and a crown to Vaxtang. (Vaxtang subsequently received a crown of rubies from the *šāhan šāh*, a reminder of his cross-cultural station and eastern Georgia’s strategic importance).⁷⁴ Thus, while the ca. 800 *Life of Vaxtang* accepts certain elements of the Roman Empire’s claim of an advantaged position within Christendom, the author mitigates it by making the Christian Vaxtang the emperor’s peer! A few centuries later the Bagratids would extend this idea to its logical conclusion, first by boldly depicting themselves as *basileis* (emperors) and then by jettisoning Byzantine titles and dignities entirely, emphasising instead a local *intitulatio* with no obvious marks of subordination to imperial powers.⁷⁵

As we have seen, despite warming relations between Vaxtang and the emperor, Iranian and Armenian contingents of Vaxtang’s army took advantage of the unsettled situation to plunder Pontos. While Roman troops staged a counterattack, Vaxtang and his fellow K’art’velians watched from the sidelines. The king sat upon a white elephant (*p’iloγ t’et’ri*, ფილოდ თეთრი < MPers. *pīl*, “elephant”; Arm. *p’il*, *փիլ*), an animal highly prized by Sasanian armies and a symbol of power and victory.⁷⁶ Tens of thousands of Iranians and their allies fell, including Ipajaj, king of the Leks, and Vaxtang’s uncle Varaz-Bakur, the chief Sasanian official (Geo. *erist’avi*) in Albania. The latter was killed by the emperor’s nephew Polykarpos, who held the Roman offices of *logothetēs* (Geo. *loyot’eli*, ლოლოთელი < Gk. *λογοθέτης*)⁷⁷ and general (Geo. *spasalari* = Gk. *stratēgos*,

⁷³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 170₁₉₋₂₀, cf. Thomson trans., 187, emphasis added: “... მიუძღნო აღთქმითა და ფიცითა ძლიერითა, რათა სწორ იყოს მეფობისა მისისა ...”

⁷⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 181₁₉.

⁷⁵ Rapp 2001.

⁷⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 173₁₋₂. For Sasanian war elephants, see: Charles 2007; and Scullard 1974. See also: Łazar P’arpec’i, cap. 39; Elišē, caps. 3 and 5 (Thomson trans., 140, 167, 170 and 173), including references to “companies of elephants” (*eramak p’lac’*, *հրամակ փղաք*); Ps.-Sebeōs, cap. 8 (Thomson trans., 7–8); and Movsēs Xorenac’i, II.82, Abelean and Yartut’iwnean eds., 225₁₅ (“companies of elephants”). War elephants (sing. *pilo*, *პილო*) feature prominently in *Vis o Rāmin*, including its Georgian version *Visramiani*, e.g.: Gvaxaria and T’odua eds., 103₂₆₋₂₇ and 109, Wardrop trans., 108 and 115. Elephants in the service of Sasanian armies are attested in the Byzantine chronicle of Theophanēs, e.g., AM 5814, 5996 and 6118. *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpāgān*, I.9 and I.13, Grenet ed. and trans., 56–57, for Pāpāg’s dream in which Sāsān sat on a white elephant.

⁷⁷ Closer to the time of the ca. 800 author, the *logothetēs* was a high administrative official often charged with fiscal responsibilities: Guiland 1971. The office “was common in the 6th C. as a designation for fiscal controllers on various levels of the administrative

στρατηγός). Vaxtang manoeuvred to defuse the volatile situation. Acknowledging God's punishment of the Iranians for their insolence, Vaxtang ordered the priest Petre to bring a cross and commanded all his men to show obeisance on penalty of death. Borzo, king of Movakani in northern Albania, refused because he was a Zoroastrian.⁷⁸ The *spaspeti* Juanšer murdered him on the spot.

The Romans were not appeased and the stage was set for a monumental *bumberazi* clash between Polykarpos and Vaxtang.⁷⁹ The K'art'velian was driven by his desire to win vengeance for his fallen uncle. In this task, the hero-king beseeched the divine to grant him strength just as God had empowered David against Goliath (*goliat'i*, the identical Georgian word for "giant"). Having touched his sword to the cross, Vaxtang calculatingly moved forward. The *logothetēs*

ladder ... [But] a radical change in their status occurred around the 7th C. when the office of praetorian prefect lost its importance and individual departments became independent; the chiefs of some of these ... were called *logothetai*": Kazhdan 1991, 1247. This would seem to be the context for the Georgian reference to the *logothetēs* Polykarpos; the time-frame is consistent with the theorised source of *The Life of Vaxtang* identified in the Epilogue.

⁷⁸ It should be emphasised that it is a Zoroastrian Albanian and not an Iranian who openly resisted the cross. Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's *History of the Albanians* is unfamiliar with an Albanian king Borzo. But this name is attested elsewhere. An Iranian colonist named Borzo/Burzo (Burzōg) is mentioned in *Vita Evstat'i*, for which see p. 53. According to *The Life of Vaxtang*, northern Albania retained a semblance of sovereignty under its own monarch whereas the southern part fell under direct Sasanian administration. Adjacent to Albania, Xaket'i was a relative hotbed of Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism into the sixth century.

⁷⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 174. Romano-Byzantine sources sometimes refer to the peculiar kind of single combat waged in the Iranian Commonwealth, as in the case of the skirmish between a young Iranian soldier and the Roman Andreas (who directed a wrestling school in Byzantium): Prokopios, *Wars*, I.xiii.29–38. See also: Rapp 2009, 667 (fn. 58); and Rance 2005, 428–429. A *bumberazi* contest (not called by this name, of course) initiated by Razatēs, a soldier under the command of Xusrō II, is reported in the ninth-century *Short History* of the Constantinopolitan patriarch Nikēphoros (§14). Earlier, Tacitus, *Annals*, VI.35, Jackson ed. and trans., 214–217, describes one-on-one combat – fought on horseback with javelins but during all-out war – involving the K'art'velian king P'arsman (Pharasmanēs) and the Parthian Arsacid Orodēs: "In the meantime, Pharasmanes and Orodes were carrying support to the resolute or succour to the wavering. Conspicuous figures, they recognized each other: a shout, an exchange of javelins, and they spurred to the charge – Pharasmanes with the greater fury, as he wounded his opponent through the helmet. He failed to repeat the blow, his horse carrying him too far past while the bravest of his guards interposed to protect the wounded prince. Still, a falsely credited report of his death demoralized the Parthians, and they conceded the victory", "Inter quae Pharasmanes Orodesque, dum strenuis adsunt aut dubitantibus subveniunt, conspicui eoque gnari, clamore telis equis concurrunt, instantius Pharasmanes; nam vulnus per galeam adegit. Nec iterare valuit, praelatus equo et fortissimis satellitum protegentibus saucium: fama tamen occisi falso credita exterruit Parthos victoriamque concessere".

charged him, Polykarpos' lance ripping into Vaxtang's reputedly impenetrable tiger-skin shield. The king struck the Greek's helmet with his sword, at once slicing his adversary's head down to the shoulders. Vaxtang laid half of the defeated's head before the cross and assured a similar fate to others who would dare to "rebel" against Christianity. A massacre ensued. Vaxtang reportedly lost 43,000 soldiers on that day; 72,000 Romans were lost and another 125,000 were captured. At the close of operations Vaxtang's army had imprisoned 780,000 Romans (!), all of whom were released.

In the battle's aftermath, Vaxtang sent a letter to the emperor in which he reasoned that Polykarpos must have acted without sanction.⁸⁰ Soon after, the unnamed emperor arrived by sea for negotiations, presumably through the port of Trebizond (Trapezous). The Romans agreed to restore border territories to Vaxtang and to partition disputed Ap'xazet'i (Gk. Abasgia; cf. Abkhazia). An amorphous alliance with the Roman Empire came into effect. Vaxtang awaited the inevitable Sasanian response.

The "Eastern" Campaign

Three years later, the new *šāhan šāh* "Xusrō" (Geo. Xuasro) initiated a huge offensive against eastern Georgia. After a four-month stalemate, Vaxtang was presented with a golden opportunity when a Roman envoy arrived with 80,000 mounted troops. The king of kings had a sudden change of heart and appealed to Vaxtang as his "brother" and as a fellow "descendant of Nimrod". In return for an armistice and military alliance, the Sasanians promised to abandon their effort to expel the K'art'velians from the Christian fold. Vaxtang's situation was both advantageous and dangerous: he and his kingdom were teetering between two empires locked in fierce competition for Caucasia's loyalty. The K'art'velian king sought to capitalise upon the predicament and is even said to have successfully mediated a peace between the rival empires. Among its provisions were the return to Iran of Roman-held Cilicia (Sikilia, სიკილია, "Sicily" [?!], but this must be a misreading of Kilikia, კილიკია; cf. MPers. Kilikiyā)⁸¹ and the

⁸⁰ This situation is reminiscent of the fallout from the assassination of Goubazēs II, king of Lazika, by Roman commanders Martin and Rusticus in 555. The stunned Laz – in what would become western Georgia – were apparently split into two camps: one urging a new alliance with Sasanian Iran and the other calling for continued cooperation with the Christian Roman Empire, the nobleman Phartazēs insisting that rogue soldiers had acted without Justinian's authorisation. This episode is reported in Agathias, III.8–14. See Rapp 2009, 645–646.

⁸¹ Sarjvelaže *et al.* 1986, 221, does not define the term. Sikilia designates Sicily in medieval Caucasian sources, e.g., the seventh-century geography of Anania Širakac'i, III.6 and III.8, Hewsen trans., 47 and 48–48A, and n. 50 (p. 91). Širakac'i's information is based on Ptolemy, III.4. But Sicily is out of context here. John Fine (personal communication, 7 June 2011) proposes Cilicia so long as our text refers to a historical place. A sloppily executed

Sasanians' withdrawal from Palestine and Jerusalem.⁸² In fact, the Sasanians did not capture Jerusalem until 614!

With the dissipation of imperial hostilities, “Xusrō” sent a proposal to Vaxtang through his “personal mowbed” (*sakut'ari mobidani*, საკუთარი მობიდანი) Barzaban. The *šāhan šāh* desired his kinsman Vaxtang to join an expedition against the “Abašes” (Abašni, აბაშნი), “Elamites” (Elamni, ელამნი, presumably in southwestern Iran), “Indians” (Hindoni, ჰინდონი) and “Sinds” (Sindni, სინდნი).⁸³ To guarantee the coalition, the *šāhan šāh* voiced his intention to marry Vaxtang's sister Mirianduxt.⁸⁴

En route to meet the king of kings ahead of the wedding, Vaxtang, his mother Sagduxt, and sister Xuaranže are said to have made a diversion to Jerusalem. There is, however, absolutely no independent and contemporaneous confirmation of this royal pilgrimage. Once again, symbolism prevails. In the first place, the Christian Chosroid-Mihrānid king reportedly visited both Jerusalem and Ctesiphon on the same journey. However, the itinerary favours Jerusalem. Later, in his final *bumberazi* skirmish in Sindet'i, Vaxtang boasted of having delivered not only Jerusalem but all Christianity from certain devastation.⁸⁵ Here Vaxtang alludes to the peace he mediated between the Romans and Sasanians and the alleged – but chronologically untenable – Sasanian withdrawal from Palestine and the Holy City. In any event, as the K'art'velian royal family sojourned in Jerusalem, the *šāhan šāh* waited in Antioch, a cultural middle ground between Mc'xet'a and Ctesiphon.

Upon arriving in Syria, Vaxtang was greeted by Leōn, the Roman *anthypatos* (ἀνθύπατος, Geo. *ant'ipatosi* [ანთიპატოსი], Lat. *proconsul*; i.e., a provincial governor). The joyful emperor entrusted 20,000 élite mounted warriors to Vaxtang, whose cavalry forces swelled to 50,000 K'art'velians, Greeks and Armenians. The *šāhan šāh* escorted the eastern Georgian potentates to Ctesiphon, where the wedding of “Xusrō” and Mirianduxt dragged on for six months. Once the celebrations concluded, Sagduxt and Xuaranže returned home by way of Edessa (Geo. Urha, ურჰა).

nusxuri manuscript must be the culprit; cf. *s* (*l*) and *k* (*l*). On Middle Persian *kylky*, see Back 1978, 224. For Cilicia's inclusion in the lands of Anērān where the Zoroastrian high priest Kerdīr was active, see: KKZ, V.15; and KNR, §38, Brunner ed. and trans., 107.

⁸² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 181–183.

⁸³ This section of the text is saturated with legendary trappings. Notwithstanding, it is based on a kernel of truth because contemporary *šāhan šāhs* were often engaged in Central Asia (and the Arabian Peninsula). Such campaigns are attested by several authorities, including Armenian historians Łazar P'arpec'i (e.g., cap. 48, for the expedition against the Kushans [K'ušans] – i.e., Hephthalites – in the sixteenth year of the reign of Yazdgird II [438–457]) and Elišē (e.g., cap. 1 [in an edict broadcast throughout the empire], and esp. cap. 7, for Yazdgird's attack of the Kushans).

⁸⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 184–185.

⁸⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 192.

The Iranian and K'art'velian monarchs began the joint campaign by marching their armies into Jorjanet'i (ჯორჯანეთი).⁸⁶ *Patmut'wn Vrac'*, the medieval Armenian adaptation of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, identifies the capital of Jūrjanet' (Ջւրջանիթ) as Gelan (Գելան; cf. the region Gīlān); in his seventh-century geography, Anania Širakac'i locates Gelan within Media.⁸⁷ Arabic Jūrjān affirms the identification: Jorjanet'i/Jūrjanet' must be Gurgān, the Iranian region immediately south and southwest of the Caspian Sea and, as it happens, a Parthian stronghold in *kūst-i Xwarāsān*.⁸⁸ Little is said about this swift phase of the expedition or why it was necessary. The complete entry reads:

First they entered Jorjanet'i, subdued it and completely depopulated it. They installed in their place inhabitants of Iranian descent [*nat'esavni sparst'ani*]. Since then the Jorjans have become peasants [*sing. glaxi*], who are now tributary to the Iranians [i.e., Sasanians].⁸⁹

One wonders whether Gurgān's de-ethnicisation and the turning of its population into "peasants" constitute the fictive ruin of a traditional centre of Parthian power on the part of the Sasanians and, strangely enough, their K'art'velian Chosroid-Mihrānid allies (who masqueraded as Sasanians).

The Irano-K'art'velian force advanced to "India" (Hindoet'i) and "Sindia" (Sindet'i).⁹⁰ What is meant by these places is not clear. While they may intend South Asia or the Horn of Africa (for which see further), the legendary nature of this account renders moot the precise locations: the author wants us to accept that the two monarchs campaigned side-by-side in distant and exotic lands. The narrative about India is three times the length of that devoted to Jorjanet'i but still occupies no more than a short paragraph. Full-scale war in India was preceded by *bumberazi* contests: Vaxtang bested fifteen enemy *bumberazis* who, in turn, had already defeated numerous Sasanian champions. The K'art'velian king's success in *bumberazi* combat therefore establishes the symbolic superiority of K'art'li over India and, by extension, Iran. Because India's fortified cities were able to withstand the assault, the *šāhan šāh* settled for their vassalage.

⁸⁶ The ethnonym Jorjani and adjectival Jorjaneli are attested in *Visramiani*, the medieval Georgian translation of *Vis o Rāmin*, e.g., Gvaxaria and T'odua eds., 34₁₃ and 35₁₁, Wardrop trans., 2 and 4.

⁸⁷ *Life of Vaxtang* in *Patmut'wn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 171₁₅₋₁₇; and Anania Širakac'i, V.29.4, Hewsens trans., 72–72A and 265 (n. 196A). See also Thomson 1996a, 204 (fn. 4).

⁸⁸ Ray was the Parthian Mihrānid capital: Pourshariati 2008, 125.

⁸⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 187₁₇₋₁₉ = Thomson trans., 204: "პირველად მივიდეს ჯორჯანეთს, და წარმოტყუენეს ჯორჯანეთი, და ყოვლად უმკუდრო ექცეს. და დასხნეს ადგილსა მათსა ნათესაენი სპარსთანი. და მიერიოგან იქმნეს ჯორჯანნი გლეხად, რომელნი აწ არიან მეტეგრენი სპარსთანი".

⁹⁰ Cf. Bahrām V Gōr's connection with Sind and Hindūstan in *Šāhnāma*. These places and their peoples are also attested in the Bagratid-era *Visramiani* (the medieval Georgian rendering of *Vis o Rāmin*) and Ioane Šavt'eli's *Abdulmesiani*.

Although the details of this story are suspect, Toumanoff detected traces of the Hephthalite Wars waged under *Šāhan šāh Pērōz*.⁹¹ The reverberations are faint and have probably been inculcated with muddled memories of other late Sasanian campaigns in the south and east, most notably those waged under Xusrō I against Yemen and the Hephthalites following the Lazic War in 562.⁹²

The theatre of operations afforded the most attention is “Sindia”, where war smouldered for four years. The Sasanians incurred tremendous losses whereas not a single K’art’velian soldier was lost, the anonymous author crediting this preposterous circumstance to the protection of the Christian God. Vaxtang, his four noble companions and the Roman *anthypatos* Leōn distinguished themselves as “brave fighters” (sing. *mq’ne mbrzoli*, მკნე მბრძოლი) and defeated many Sindian *bumberazis*. Their chief adversary was the unnamed king of the Sinds, a “brave and enterprising giant” (*mq’ne goliat’i da šemmart’ebeli*, მკნე გოლიათი და შემმართველი) who personally entered into *bumberazi* contests. One morning the Sindian king sent forth a champion who challenged Vaxtang to single combat. The *spaspeti* Saurmag, Vaxtang’s foster brother, a “loyal, trustworthy and valiant” (*ert’guli, misandobeli da k’ueli*) man, stepped forward but was killed in an ambush, in contravention of *bumberazobay* protocol.⁹³

The scene was set for the final *bumberazi* encounter featured in *The Life of Vaxtang*: the showdown of Vaxtang and the king of the Sinds.⁹⁴ Unlike other *bumberazi* skirmishes in pre-Bagratid historiography, this episode commences with a lengthy verbal spar. The Sindian monarch hurled the first parable, which ended in a stinging critique of Vaxtang’s alliance with Zoroastrian Iran. The Sind accused Vaxtang of having strengthened Christianity’s most dangerous enemy, and he branded his K’art’velian opponent a slave of the Sasanians: “[you are] an autocratic [*t’wt’mpqrobeli*]⁹⁵ and heroic [*axovani*]⁹⁶ king, yet of your own will you have given yourself up to your enemies as a slave [*mona*].”⁹⁷ This is a clever literary technique, for late antique and medieval K’art’velians were all too cognisant of the criticisms that might be levelled against them by other Christians – especially Romans and Byzantines – owing to their close cultural

⁹¹ Toumanoff 1963, 367.

⁹² On the peace of 562, see Menander Protector, frag. 6.1, Blockley ed. and trans., 76–79.

⁹³ Thomson 1996a, 206 (fn. 67): “This Saurmag was the nephew of an earlier Saurmag; it was the latter who was Vaxt’ang’s tutor ... and father of Artavaz ...” According to his later *vita*, Vaxtang’s Christianised Iranian ally Ražden also fell victim to ambush.

⁹⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 188–195.

⁹⁵ For this term, see Rapp 2000, 576. Thomson prefers “independent”. The Georgian word embodies the sense of an autonomous ruler.

⁹⁶ For the application of *axovani* to a holy woman, see Iakob C’urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 17, Abulaže ed., 27₂₅.

⁹⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 191_{15–16} = Thomson trans., 208: “რამეთუ მეფე ხარ თვთმყრობელი და ახოვანი, და ნებითა შენითა მიგიცემია თავი შენი მონად მტერთა შენთა”.

connection to Iran. In fact, this fictional account is a meticulously constructed apology of the intricate web of K'art'velian loyalties and allegiances in Late Antiquity. As expected, Vaxtang's resplendent tongue came to the defence of the K'art'velian position. His portrayal surely owes something to Xusrō I's reputation as a philosopher-king.⁹⁸ As a non-Christian, Vaxtang retorted, the Sindian king had no right to lecture him. Moreover,

"I did not make my entrance into this land for the sake of the glory [*didebay*] of this world, nor to serve the Iranian king, but in order to serve God [who is] without beginning, the consubstantial Trinity, the Creator of all things, for the sake of eternal and unending glory hereafter. For by my coming here, first I delivered Jerusalem, the Holy City, where trod the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ and where he accomplished everything for the salvation of our souls. And then I rescued all Christendom from ruin, because the time was coming for the king of the Iranians to subjugate all Christendom".⁹⁹

In a passage abounding with exaggeration and anachronism, Vaxtang declares himself the saviour of all Christendom thanks first and foremost to his efficacious diplomacy with Sasanian Iran. His role as mediator had been made possible by Caucasia's dual affiliations with the Irano-Zoroastrian and Romano-Christian worlds. But the Sasanians did not capture Jerusalem until 614, a century after Vaxtang's death! Words are then put into the mouth of Vaxtang showing how Christian K'art'velians reconciled their dual association with these bitter foes:

"... I came here in person to succour the Iranians. This was indeed right, first because of [our shared] kinship [*nat'esaobay*], and then for this purpose, that although the Iranians are not in the true religion yet they know God the Creator

⁹⁸ Agathias, II.3, for Iran as the realisation of Plato's realm of the "philosopher-king" (φιλοσοφίας ... βασιλεία). In post-Constantinian times, some Roman philosophers visited the Sasanian Empire, even taking up residence there. Seven "pagan" philosophers participated in a debate at Ctesiphon sponsored by Xusrō I (*ibid.*). Among them was the Neoplatonist Priscianus of Lydia, whose *Solutionum ad Chosroem* consists of Xusrō's questions about philosophy and Priscianus' replies. See Erhart 1998. *Chronicle of Seert*, Scher ed., 147 (1910), for Xusrō's study of philosophy.

⁹⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 192¹⁰⁻¹⁷ = Thomson trans., 208-209: "არა მიქმნია მოსლვა ამას ქუეყანასა დიდებისათჳს ამა სოფლისა, არცა მსახურებისათჳს სპარსთა მეფისა, არამედ მსახურებისათჳს ღმრთისა დაუსაბამოსა, სამებისა ერთარსებისა, დამბადებელისა ყოველთასა, დიდებისათჳს მერმისა საუკუნოსა დაუსრულებელისა. რამეთუ ჩემითა აქა მოსლვითა პირველად გამომიკსნია იერუსალემი, წმიდა ქალაქი, სადა დადგეს ფერკნი უფლისა ჩუენისა იესოს ქრისტესნი, და მუნ აღასრულა ყოველივე კსნისათჳს სულთა ჩუენთასა. და შემდგომად ყოველი საქრისტიანო დამიკსნია მოოჭრებისაგან, რამეთუ მისცემოდა უამო სპარსთა მეფესა მოტყუენვად ყოველისა საქრისტიანოსა".

and believe in the spiritual life. But you [Sinds] are completely ignorant of God and do not understand, like horses and mules".¹⁰⁰

Vaxtang thus justified his close relationship with the Iranians in two ways: first, the biological connection of the Sasanians and Chosroids-Mihrānids; and second, the belief in a common Creator deity by Christians and Zoroastrians (especially adherents of Zurvanism?).¹⁰¹ When push came to shove, Vaxtang sided with Christianity. But, simultaneously, he considered certain aspects of Zoroastrianism valid and honourable.

The time for debate passed and the antagonists rushed upon each other with lances at the ready. Moving like a "whirlwind" (*grigali*, გრიგალი), Vaxtang struck his opponent's shoulder and the Sind tumbled to the ground.¹⁰² Showing uncharacteristic mercy, Vaxtang dragged the injured king before the *šāhan šāh* and advised that the vanquished monarch should be bound by tribute and released because Sindia could not be taken by force of arms. Three of its cities were left unharmed: Sindila (var. Sindas), T'op'or and Kimrai.¹⁰³ Scholars have been unable to identify these with known cities.

From Sindia the Iranians and K'art'velians pressed on to Abašet'i.¹⁰⁴ In medieval Georgian sources, Abašet'i – like Hindoet'i and Sindet'i – typically designates an exotic, undefined land to the east or south. Technically, however, the term refers to Ethiopia (especially Aksum) and, more broadly, the Horn of Africa. In later Roman and early Byzantine literature, Ἰνδία, "India", could designate Ethiopia and even Yemen and southern Arabia.¹⁰⁵ The sixth-century Prokopios places "India" along the Red Sea.¹⁰⁶ But he makes a distinction between "Indians" and "Ethiopians" (*Aithiopes*, Αἰθίοπες), whom he also calls "Aksumites" (*Auxōmitai*, Αὐξωμίται) after the royal city Aksum (Auxōmis, Αὐξάμις).¹⁰⁷ Writing in the late

¹⁰⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 193₆₋₁₀ = Thomson trans., 209: "... თვთ ძალად სპარსთა მოსრულ ვიყავ აქა. ჯერ იყო ესეცა პირველად ნათესაობისათვის და შემდგომად ამისთვის, დაღაცათუ არა ჭეშმარიტსა სჯულსა ზედა არიან სპარსნი, არამედ მეცნიერნი არიან ღმრთისა დამბადებელისანი, და რწამს ცხოვრება სულიერი. ხოლო თქვენ სრულიად უმეცარნი ხართ ღმრთისანი და უგულისხმო, ვითარცა ცხენი და ჯორი".

¹⁰¹ Zurvanism is specially addressed in Eznik's *On God*, caps. 145–200 *et seq.*

¹⁰² For the Bagratid King Davit' II fighting in battle as if a whirlwind (*grigali*), see *Life of King of Kings Davit'*, cap. 28, Šaniže ed., 173₁, Šaniže ed. (Metreveli general ed.), 312₁, Thomson trans., 320. This image was probably inspired by *The Life of Vaxtang*.

¹⁰³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 195₁₀₋₁₁.

¹⁰⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 195. Abašis are mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Abdulmesiani* by Ioane Šavt'eli, 60.2 ("Abaš-šabaši") and 81.1, Lolašvili ed., 137 and 144.

¹⁰⁵ Mayerson 1993. See also Joseph 1948. The ambiguous application of "India" is evident in other Caucasian narratives, including Ps.-Sebēos, caps. 47 and 50, Thomson trans., 133 (and fn. 826) and 144 (and fn. 881).

¹⁰⁶ Prokopios, *Wars*, I.xix.3.

¹⁰⁷ Prokopios, *Wars*, I.xix.17. See also *ibid.*, I.xix.24.

seventh/early eighth century, the Coptic bishop John of Nikiū asserts the close proximity of the land of Ethiopia and Egypt; the former “comprised three Indian states and four Abyssinian states, and they were situated on the border of the Sea [of Salt] towards the east”.¹⁰⁸ A century later, the Byzantine chronographer Theophanēs Confessor refers to the “king of the Aksumite Indians” (*ho basileus tōn Exoumitōn Indōn*, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἐξουμιτῶν Ἰνδῶν).¹⁰⁹

According to *The Life of Vaxtang*, Abašet'i's approaches were choked by water and reeds that severely hindered the movement of ships and large animals. The invaders diverted the water and burned the desiccated plants. The whole of Abašet'i was subjugated and the *šāhan šāh* deported half the population, which he dispersed to various unspecified places.¹¹⁰ The medieval K'art'velian author identifies as K'urds (ქურდობა), “Kurds”, the thousand or so Abaš families forcibly transferred from their homes.¹¹¹ Overall, the space dedicated to the last stage of the fanciful campaign is meagre, and no *bumberazi* contests are documented. Although lacking in specificity, the story of the Irano-K'art'velian campaign in Abašet'i may have been inspired by an actual event: the military activities of Xusrō I against the Ethiopians in Yemen.¹¹²

Finally, it must be stressed that Vaxtang did not stand alone as a Christian Iranic champion. Although their centrality is most evident in Georgian narratives, Christian aristocratic and royal champions are attested in Armenian and Albanian historiography, too. Heroic imagery reminiscent of *The Life of Vaxtang* is applied to the fourth-century Babik of Siwnik' in Movsēs Dasxuranc'i's *History of the Caucasian Albanians*.¹¹³ The Christian Babik engaged in single combat on horseback against the Hun “giant” (*hskay*) Honagur on behalf of Šāpūr II. Honagur wore armour fifty layers thick and wielded a lance fashioned from a tall

¹⁰⁸ John of Nikiū, 90.71, Charles trans., 141, surviving only in a later Ethiopic translation.

¹⁰⁹ Theophanēs, AM 6035, de Boor ed., 223. Theophanēs usually distinguishes Ethiopians/Aksumites (“Indians”) and Yemenis, especially Himyarites (“Homerites”), e.g., AM 6015, de Boor ed., 169.

¹¹⁰ Mass deportation was an important Sasanian strategy: Morony 2004; and Canepa 2009, 27–29.

¹¹¹ Kurds are also encountered in the Iranian epic, e.g., *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pāpagān*, cap. 6, Grenet ed. and trans., 78–81, for Kurds (MPers. Kurdān) and the king of the Kurds (Kurdānšāh). *Life of the Kings in Patmut'iw n Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 178, associates the Kurds with the Kushans (K'ušans), probably because of the setting of the earlier campaigns in South Asia.

¹¹² See Greatrex 1998, appendix, “The Roman Initiative in Southern Arabia”, 224–239, p. 239 for the observation: “In both southern Arabia and the Transcaucasus Roman influence was in the ascendant in the early sixth century, a development closely linked to the spread of Christianity. But Ethiopia and Himyar were never likely to play as significant a part in wars between Rome and Persia as the more centrally located kingdoms of Armenia, Iberia, and Lazica”.

¹¹³ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.1, Aṛak'elyan ed., 109–110, Dowsett trans., 63–64.

tree. The *šāhan šāh* confirmed Babik's status with a ring adorned with the image of a sacred boar. For its part, the fifth-century *Epic Histories* relates a heroic contest pitting the Armenian Arsacid king Varazdat (r. 374–378) – who was confirmed by the Roman emperor Valens (r. 364–378) – against *Sparapet* Manuēl Mamikonean.¹¹⁴ Varazdat and Manuēl grappled on horseback with lances. In another instance, *The Epic Histories* describes a contest between Manuēl and the traitor Meružan Arcruni.¹¹⁵ Similarly, this text paints the Armenian *sparapet* Vasak Mamikonean in heroic colours. In the presence of the *šāhan šāh*, Vasak described himself as a lion and a “giant” and boasted that the two great mountains upon which he stood – the Sasanian and Roman Empires – sank beneath his feet.¹¹⁶ In addition, the seventh-century Ps.-Sebēos presents Smbat Bagratuni as a “gigantic/monstrous” (*anheded*, *անհեղհղ*) man who successfully waged single combat using lances against the king of the Kushans (K'ušans).¹¹⁷

Amirandarejaniani

In concluding our discussion of the *bumberazobay's* presentation in *The Life of Vaxtang*, we should consider the analogous imagery of *Amirandarejaniani*, a Bagratid-era Georgian epic written in the twelfth or thirteenth century.¹¹⁸ Though this “riveting work of genius”¹¹⁹ is frequently ascribed to Mose Xoneli (Moses Khoneli), many hands contributed to the received text.¹²⁰ *Amirandarejaniani* celebrates the exploits of the fictional champion Amiran¹²¹ Darejanisze and his companions. The story commences with a hunting expedition led by Abesalom, king of the Indians (*hindot' mep'e*, *ჰინდოთ მეფე*). Abesalom's party pursued a golden-horned antelope into a strange land. The hunters chanced upon a stone building whose interior was decorated with portraits of three young warriors (sing. *čabuki*),¹²² their retainers and a beautiful maiden, the daughter of the “King of the Seas”.¹²³ An image of a tall armoured *čabuki* holding a scimitar was

¹¹⁴ *Epic Histories*, V.xxxvii, especially Garsoïan trans., 219.

¹¹⁵ *Epic Histories*, V.xliii, especially Garsoïan trans., 227.

¹¹⁶ *Epic Histories*, IV.liv, Garsoïan trans., 173.

¹¹⁷ Ps.-Sebēos, caps. 20 and 28. See also Greenwood 2002, 349–350.

¹¹⁸ *Amirandarejaniani* is one of several original Iranic and adapted/translated Iranian epics enjoying tremendous popularity among Georgian élites from the twelfth century, e.g., Šot'a Rust'aveli's *Vep'xistqaosani* as well as *Visramiani* and *Dilariani*. For an overview, see Rayfield 1994, 63–86.

¹¹⁹ Rayfield 1994, 65.

¹²⁰ It may even be an adaptation of an Iranian original: Toumanoff 1960b.

¹²¹ Amiran(i) came to be connected with Prometheus, who was chained to a peak in the Caucasus Mountains. See Tuite 1998. The name Amiran may be connected to the Zoroastrian Angra Mainyu via MPers. Ahriman: Colarusso 2002, 122 and 169.

¹²² MacKenzie 1986, 21; and Andronikašvili 1966, 408–409.

¹²³ *Amirandarejaniani*, At'anelišvili ed., 8, cf. Stevenson trans., 2–3.



Figure 6.2. Scene from *Amirandarejaniani* on the exterior of the Lašt'xveri church, Svanet'i. See Aladašvili, Alibegašvili and Vol'skaia 1983, esp. 126–127.

accompanied by an inscription identifying him as Amiran Darejanisze; it also named his two companions – Badri Savarsamisze and Nosar Nisreli. Outside, the bewildered hunters gazed upon the aftermath of an extraordinary battle: the plain was littered with the bones of horses and fragments of shattered armour. King Abesalom became obsessed with uncovering the story of Amiran and dispatched a mission to Iran that retrieved Amiran's one-time companion Badri. At the Indian court, Badri related the valiant feats of Amiran and his brothers-in-arms.

Amirandarejaniani is a work of fiction populated with fantastic places, including the Land of the Beasts, the Land of the Stars and the Land of the Sorcerers. When they appear, genuine locales such as Baghdad, Balkh and Bašra are vaguely described. Reminiscent of *The Life of Vaxtang*, India (Hindoet'i), Yemen (Iamanet'i) and Sindia (Sindet'i)¹²⁴ are exotic settings devoid of concrete historical meaning.

There is an even more specific parallel between *The Life of Vaxtang* (and *The Life of the Kings*), on the one hand, and *Amirandarejaniani*, on the other: the centrality of the *bumberazobay*. Amiran and his companions were *bumberazis par excellence*. They literally rejoiced in the occasion to grapple with other champions. *Amirandarejaniani*'s terminology and turns of phrase are heroic

¹²⁴ “Chinese” in Stevenson trans.

and expressive, epic traits it shares with *The Life of Vaxtang*.¹²⁵ *Amirandarejaniani* freely deploys the heroic vocabulary of pre-Bagratid historiography, including *bumberazi*, *goliat'i*, *mq'edari* and *k'ueli*.¹²⁶ This scene is typical:

In the morning the *čabuki* Šavi ["the Black Knight"]¹²⁷ saddled up, mounted his black horse, and came out. By your head, should you have seen him, you would have been delighted! [On our side] Badri Iamanisze saddled up and mounted his white horse. By your head, they were both men enough! They circled each other at the gallop and engaged. The clashing of their swords was like the thunder in the sky! [They fought] for a long time: each splintered his sword and then drew out a fresh one. Then at the end Badri Iamanisze [became] enraged, he brought about his horse, turned back, and struck [Šavi's] right shoulder with his sword, cleft him through to the left hip and killed him.¹²⁸

There are noteworthy discrepancies. *Amirandarejaniani* is committed to the exploits of a non-royal figure, Amiran. The epic is suffused with the conviction that Amiran should not engage opponents of royal blood in single combat.¹²⁹ Another divergence has to do with the setting. In pre-Bagratid historiography, *bumberazi* contests are invariably staged on the battlefield just before all-out war and in isolation from civilians. But in *Amirandarejaniani* the *bumberazobay* is a spectator sport in which partisan onlookers revel in the action. Thus, the King of the Seas, his queen and their daughter were mesmerised by a *bumberazi* clash between Badri Iamanisze and Azarmanik.¹³⁰ *Amirandarejaniani* lays out other aspects of the *bumberazobay* in more detail. The specially prepared ground

¹²⁵ Although the word *čabuki* tends to be favoured in epics of the twelfth century and later, it sporadically occurs in pre-Bagratid sources, e.g.: *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 20₁₇; and *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 164₅ and 167₅. See also: Kvačaze et al. 1986, 246; and Sarjvelaze et al. 1986, 162.

¹²⁶ Remarkably, *bumberazis* are not explicitly mentioned in Šot'a Rust'aveli's *Vep'xistqaosani*. However, we occasionally meet *gmiris*, *goliat'is*, *čabukis* and even minstrels (*mgosanis*): Baramize, Kekelize and Šaniže eds., quatr. 84₂, 345₄, 1036₂, 1058₂, 1355₃, 1464₁, 1533₁ and 1535₂.

¹²⁷ For the colour black in the Iranian world, see Russell 1998a.

¹²⁸ *Amirandarejaniani*, Stevenson trans., 14 (based on a problematic manuscript), cf. At'anelišvili ed., 44₁₋₉; "დიდასა შეეკაზმა შავი ჭაბუკი, შეჯდა მისსა შავსა ცხენსა და გამოვიდა. თავმან თქუენმან, თუმცა გენახა, მოგეწონებოდა. შეეკაზმა ბადრი იამანისძე და მისსა თეთრსა ტაიჭსა შეჯდა. თავმან თქუენმან, ორ კაცად კმა იყვნეს. შემოუვლეს ერთმანერთსა ნავარდი და შეიბნეს. კრმალთა მათთა ჭეხა ჰგვანდა ცისა ჭეხასა. იბრძოდეს დიდი ხანი, გარდააღეწეს ოროლი კრმალი ერთმანერთსა. ბოლოსა ჟამსა გაწერა ბადრი იამანისძე, გაიყუნა ცხენი, შემოიქცა და შემოჰკრა კრმალი მარჯუენესა მჭარსა და მარცხენესა თეძოსა დაასო, ჩემოაგდო და მოკლა".

¹²⁹ *Amirandarejaniani*, At'anelišvili ed., 244 and 247–248, cf. Stevenson trans., 82 and 83.

¹³⁰ E.g., *Amirandarejaniani*, At'anelišvili ed., 63–64 and 68, cf. Stevenson trans., 21–23.

on which champions fought is designated *milioni* (მილიონი); curiously, this word reflects the deliberate introduction of Greek vocabulary into Georgia under Bagratid rule, for it transcribes Greek μίλιον, *milion*, a Roman mile (i.e., a thousand paces).¹³¹ *Amirandarejaniani*'s *bumberazis* received a salary: some were paid up to 1,000 drachms for a single day of combat.¹³² The later epic poem also places a considerably greater emphasis upon feasting. Banqueting halls (sing. *saxli*, სახლი, also "house, dwelling") are mentioned on several occasions. The songs of minstrels (sing. *mgosani*, მგოსანი) thickened the jovial atmosphere of *bumberazi* contests and celebratory feasts.¹³³

Diverse interpretations have attempted to explain the affinities of pre-Bagratid historiography and *Amirandarejaniani*. Today we are in a position to resolve their relationship: in its received form pre-Bagratid historiographical literature belongs to the turn of the eighth/ninth century and *Amirandarejaniani* – to the twelfth or thirteenth century. *Amirandarejaniani*'s authors were undoubtedly familiar with *The Life of Vaxtang* and perhaps *The Life of the Kings*. While it is likely that they absorbed and repackaged the epic vocabulary, turns of phrase and imagery of pre-Bagratid historiography, there are no signs of direct quotation or borrowing. In the words of R.H. Stevenson:¹³⁴

It must always be borne in mind that from the point of view of folk-lore Caucasia is to be looked upon as constituting in large measure an outpost of the Iranian world, and that thus almost any motif with the stamp of a popular origin found in a work composed in the former region could quite possibly have come from the common Caucaso-Iranian stock through a Persian channel.¹³⁵

The profoundly Iranic architecture of Caucasian folklore is well known. It is altogether evident in the Nart sagas of northern Caucasia, which have been translated and studied by John Colarusso.¹³⁶ Narts share many heroic qualities with *bumberazis*, including a titanic physique. A few sagas portray Narts as pre-human giants.¹³⁷

¹³¹ E.g., *Amirandarejaniani*, At'anelišvili ed., 42. For the term, see also Stevenson trans., 13 (fn. 5). For the Bagratid-era introduction of Greek terminology into Georgian, see Rapp 1997, 504–505. In historiographical works, the influx is most apparent in the thirteenth-century *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*.

¹³² *Amirandarejaniani*, At'anelišvili ed., 220, cf. Stevenson trans., 74.

¹³³ In late Sasanian depictions of the royal hunt on the monumental cliff carvings at Tāq-e Bostān, the retinue accompanying the *šāhan šāh* includes corps of female harpists: Walker 2006, 135.

¹³⁴ Stevenson's translation relies on a problematic manuscript. For a sharp critique, see Lang and Meredith-Owens 1959.

¹³⁵ Stevenson in *Amirandarejaniani*, xx.

¹³⁶ Colarusso 2002. See also Dumézil 1934.

¹³⁷ Colarusso 2002, 269–270 and 406–409.

Addressing the connection of *The Life of Vaxtang* and *Amirandarejaniani*, Stevenson adds:

Whatever the temporal relation of the two works, however, the formulas and turns of phrase in which similarity is manifest are so redolent of the technique of oral narrative that it would seem more natural to suppose with [Aleksandre Baramiṣe] ... that they are derived from a common indebtedness to popular tradition rather than that one writer exerted influence over the other.¹³⁸

This “common indebtedness” entailed substantial cross-cultural dialogue across many centuries. Addressing the importance of polo, archery and the hunt in the Sasanian world, Joel Walker emphasises:

This process is best understood not simply as a “trickle down” of royal aristocratic models, but rather as a dialogue in which provincial elites developed their own versions of the Sasanian epic tradition.¹³⁹

In light of the considerable interval separating pre-Bagratid historiography and *Amirandarejaniani*, the durability of *bumberazi* imagery in the post-Sasanian period up to and beyond the Mongol conquest of the thirteenth century is remarkable. But this imagery was neither static nor uninterrupted, and its target was intentionally redirected from Georgian monarchs – whose image under the Bagratids placed more emphasis on Byzantine models – to wholly fictional characters.

Defenders and Propagators of the Faith

The exclusive dynastic concern of *The Life of Vaxtang* is the Christian Chosroid family. On several occasions, the text emphasises the king's duty to defend and expand Christianity especially through the building, maintenance and embellishment of churches. The royal adornment and construction of churches are also featured in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, a somewhat later text devoted to the Christian Chosroids immediately following Mirian. Significantly, this dimension of royal authority is less prominent in the longer *Life of Vaxtang*, in whose pages Iranic elements of kingship predominate.

Vaxtang's grandfather Arč'il is credited with raising Mc'xet'a's Step'an-cmida, the Church of St Stephen.¹⁴⁰ Vaxtang's mother, the Christianised Iranian Sagduxt, sponsored the construction of the original Samšwlde Sioni.¹⁴¹ During

¹³⁸ Stevenson in *Amirandarejaniani*, 239. See Kekeliṣe and Baramiṣe 1954, 139.

¹³⁹ Walker 2006, 138.

¹⁴⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 140^{20–21}.

¹⁴¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 142^{12–13}.

Vaxtang's reign, following the withdrawal of his troops from Anatolia, the king charged his foster brother Artavan (MPers. Ardavān) with building the fortress-city of Artanuji.¹⁴² In the valley below, the king instructed Artavan, the *erist'avi* of Klarjet'i, "to build a church and construct a monastery just as [Vaxtang] had seen monasteries in Greece [i.e., Roman Anatolia]".¹⁴³ The historian identifies the new monastery as Opiza, one of the most famous Georgian religious endowments of Tao-Klarjet'i. In addition, he reports the foundation of churches in the villages of Meri, Sindobi and Axizi. This is an important passage, for even if its association with Vaxtang is anachronistic, it nevertheless encapsulates the later trend of incorporating adapted Romano-Byzantine features into the ecclesiastical art and architecture of Tao-Klarjet'i and other Georgian ritual spaces.¹⁴⁴ Back in Mc'xet'a, Vaxtang built Sueti-c'xoveli, the Church of the Living Pillar, also known as the Church of the Apostles. By tradition Sueti-c'xoveli occupies the site of the first church raised by Mirian. A structure called Sioni (Zion) had subsequently stood there.¹⁴⁵ Vaxtang then "built the church of Nik'ozi over the hearth [*sagzebeli*, საგზეელი] of a fire[-temple] and installed a bishop where was buried the body of the holy Ražden [Ražēn], who had been martyred by the Iranians in the war against Vaxtang".¹⁴⁶ An anonymous Georgian-language *vita* is dedicated to Vaxtang's companion Ražden (Mr. Ražēn), an Iranian convert to Christianity. However, the received treatment of Ražden's martyrdom was composed much later: it is perhaps based on an original from the eleventh/twelfth century and exhibits yet later accretions. The surviving text is impoverished and contains no appreciable information about the Sasanian Empire.¹⁴⁷

The Life of Vaxtang emphasises the growth and reorganisation of eastern Georgia's ecclesiastical hierarchy under its royal hero. From the second half of the 480s, the chief prelate of the church in K'art'li styled himself *katholikos* (Geo.

¹⁴² Artanuji, whose hilltop ruins are still visible in eastern Turkey, grew into one of the region's most vibrant commercial centres. The significance of Ardanoutzi (Ἀρδανούτζι) is highlighted in the *De administrando imperio* of the Byzantine scholar-emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennitos (r. 913–959): DAI, cap. 46. On the city and its economic context, see Manandian 1965, 146.

¹⁴³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 177₂₂–178₁ = Thomson trans., 195: "... აღაშენოს ეკლესია, და ქმნეს მონასტრად, ვითარცა ეხილვნეს მონასტერნი საბერძნეთისანი".

¹⁴⁴ For a recent examination of this phenomenon, see Sxirtlaže 2008.

¹⁴⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 198_{11–13}. Vaxtang's body was interred in Sueti-c'xoveli: *ibid.*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 204. Today the (dubious) grave of St Vaxtang is capped with a modern slab and inscription.

¹⁴⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 199_{6–8} = Thomson trans., 217: "შემდგომად მისსა აღაშენა ეკლესია ნიქოზისა საგზეელსა თანა ცეცხლისასა და დასუა ეპისკოპოსი, სადა-იგი ევლა გუამი წმიდისა რაქდენისი, რომელი იწამა სპარსთა მიერ წყობასა ვახტანგისსა". In addition, see *Royal List II*, §11, Abulaže ed., 93. For the church of Nik'ozi, see *Vita Ražden*, cap. 24, Peeters trans., 317.

¹⁴⁷ On Ražden's final resting place at Cromi, see Sxirtlaže 1985.



Figure 6.3. Sueti-c'xoveli, Mc'xet'a. The current edifice is a medieval church post-dating Vaxtang's reign.

kat'alikos/kat'alikoz, კათალიკოს/კათალიკოზ < Gk. καθολικός; Arm. *kat'olikos*, *Կաթողիկոս*; Lat. *catholicus*).¹⁴⁸ The historical factors leading to the establishment of the katholike need not detain us, but the received ca. 800 text expressly connects it to Vaxtang's invasion of Roman Anatolia and the divine vision he experienced there.¹⁴⁹ For whatever reason, Vaxtang was determined to promote the Greek bishop Petre to the newly created katholike.¹⁵⁰ At the time, however, the church based at Mc'xet'a was led by Archbishop Mik'ael, another Greek cleric. Mik'ael's reaction was aggressive and violent: he kicked the king in the mouth, knocking out one of his teeth. Vaxtang apprehended Mik'ael and dispatched him to the patriarch of Constantinople for sentencing. The disgraced bishop spent the rest of his life exiled in the imperial capital's Stoudios monastery.¹⁵¹ Upon Mik'ael's removal, Petre and his subordinate, the Greek monk Samoel, were sent to the patriarch of Antioch because, the ca. 800 author says, K'art'li originally had fallen under its jurisdiction.¹⁵² The unnamed Antiochene patriarch consecrated Petre as the first *katholikos* of K'art'li and ordained twelve suffragan bishops, the number in obvious imitation of Christ and the apostles.¹⁵³ After reporting the return of the newly invested clerics to Mc'xet'a, the historian sketches the administrative structure of the K'art'velian Church:

And there they installed Petre as *katholikos* and Samoel as bishop of the episcopal see of Mc'xet'a. As bishops [Vaxtang] established one in Klarjet'i, at the church of Axizi; one at Artani in Erušet'i; one in Javaxet'i at Cunda; one at Manglisi; one at Bolnisi; one at Rust'avi; one at Ninocmida, at the gate of Ujarma, which was built by Gorgasali; one at Čeremi, also his own construction, and there he built a fortress between the two churches, which he had also constructed; one

¹⁴⁸ Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 451–465, with cautions against the equation of the establishment of the katholike with autocephaly. See also Kekeliže 1957a. Cf. Goilaže 1991a, 134. On the date, see Toumanoff 1954, 167–169. For the period, see also Goilaže 1991b, 159–166.

¹⁴⁹ Some of the specific details of this development as elaborated in *The Life of Vaxtang* may be suspect, yet the contemporaneous foundation of the K'art'velian katholike is not in doubt.

¹⁵⁰ For the possible identification of Petre with Peter the Fuller (d. 488), the exiled Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch, see van Esbroeck 1989, 265.

¹⁵¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 196–197. For Stoudios, see Thomson 1996a, 215 (fn. 76). Though it was founded in the fifth century, Stoudios gained prominence towards the end of the eighth century. The reference may therefore reflect the author's time.

¹⁵² The legal relationship between the K'art'velian Church and the patriarchate of Antioch was disputed in the medieval era: Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 457–462. Mamulia Gi. 1992, for the hypothesis that the early church in K'art'li fell under the jurisdiction of the metropolitanate of Amasea in Helenopontos (a diocese of Pontos) and not Antioch. See now Martin-Hisard 2008b.

¹⁵³ Cf. the establishment of twelve bishops in northern Armenia by Grigor Lusaworič' (Gregory the Illuminator) in the fourth century: Agat'angelos (Aa), §845.

at Č'et'et'i, which he built in the middle of the village; one at Xornabuji; and one at Agaraki, which is in the direction of Xunani.¹⁵⁴

While this passage provides valuable insights into the organisation of the early church in K'art'li,¹⁵⁵ we must handle it with caution, for its testimony may derive from a subsequent time or times, perhaps ca. 800 and potentially as late as the eleventh century. We should take notice of the reference to Bolnisi: although its foundational inscription does not mention any K'art'velian monarch, even indirectly, Bolnisi Sioni was built during Vaxtang's reign.¹⁵⁶ His epigraphical absence demonstrates the considerable autonomy of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands and their frequent alignment with the Sasanian court in Late Antiquity. Along with other evidence, Bolnisi Sioni's foundational inscription throws the hyper-majestic imagery of *The Life of Vaxtang* into doubt.

Surviving Georgian texts give no indication of a direct, sustained relationship between the K'art'velian and the East Syrian Church, also called the Church of the East and what was once misleadingly termed the Nestorian Church.¹⁵⁷ The East Syrian Church acquired official status in Sasanian Iran under Yazdgird I (r. 399–420), who is branded “the Sinner” in non-Christian sources.¹⁵⁸ Yazdgird never converted to Christianity, but he endeavoured to harness the loyalty of Christian Iranians, to establish government oversight over their actions and to advance the Iranian-based ecclesiastical hierarchy as a Near Eastern alternative to that of the Roman Empire and its allies. Intentionally mimicking Constantine, Yazdgird convened the first general council of the East Syrian Church at Ctesiphon in 410 under the chief prelate Mar Ishāq. Its purported acts are preserved in the *Synodikon orientale* of the ninth century.¹⁵⁹ This compilation does not attest eastern Georgian representation at Iranian ecclesiastical councils with

¹⁵⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 198₁₃–199₅ = Thomson trans., 217: “და მუნ შინა დასუეს პეტრე კათალიკოსად და სამოელ ეპისკოპოსად მცხეთასავე საეპისკოპოსოსა. და დასუა ერთი ეპისკოპოსად კლარჯეთს, ეკლესიასა ახიზისასა; ერთი არტანს ერუშეთს; ერთი ჯავახეთს, წუნდას; ერთი მანგლისს; ერთი ბოლნისს; ერთი რუსთავს; ერთი ნინოწმიდას, უჯარმის კარსა, რომელი გორგასალსა აღეშენა; ერთი ჭერემს, მისსავე აღშენებულსა, და მუნ ქმნა ქალაქი ერთი შორის ორთავე ეკლესიათა, რომელი-იგი მანვე აღაშენა; ერთი ჩელეთს, რომელი სოფელსა შუა აღაშენა; ერთი ხორნაბუჯს და ერთი აგარაკს, რომელ არს ხუნანს გამართებით”.

¹⁵⁵ Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 437–465.

¹⁵⁶ The later *Life of the Successors of Mirian* may erroneously attribute the structure to P'arsman IV (r. 406–409), although this potentially refers to an edifice predating Sioni. See pp. 265–267.

¹⁵⁷ The relationship between the East Syrian and Armenian churches was far closer, for which see especially the publications of Garsoïan.

¹⁵⁸ McDonough 2008b, for the Syriac, Greek and Arabic images of Yazdgird.

¹⁵⁹ On this synod in the context of Christian Caucasian history, see Garsoïan 1999b, 49–52. See now Wood 2012.

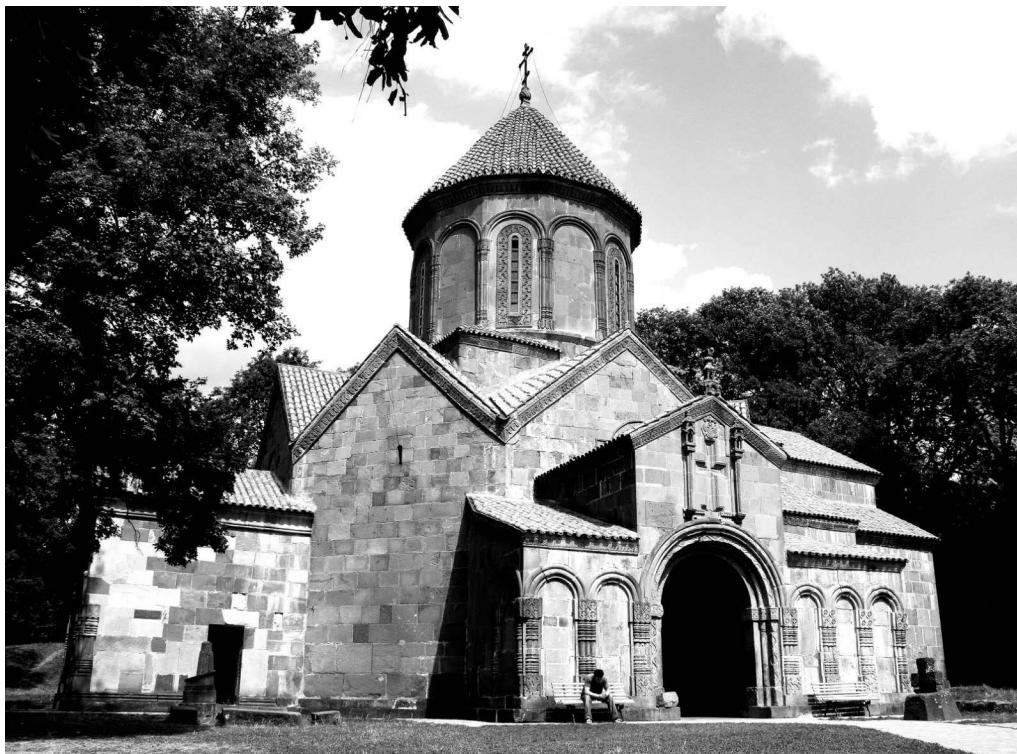


Figure 6.4. Manglisi.

one conspicuous exception:¹⁶⁰ a bishop from Gurzān attended the synod of Mar Yahḫalāhā in 420.¹⁶¹ Further details about the identity of this bishop are wanting. The toponym Gurzān is encountered in other Christian Syriac sources, including the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Zachariah of Mitylēnē,¹⁶² whose enumeration of territories in the “Northern region” includes Armenia, Gurzān (“a country in Armenia [!], and its language is like Greek [!]; and they have a Christian prince, who is subject to the king of Persia”), Arrān (i.e., Albania), Sisagan (i.e., Sisakan/Siwnik’) and Bazgun. Gurzān is also mentioned alongside Arrān in the *vita* of Pīrāngušnasp-Grigor.¹⁶³ There can be no question that Gurzān is eastern Georgia.

There is, however, some manner of titular connection. While we must be cognisant of the *Synodikon orientale*’s retrojection of some later concepts,¹⁶⁴ according to its testimony the bishop of the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon, by then the highest-ranking ecclesiastic in the East Syrian Church, was designated *katholikos* as early as the council of Mar Ishāq in 410 and certainly by the 420s.¹⁶⁵ How the office was originally incorporated into a religious framework is obscure,¹⁶⁶ but the process is closely associated with Sasanian Iran and Caucasia. After the 420s, the title was current in the Armenian Church; later in the century, it was embraced by K’art’velian chief prelates.¹⁶⁷ Some scholars, including Michel van Esbroeck, have linked it to a specific confessional orientation, especially the rejection of – or, I would add, indifference to – the dyophysite christology

¹⁶⁰ Armenians frequently attended these councils: Garsoïan 1984, 240. Between the partition of ca. 387 and 591 more than three-quarters of Armenia fell under Sasanian control (*ibid.*, 235).

¹⁶¹ *Synodikon orientale*, cap. 2, Chabot trans., 276. For Gurzān, see Ceret’eli K. 1993a. See also: Adontz/Garsoïan 1970, 171; Martin-Hisard 1998b, 495; and Garsoïan 1999b, 162 (with regards to *The Letter of Bēṭ Aršam*) and 204.

¹⁶² Ps.-Zachariah of Mitylēnē, II.7, Hamilton and Brooks trans., 327–328.

¹⁶³ *Vita Pīrāngušnasp-Grigor*, Hoffmann trans., 79 (and fn. 718) and 80.

¹⁶⁴ This is not uncommon for ecclesiastical titles. For the anachronistic application of Armenian ecclesiastical titles in *The Epic Histories*, Agat’angelos (Aa) and Łazar P’arpec’i, see: Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Kat’olikos/Kat’olikosut’iwn”, 537; and Thomson in P’arpec’i, “Patriarchal Titles”, 272–274.

¹⁶⁵ *Synodikon orientale*, cap. 1, Chabot trans., 260. See also: Wood 2012; Macomber 1968; Morony 1984, 334–337; Leclercq 1928; McCullough 1982, esp. 121ff.; Toumanoff 1954, 146–147; and Garsoïan 1999b, 51–52.

¹⁶⁶ In second- and third-century Roman Egypt, *katholikos* signified a leading financial officer. The secular and religious offices are not directly related. About the title of *katholikos*, the canons attributed to Mārūtā of Maipherqaṭ – Roman ambassador to Ctesiphon and attendee of the synod of 410 – relate: “... the term *catholicos* is not a Greek nor a Syriac but a Roman [term]. For the term *catholicos* in Greek has no explanation, but as it is so it is called in the Roman [language], in the same way as the Greeks call it. In Syriac «*catholicos*» is interpreted «general», for example, also ἐκκλησία καθολική is interpreted in Syriac «the general calling»” (“Canons of Mārūtā”, Vööbus trans., 7).

¹⁶⁷ Toumanoff 1954, 146.

of Chalcedon.¹⁶⁸ Yet when the K'art'velian Church began to attach itself to the Chalcedonian fold in the early seventh century, its leading bishop retained the title *katholikos*. Its proud use has continued to the present day. The K'art'velian adoption of the term was possibly inspired by the East Syrian Church directly, but there are other potential paths of inspiration and transmission. For example, the title may have reached K'art'li (and Albania) via Armenia. What can be said with confidence is that over the course of the fifth century several ecclesiastical organisations in the Near East, including those of Sasanian Iran, Armenia, K'art'li and Albania were administered by chief prelates who styled themselves *katholikoi*. And all these *katholikoi* tended flocks within the Iranian Commonwealth.

The Onomastic Continuum

Despite over a century of Christianisation and the surging influence of the Christian Roman Empire, the Iranic description of K'art'velian society is remarkably stable across *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. Some of the consistency is the result of scribal and especially editorial homogenisation. But a great deal of it is based on the historical realities of Late Antiquity. The dominance of an Iranic onomasticon through the initial conversion of the monarchy has already been noted. This trend continued into the sixth century, as we see with all three of the Christian Chosroid monarchs featured in *The Life of Vaxtang*:¹⁶⁹

411–435	Arč'il	Probably an indigenous Iranic name, but its etymology is uncertain. ¹⁷⁰
435–447	Mirdat V	Miθradāta, “given by [the Mazdean deity] Miθra”; Arm. Mihrdat (Mihrdāt); Gk. Mithradatēs/Mithridatēs (Μιθραδάτης/Μιθριδάτης).
447–522	Vaxtang I	Cf. Vərəθraγna, Vahrām/Bahrām; var. MPers. Vrθangi; Arm. Vahram (Վաղարշ).

¹⁶⁸ Van Esbroeck 1991, 514–519.

¹⁶⁹ For these names, see Andronikašvili 1966, 435–437, 467–468 and 474. All are attested in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's Royal List II*. However, its Šatberdi variant (§11, Rapp trans., 305) gives the corrupted “Golgasari” for “Gorgasali”. The distorted *nusxuri* *ჰაგასარი* is a misreading/mistranscription of *ჰაგარტისანი*, i.e., the confusion of *l* (*ლ*) and *r* (*რ*).

¹⁷⁰ Rendered Arjil (Արշիլ) by Movsēs Xorenac'i, III.60, Abelean and Yarut'wnean eds., 341₃. Xorenac'i styles Arjil-Arč'il “king”, *t'agawor*.



Figure 6.5. Sasanian seal-stamp inscribed Vrðangi. British Museum, no. 119712.

The Life of Vaxtang draws special attention to the name of its hero: “in Persian he was called Varan-Xuasro-T’ang, but in Georgian he was called Vaxtang”.¹⁷¹ The name Vaxtang is ultimately based on Vərəθrəyana, the Mazdean deity who was closely associated with *xwarrah*.¹⁷² Vrðangi, a Middle Persian equivalent of Vaxtang, is attested on a cornelian seal-stamp now in the collection of the British Museum.¹⁷³ Although the object derives from the early Sasanian epoch, there is no particular reason to think that it depicts the K’art’velian king Vaxtang.¹⁷⁴ But the seal-stamp demonstrates the use of the name Vrðangi/Vaxtang in Middle Persian.

The Life of Vaxtang’s explanation of the Iranian sobriquet Gorgasali is more nuanced:

¹⁷¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 143₆₋₇: “... უწოდა სახელი მისი სპარსულად ვარან-ხუასრო-თანგ, ხოლო ქართულად ეწოდა ვახტანგ”. See also Rapp 2003, 207–208 (and fn. 21).

¹⁷² E.g.: Soudavar 2003, 25; and Rose 2011, 106.

¹⁷³ The seal is small, 12 mm x 16 mm. I wish to thank the British Museum’s Near Eastern Cabinet for the opportunity to examine this object in November 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Amiranašvili 1971.

And King Vaxtang had had made a helmet of gold; on the front it had a wolf, and on the back a lion.¹⁷⁵ On whichever side the K'art'velians were being defeated, there he would advance and destroy the Iranian troops, like a lion [slaying] onagers. Therefore, the Iranians were quite unable to fight him because they recognised him, on whom the wolf and lion were inscribed. And when they saw Vaxtang, they would say: “*Dur az gorgasal*”, which means: “Flee the head of the wolf”.¹⁷⁶ And hence King Vaxtang was named Gorgasalı.¹⁷⁷

The narratively rich *Life of Vaxtang* is populated with numerous other individuals. Its non-clerical figures hailing from Caucasia overwhelmingly possess Iranian and Iranic names: Vaxtang's sisters **Xuaranže** (lit. “son of Xuaran” [?]; var. Xuaramze [xwarrah + mze, “Sun”?]) in the Mariamseuli redaction) and **Mirianduxt**;¹⁷⁸ **Darč'il/Dač'i (Dārč'īhr)**, Vaxtang's son and successor (whose reign is fully treated in Ps.-Juanšer's continuation);¹⁷⁹ **Artavaz**, Vaxtang's foster brother;¹⁸⁰ **Saurmag**, a K'art'velian *spaspeti* and Vaxtang's *mamamžuze*;¹⁸¹ **Saurmag**, nephew of *spaspeti* Saurmag;¹⁸² the K'art'velian *spaspeti* **Juanšer**;¹⁸³ the K'art'velian *erist'avis* **Nasar** and **Adarnase**;¹⁸⁴ **T'arq'an**, a “Khazar” *bumberazi*; **Baqat'ar**, an Alan/Ovsi *bumberazi*;¹⁸⁵ the Armenian *naxarars* **Arew of Siwnik'**, **Juanšer of Vaspurakan** (Geo. Asp'uragan) and **[H]amazasp**

¹⁷⁵ Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.1, Arak'elyan ed., 110, for the tiger-shaped helmet of the champion Babik of Siwnik'. Much earlier, Strabōn, XI.4.5, for K'art'velian (Iberian) and Albanian soldiers wearing helmets fashioned from the skins of wild animals. For animal headdresses, see Lerner J. 2009, including p. 221 (fn. 23) for a bulla from Up'lis-c'ixe in K'art'li depicting a grandee adorned with a cap fashioned in the image of a lion. See also Gignoux 1979, pl. II:4.

¹⁷⁶ “Wolf”, Geo. *mgeli* (მგელი). One of the Parthian homelands was closely associated with this animal: Gurgān, “the land of wolves”.

¹⁷⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 180₉₋₁₄ = Thomson trans., 197: “ხოლო ვახტანგ მეფესა შეექმნა ჩაბალახი ოქროსი, და გამოესუა წინათ მგელი და უკანათ ღომი; და რომელსა კერძა იძლეოდიან ქართველნი, მუნიტცა მიმართის და მოსრის სპისა მისგან სპარსთასა, ვითარცა ღომმან კანჯარნი. მიერთიგან ვერდარა შეუძლებდეს სპარსნი წყობად მისა, რამეთუ დაისწავლეს იგი, რომელსა ეწერა მგელი და ღომი, და ვითარცა იხილიან ვახტანგ, თქვან: ‘ღურ აზ გორგასალ’, რომელ არს ესე: ‘შირიდეთ თავსა მგლისასა’. და მის მიერ სახელ-ედა ვახტანგ მეფესა გორგასალ”. See also Toumanoff 1963, 369 (fn. 48).

¹⁷⁸ E.g., *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 143₄ and 143₁₇.

¹⁷⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 178₁₄.

¹⁸⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 156₁₀.

¹⁸¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 143₁₅.

¹⁸² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 189₂₀.

¹⁸³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 145₉.

¹⁸⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 176₁₁.

¹⁸⁵ For a later Ap'xaz named Baqat'ar, see *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 261₁₃.

of **Tarōn**;¹⁸⁶ and **Borzo**, king of Movakani in Albania.¹⁸⁷ In addition, *The Life of Vaxtang* attests several Iranians having ties to Caucasia: **Urmizd**,¹⁸⁸ the Sasanian *šāhan šāh* Hormizd III and “father” of Vaxtang’s first wife **Balenduxt**¹⁸⁹ (perhaps a corruption of *Šāhēnduxt*, “daughter of a falcon”, according to Jost Gippert);¹⁹⁰ *šāhan šāhs* “**Xuasrot’ang**” (probably *Šāpūr II*) and “**Xuasro**” (there may be more than one *Xuasro*);¹⁹¹ **Bartam**, a Sasanian prince, son of “*Xuasro*”;¹⁹² **Barzabod**, Sasanian viceroy of Albania (*Rani*); **Sagduxt**, Barzabod’s daughter and Vaxtang’s mother; Vaxtang’s uncle **Varaz-Bakur**, Sasanian viceroy of Albania after his father Barzabod; **Bink’aran**, a Zoroastrian *mowbed* based in *Mc’xet’a*; **Mobidan (Mobidān)**, chief prelate of the church in *K’art’li* and probably a Manichaean; **Barzaban**, the personal *mowbed* of the *šāhan šāh*; **P’arsman-P’arux**, a *bumberazi* in Vaxtang’s retinue; and the Christian Iranian martyr **Ražden (Ražēn)**, the “guardian” of Vaxtang’s wife.

Mirianduxt, Balenduxt and Sagduxt are reminders of the frequent application in Old Georgian of the Middle Persian suffix *-duxt*, “daughter of”.¹⁹³ Its usage persisted well into the Bagratid period. Thus, *Žalanduxt* is mentioned in an epitaph on a seventh-century stele-cross from *Samcverisi*;¹⁹⁴ we meet *Bakurduxt* in a short tenth-century inscription on the *Ninocmida* church;¹⁹⁵ *Sahakduxt* is specified on a tenth-century icon depicting Gregory Thaumaturgos;¹⁹⁶ *Guaranduxt* and *Miranduxt* were daughters of the martyred prince *Arč’il*;¹⁹⁷ another *Guaranduxt* was the niece of the same *Arč’il*;¹⁹⁸ another *Guaranduxt* was the mother of the Bagratid king Bagrat III (r. 1008–1014);¹⁹⁹ and yet another

¹⁸⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 159₁₉.

¹⁸⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 174₄.

¹⁸⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 158₁₄.

¹⁸⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 158₁₂.

¹⁹⁰ Gippert 2011. *Nuxuri b* (უ) and *š* (ყ) are easily confused. Gippert’s fascinating interpretation hinges in large measure on Balenduxt actually being the daughter of Hormizd III. MPers. *bālēn* denotes “top, peak” and “cushion, pillow” (p. 97), both of which are appropriate in a Sasanian administrative and aristocratic Caucasian context. On the importance of cushions (sing. *barj*, *բարձ*) in Parthian and Caucasian Arsacid court ceremonial, see Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, 515.

¹⁹¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 161₃ and 199₂₀.

¹⁹² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 202₁₁, also in a subtitle (201₂) which may have been inserted later.

¹⁹³ This suffix is encountered in other Caucasian languages, including those of northern Caucasia: Colarusso 2002, 195 (for *-ukh/-ux*).

¹⁹⁴ Šošiašvili 1980, 150–151.

¹⁹⁵ Šošiašvili 1980, 315–316.

¹⁹⁶ Soltes 1999, #111, 213.

¹⁹⁷ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 244_{18–19}.

¹⁹⁸ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 242₂₃.

¹⁹⁹ *Chronicle of K’art’li*, Qauxč’išvili ed., e.g., 274₁₅. She is also mentioned in a late tenth-century inscription from *Axali Sop’eli*: Šošiašvili 1980, 258–259.

Guaranduxt was the wife of the Bagratid monarch Davit' II (r. 1089–1125).²⁰⁰ Quite obviously, Guaranduxt was a favoured name among K'art'velian and then Georgian princesses and queens, its popularity bridging the pre-Bagratid and Bagratid eras.

Marriage and Adoptive Kinship

High-profile marriages between the élites of eastern Georgia and Iran continued in the fifth and sixth centuries. Vaxtang was born of the union of the K'art'velian king Mirdat IV and the Iranian Sagduxt, daughter of the chief Sasanian official in Albania, then reportedly based at Partaw (Geo. Bardavi).²⁰¹ Having taken up residence in K'art'li, Sagduxt abandoned Zoroastrianism and was baptised. Capitalising upon her position, she sponsored the construction of the Samšwlde Sioni church.²⁰² Vaxtang's first wife Balenduxt was a "daughter" of an unspecified Sasanian *šāhan šāh*. Toumanoff proposes Hormizd III (r. 457–?459) and places the wedding in 459.²⁰³ Vaxtang's son and successor Dač'i was born about a year later. After Balenduxt's death, Vaxtang married Helena (Geo. Elene), a "daughter" of the Roman emperor,²⁰⁴ thus living up to his reputation as mediator between the Sasanians and Romans.²⁰⁵ As is not uncommon in early Georgian historiography, "daughter" is an exaggeration in the case of Helena and quite possibly in that of Balenduxt, too. Toumanoff identifies this Helena as a princess from the family of the emperor Zēnōn and fixes the marriage sometime after 484.²⁰⁶

On several occasions *The Life of Vaxtang* refers to foster parenting, specifically *mamamžuze*, "foster father", an institution also attested in other Georgian texts preceding Bagratid rule. The *spaspeti* Saurmag was Vaxtang's *mamamžuze* and acted as regent during the king's minority.²⁰⁷ Saurmag simultaneously served as *mamamžuze* of the renowned warrior Artavaz, later the *erist'avi* of Klarjet'i. Artavaz

²⁰⁰ *Life of King of Kings Davit'*, §44, Šaniže ed., 183.

²⁰¹ As noted, Partaw was actually founded – or at least reestablished and enlarged – under Pērōz (r. 459–484).

²⁰² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 141–142.

²⁰³ Toumanoff 1990, 378. For Balenduxt, see *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 158 and 178.

²⁰⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 198. For the contention that King Arč'il married Jovian's descendant Mariam, see *ibid.*, 140.

²⁰⁵ On Vaxtang as mediator, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 421–423.

²⁰⁶ Toumanoff 1990, 378. Later, *The Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 203, reports the death of the Roman emperor, Vaxtang's father-in-law, and the enthronement of his son Zēnōn. But Zēnōn's father Kodisas was not emperor.

²⁰⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 143 and esp. 145. Saurmag's brother, Varaz-Mihr, was Vaxtang's envoy to the Roman Empire (*ibid.*, 172).

and Vaxtang are explicitly described as *žužusmte* (ძუძუსმტე), “foster brother(s)”.²⁰⁸ Another Saurmag, nephew of the *spaspeti* Saurmag, was raised alongside Vaxtang.²⁰⁹ And the Christianised Iranian Ražden, who was martyred by the Sasanians, was the *mamamžuze* of Vaxtang’s first wife, the Iranian princess Balenduxt.²¹⁰

Secular Administration and Officials

As we have seen, *The Life of the Kings* describes an administrative system in which the *mep’e* (king) headed subordinate *erist’avis* in whose hands were vested local military and civilian power. The network was reportedly established by the first monarch P’arnavaz. Although this text communicates little about specific *erist’avis* in the long period before Mirian’s baptism, they must have represented the great aristocratic houses of eastern Georgia. We would expect *The Life of Vaxtang* to reveal more about the political structure of K’art’li because of its dense narrative detail and the closer temporal proximity of its author to the events and peoples he describes. The particulars are richer on the whole, yet they are meagre compared to Armenian historiographical literature. The difference has to do chiefly with patronage and perspective: whereas Armenian works were typically composed at the behest of particular *naxarar* houses and are expressions of aristocratic interests, their surviving Georgian counterparts – with exceedingly few exceptions²¹¹ – were written on behalf of the royal family or, in the case of pre-Bagratid texts, champion strict but lapsed dynastic kingship.²¹² Early Georgian historiography illuminates an élite society governed by kings but frequently hints at the dominance of powerful noble houses and estates, an arrangement characterising the whole of the Iranian Commonwealth.

Two passages in *The Life of Vaxtang* provide insight into K’art’li’s political organisation in Late Antiquity. Around the year 455, when he was fifteen years old Vaxtang

... summoned all the nobles of K’art’li and assembled them in the city [i.e., Mc’xet’a]. And the king prepared a hall [*saxli*] and sat upon a high throne. The *spaspeti* Juanšer and the two bishops also sat on thrones, but the other

²⁰⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 156₁₀ and 177₂₀. For foster children of similar age being raised together, see *Vita Peter the Iberian* (Syr.), cap. 9.

²⁰⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 189.

²¹⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 199. In this case, Thomson trans., 217, renders the term “guardian”.

²¹¹ E.g., *The Monument of the Erist’avis* (*Žegli erist’avt’a*). This fifteenth-century source, devoted to the *erist’avis* of K’sani, reaches back to the sixth but concentrates on the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

²¹² Thomson 1996c, for a comparison of the two historiographical traditions.

erist'avis sat on chairs, while the *at'asist'avis* and *asist'avis* and all the people were standing.²¹³

This may appear to be a rare glimpse into the pre-Bagratid court, but we must remember that *The Life of Vaxtang* attained its received state later, ca. 800, just before the Bagratids took the command of the presiding principate. As reported, four figures sat on thrones: the king and his right-hand man, the *spaspeti*, along with what appear to be the two highest Christian officials in eastern Georgia. These two clerics and their ranks are not elucidated. Elsewhere, however, the same author distinguishes between the *katholikos* based at Mc'xet'a and the "bishop of the episcopal see of Mc'xet'a".²¹⁴ There is an Armenian parallel. Agat'angelos draws a distinction between Gregory the Illuminator, the first chief prelate of the Armenian Church sitting at the royal capital Valaršapat (Ējmiacin), and Albianos, whom Gregory appointed as "overseer", *verakac'u* (*վերակացու*, i.e., bishop), of the royal court.²¹⁵

According to *The Life of Vaxtang*, the K'art'velian secular administration was configured decimally. Under the *erist'avis* were *at'asist'avis*, "heads of a thousand", and below them, in turn, were *asist'avis*, "heads of a hundred". The most esteemed *erist'avis* are enumerated in a passage describing Vaxtang's preparation for a campaign with the Sasanian *šāhan šāh*:

... Vaxtang brought his son, who was called Darč'il in Persian, but Dač'i in Georgian; he was five years old. He crowned him, left him as king, and left with him his seven nobles:

first, the *spaspeti* Juanšer, ruler [*mpqrobeli*] of Šida [Inner] K'art'li and chief [*mp'lobeli*] of all the *erist'avis*;
Demetre, *erist'avi* of Kaxet'i and Kuxet'i;
Grigol, *erist'avi* of Heret'i;
Nersaran, *erist'avi* of Xunani;
Adarnase, *erist'avi* of Samšwlde;
Samnaxir, *erist'avi* of Šida Egrisi and Suanet'i; [and],
Bakur, *erist'avi* of Margwi and T'akueri.

²¹³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 147₁₋₅ = Thomson trans., 162: "... მოუწოდა ყოველთა წარხინებულთა ქართველთა, და შემოკრიბნა ყოველნი ქალაქად. და განმზადა მეფემან სახლი ერთი და დაჯდა საყდართა ზედა მაღალთა, ხოლო ჯუანშერ სპასპეტი და ორნივე ეპისკოპოსნი დასხდეს საყდართავე, და სხუანი ყოველნი ერისთავნი დასხდეს სელებითა, და ათასის-თავნი და ასის-თავნი და ყოველი ერი წარმოდგეს ზე".

²¹⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 198₁₃₋₁₄. For the passage, see above p. 306 (fn. 154).

²¹⁵ Agat'angelos (Aa), §846, Thomson trans., 381: "*վերակացու թողյր արքունական գրան բանակն*". For "overseer" and "bishop", see also §856.

To these he entrusted his son Dač'i; and he ordered them to restore Ujarma and to bring up King Dač'i there, because he recognised that it was suitable for game and sheep. He took with himself four of his nobles:

Artavaz, *erist'avi* of Klarjet'i;
 Nasar, *erist'avi* of Cunda;
 Bivritiani [cf. Biwratean], *erist'avi* of Ožrq'e;
 [and] Saurmag, his *ejibi* [i.e., grand chamberlain] ...²¹⁶

The families represented by these “seven nobles” may be a deliberate imitation of the seven great aristocratic houses of Iran.

Vaxtang's *erist'avates* closely coincide with those ascribed to P'arnavaz in *The Life of the Kings*.²¹⁷ The major departures are the splitting of the far eastern *erist'avate* of Kaxet'i/Kuxet'i and Heret'i as well as the addition of the *ejibi* (“grand chamberlain”, ეჯიბი, cf. Arabic *hajib*; Arm. *hejup*, ჯეჟუპ)²¹⁸ and the reference to *asist'avis*. Like *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang* makes the *erist'avis* dependent upon the *spaspeti*, to whom is entrusted Šida K'art'li, the central district of the realm.²¹⁹ Because such administrative durability is improbable, we must wonder about the retrojection of early medieval political configurations onto antiquity. Nevertheless, the basic bureaucratic scheme can be accepted for both periods. Its fundamental structure exhibits remarkable stability over the long haul, and this helps to account for the survival of eastern Georgian society across protracted spans of upheaval.

Related to *erist'avi* is *erismt'avari* (sing. ერისმთავარი), which is encountered once in *The Life of Vaxtang*. The compound consists of *eri* (ერი), “people, army,

²¹⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 185–186₁ = Thomson trans., 201–202: “... მოიყვანა ვახტანგ ძე მისი, რომელსა ერქუა სპარსულად დარჩილ, ხოლო ქართულად დანი. იყო ხუთისა წლისა, და დაადგა გვრგვნი, და დაუტევა მეფედ, და დაუტევენა მის თანა შვდნი წარჩინებულნი მისნი: | პირველად ჯუანშერ სპასპეტი, მყრობელი შიდა ქართლისა და მფლობელი ყოველთა ერისთავთა; | და დემეტრე, ერისთავი კახეთისა და კუხეთისა; | და გრიგოლი, ერისთავი პერეთისა, | და ნერსარან, ერისთავი ხუნანისა; | და ადარნასე, ერისთავი სამშუღლისა; | და სამნადირ, ერისთავი შიდა ეგრისა და სუანეთისა; | და ბაკურ, ერისთავი მარგვსა და თაკურისა. | და ამით შეჰვედრა ძე თუხი დანი, და უბრძანა აღშენება უჯარმისა და მუნ შინა ზრდა დანი მეფისა, რამეთუ სიმაღლედ გამოწახა იგი ნადირთა და ცხოვართათჳს. და წარიტანნა თანა ოთხნი წარჩინებულნი მისნი: | არტავაზ, ერისთავი კლარჯეთისა; | და ნასარ, ერისთავი წუნდისა; | და ბივრიტიან, ერისთავი ოძრკისა; | და საურმაგ, ეჯიბი მისი დიდი...”

²¹⁷ Baxtaze 2003, 87–89.

²¹⁸ Rapp 2003, 230. This oldest Georgian reference to *ejibi* belongs to the time of the ca. 800 author and not of Vaxtang.

²¹⁹ On the geography of Šida K'art'li, see Gvasalia 1991.

host”,²²⁰ and *mt’avori* (მთავარი), “prince” or “chief”, itself from *t’avi* (თავი), “head”. As Vaxtang entered negotiations with the Roman emperor during the Anatolian campaign, the young king’s Iranian troops plundered Pontos. Among the dead in the Roman counterattack were many *erismt’avaris*.²²¹ It has not been determined precisely who these *erismt’avaris* were and how they were differentiated from standard *mt’avaris*.²²²

On three occasions *The Life of Vaxtang* attests *spasalaris* (sing. სპასალარი), “generals”: the unnamed *spasalari* of Kaspi, foster father of Vaxtang’s sister Mirianduxt; the *spasalaris* of K’art’li who greeted Vaxtang upon his return from his military expedition with the *šāhan šāh*; and the *spasalaris* of K’art’li whom the dying Vaxtang ordered to remain in their places.²²³

Explicit references to *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands are few. *The Life of Vaxtang* is familiar with the “*bidaxš* of the Armenians [i.e., of the Armenian March]” (*somext’a patiaxši*, სომეხთა პატიახში) and the “*bidaxš* of Somxit’i” (*patiaxši somxit’isa*, პატიახში სომხთისა); compare the *erist’avi* of Samšwde in the aforementioned list.²²⁴ In Armenian sources the office is normally situated within a K’art’velian framework once the Armenian Arsacid monarchy had been suppressed in 428. This adjustment is reflected in *The Life of Vaxtang*.²²⁵ The first reference is of special interest, for one interpretation makes the *bidaxšes* of Somxit’i-Gugark’ relatives of the Bivritianis, a surname associated with the Bagratids (Geo. Bagratuniani, later Bagrationi).²²⁶ However, a comma is missing in the critical edition’s list of three illustrious families associated with Armenia: the Aršakunis (the Arsacids), the *bidaxšes* (whose family is otherwise unnamed, following the literary convention of the time) and the Bivritianis/Bagratids. Thus, the *bidaxšes* and the Bivritianis constituted separate houses.²²⁷

²²⁰ And in a modern context, “nation”.

²²¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 173₅.

²²² These *erismt’avaris* should not be confused with subsequent presiding princes.

²²³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 143₁₈, 196₁₀ and 202₁₈.

²²⁴ (Later) Georgian-language manuscripts transmitting *The Life of Vaxtang* use two forms interchangeably: *pitiaxši* and *patiaxši*.

²²⁵ Toumanoff 1963, 192. *Bidaxš* (“*pitiaxši*”) is last attested in the eighteenth-century continuation of the medieval section of *K’art’lis c’xovreba* by Beri Egnatašvili: Qauxč’išvili ed., 342₅, for “the *patiaxši* of Lori [Geo. Lori]”, a northern district of Armenia and part of the historical Armeno-K’art’velian marchlands. A similar archaizing reference is found in a subsequent added text: *The New K’art’lis c’xovreba – Third Text*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 477₁₁. These narratives, as well as an intervening one, were inserted in the early modern period by Vaxtang VI’s editorial commission.

²²⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč’išvili ed., 161₆₋₇. For the Bagratid connection and the internal divisions of Caucasian aristocratic houses, see Toumanoff 1963, 252, 294–295, 316, 344 (fn. 16) and 463–464 (fn. 117).

²²⁷ Toumanoff 1963, 335 (fn. 143).

Elsewhere in *The Life of Vaxtang* we are informed about the betrothal of Vaxtang's sister Xuaranže to Bakur, *bidaxš* "of the Armenians".²²⁸

Finally, *The Life of Vaxtang* once alludes to *dasturni*, "officers". The term appears in a message allegedly sent from the *šāhan šāh* to Vaxtang recognising the K'art'velian king's right to govern his realm as he saw fit.²²⁹ *Dasturi* (დასტური), the singular form, mirrors Middle Persian *dastwar*, "authority, priest, minister".²³⁰ *Dasturi* retains currency in modern Georgian, though its meaning has shifted exclusively to "sanction, permission, confirmation, agreement".²³¹ It is worth noting that the Middle Persian *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* is acquainted with a "*dastūr* of Ādurbādagān" under Xosrō I.²³²

Šāhan šāhs and Sasanian Agents

The ubiquity of Iranic culture and social structures in *The Life of Vaxtang* might imply a goldmine of information about the Sasanian Empire proper, including the names of specific *šāhan šāhs* and their officials as well as historical episodes involving the Iranian nucleus. But the corpus of pre-Bagratid historiography is disappointing in this respect, especially compared with Armenian sources. The chief historical value of *The Life of Vaxtang* – like that of *The Life of the Kings* – rests in the outlooks, attitudes and conventions woven into its narrative.

Šāhan šāhs are fairly prominent characters, yet *The Life of Vaxtang*'s references to them – and, for that matter, to their Roman counterparts – lack precision. During Vaxtang's long reign, six *šāhan šāhs* occupied the Sasanian throne: Yazdgird II (r. 438–457), Hormizd III (r. 457–?459), Pērōz (r. 459–484), Balāš (r. 484–488), Kavād (r. 488–496, 498–531) and Zāmāsp (r. 496–498). Only one of these figures is explicitly named:

... then the king of the Iranians gave [Vaxtang] his daughter to wife; she was called Balenduxt. He gave over Somxit'i and all the [northern] Caucasian kings as a dowry, and wrote therewith a letter, in which the introduction runs as follows: "From Hormizd [Urmisd],²³³ King of All Kings, to Vaxtang, Varan-Xuasro-T'ang, the heroic [axovani] King of the Ten Kings, greetings".²³⁴

²²⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 185 and 199.

²²⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 184₂.

²³⁰ MacKenzie 1986, 25. See also Thomson 1996a, 200 (fn. 59).

²³¹ Cherkesi 1950, 66; Rayfield *et al.* 2006, vol. 1, 556.

²³² *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*, Cereti ed. and trans., ch. 2, 133–134 and 150, cited and excerpted in Daryaei 2009, 89.

²³³ Ormizd (ორმიზდ) in the Georgian version of *Vita Gulanduxt*, §1, Kekelize ed., 210₈.

²³⁴ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 158_{11–15} = Thomson trans., 173: "... სოლო სპარსთა მეფემან მოსცა ასული მისი ცოლად, რომელსა ერქუა ბალენდუხტ. და მოსცა სომხითი და ყოველნი მეფენი კავკასიანნი ზითვად და მისწერა მის თანა

As with other early Georgian authors, Vaxtang's historian frequently refers to *šāhan šāhs* by the generic appellation "Xuasro". In one instance towards the end of Vaxtang's life (no later than ca. 522), we read about the death of one Xuasro and his replacement by another, his son.²³⁵ But the first *šāhan šāh* named Xusrō did not come to power until 531. Furthermore, the reigns of the two historical Xusrōs were not contiguous: Xusrō I was the grandfather of Xusrō II. An additional example in *The Life of Vaxtang* specifies *Šāhan šāh* Xuasrot'ang (ხუასროთანგ). A contemporary of the Roman emperor Jovian, Xuasrot'ang must be Šāpūr II.²³⁶ Later, the Sasanians invaded eastern Georgia at the conclusion of Vaxtang's rule. Fighting in his last battle, Vaxtang killed Bartam, the son of an unspecified *šāhan šāh*.²³⁷ If the chronology is sound and Bartam is a historical figure, he must be a son of Kavād.

We stand on firmer ground when it comes to Sasanian officials in southern Caucasia and, in particular, the viceroys of Albania whom pre-Bagratid historiographies designate "*erist'avis* of Rani". Whenever the Sasanians lacked a direct presence in K'art'li, the chief point of contact was Albania. From the early 460s, this entailed the Sasanian *marzbān* based in southern Albania at Partaw, a city constructed – or at least comprehensively rebuilt – by order of Pērōz. *The Life of Vaxtang*'s most prominent Albanian viceroy is Barzabod, the father of Vaxtang's mother Sagduxt. Barzabod's jurisdiction extended beyond Rani and Movakani into Ādurbādagān, thus encompassing much of southeastern Caucasia. Varaz-Bakur, Sagduxt's brother (and Vaxtang's uncle), succeeded Barzabod as the leading Sasanian official in Albania. He was killed by Roman troops during Vaxtang's ill-fated campaign in Anatolia.²³⁸ Curiously, the word *marzbān* is encountered only once in *The Life of Vaxtang*, and not with regards to Caucasia. In an Iranian context, a *šāhan šāh* makes reference to his "elders and *marzbāns*" (*moxuc'ebulni da marzapanni*, მოხუცებულნი და მარზაპანნი).²³⁹

წიგნი, რომელსა პატრუცავსა წერილ იყო ესრეთ: 'ურმისდისგან, ყოველთა მეფეთა მეფისა, ვახტანგის მიმართ, ვარან-ხუასრო-თანგისა, ათთა მეფეთა მეფისა ახოვანისა'". The ten kings ruled various highlanders. Cf. *Epic Histories*, III. vii, for a list of Caucasian peoples, many of whom were highlanders: Honk', P'oxk', T'awasparik', Hečmatakk', İzmaxk', Gat'k', Głuark', Gugark', Šičbk', Čilbk', Bałasčik' and Egersuank' (i.e., Egrisians-Suans/Svans of northwestern Caucasia). See also Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, commentary, 249, III.vii, n. 2.

²³⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 199¹⁹⁻²⁰.

²³⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 161²⁻³.

²³⁷ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 202¹⁰⁻¹¹.

²³⁸ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 176.

²³⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 184¹¹. The latest Georgian reference to *marzbāns* is found in the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of a Hundred Years*, cap. 2, Kiknaže ed., 53²⁹, Qauxč'išvili ed., 168¹⁸. This application is deliberately archaising.

Zoroastrians, Zoroastrianism and Christianised Xwarrah

Despite the importance of Zoroastrianism in its narrative, *The Life of Vaxtang* specifies only one Zoroastrian official: Barzaban, the *šāhan šāh*'s “personal mowbed” (*sakut'ari mobidani*, საკუთარი მობიდანი).²⁴⁰ As described, Barzaban functions as an envoy: he was dispatched to eastern Georgia to confirm Vaxtang's sovereignty and from there headed a diplomatic mission to the Roman Empire.

On a broader level, the text supplies fascinating details of the ongoing competition between Christianity and Zoroastrianism and Sasanian efforts to expand the orthodox strain of their religion in Caucasia. *The Life of Vaxtang* opens with the ominous death of King Mirdat IV in Ctesiphon. Mirdat may not have been a fully committed Christian; such is implied in *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, but this might be read alternately as a veiled statement about his confessional affiliation. At any rate, he imprudently shunned cordial relations with both the Sasanians and Romans. An Iranian invasion ensued and the stormy religious atmosphere deteriorated further: “And in all the churches of K'art'li the Iranians lit fires for the fire-worshippers”.²⁴¹ The subsequent king, Arč'il, manoeuvred to shield Christianity from the onslaught. He won some breathing space when his son Mirdat – the future Mirdat V, father of Vaxtang Gorgasali – fell in love with Sagduxt, daughter of the Sasanian viceroy of Albania. Because war was exacting a heavy toll on both sides, Barzabod and Arč'il came to terms for peace. The ceasefire was sealed with the marriage of Mirdat and Sagduxt. It is not entirely clear whether Sagduxt's conversion to Christianity was a K'art'velian condition of the marriage, whether her conversion was the result of acculturation or whether she may have already embarked upon the path of conversion prior to her removal to eastern Georgia.²⁴²

After Vaxtang's birth, Sagduxt was tormented by the prospect of her father seeking vengeance upon the K'art'velians because of her apostasy from Zoroastrianism. She made the trek to Partaw, possibly a slight anachronism here, and implored Barzabod not to strike K'art'li. Barzabod agreed in return for the right to install Zoroastrian priests in Mc'xet'a:

“I shall not make you force any K'art'velian to renounce the Christian religion. But I shall send fire-worshippers to your city [of Mc'xet'a], and they will act there as bishops [*episkoposni*, i.e., overseers] of our religion over them. If any K'art'velian of his own will chooses our religion, you will not prevent him”.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 184₁.

²⁴¹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 139₇₋₈ = Thomson trans., 153: “და ყოველთა შინა ეკლესიათა ქართლისათა ცეცხლის-მსახურთა სპარსთა ადგანეს ცეცხლი”.

²⁴² *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 141–142, claims that Sagduxt's Christian instruction occurred after her wedding.

²⁴³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 144₁₉–145₁ = Thomson trans., 159: “იძულებით არცა-ვის ქართველსა სხუასა დაგადებინებ სჯულსა ქრისტესსა, არამედ

A delegation of Zoroastrian priests led by Bink'aran took up residence in Mogut'a, the Iranian quarter of Mc'xet'a.²⁴⁴ Bink'aran's efforts to lure Christian K'art'velians to Zoroastrianism were largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Sagduxt attempted to offset the reinvigorated Zoroastrian presence in the royal city with the energetic Mik'ael, a Greek bishop from Roman Anatolia – the same Mik'ael who later kicked Vaxtang's face. According to *The Life of Vaxtang*, Mik'ael's intervention prevented any of the K'art'velian aristocrats from forsaking Christianity.²⁴⁵

Vaxtang was aggrieved by the resurgence of Sasanian Zoroastrianism. But his options were limited because Sasanian power waxed strong.²⁴⁶ The young king had to cope with a stark reality: while he might sometimes counterbalance Iranian and Roman interests, Iran was in closer proximity to K'art'li. What is more, the culture, society and history of Caucasia and Iran were tightly intertwined. This had some intriguing consequences including, as we have seen, the imagined Vaxtang reasoning before the king of the Sinds that Zoroastrianism was honourable because its adherents acknowledged God the Creator and subscribed to the “spiritual life”.²⁴⁷ At the same time, Roman insistence of the empire's privileged place within Christendom was not lost on the ca. 800 K'art'velian author and perhaps the historical Vaxtang. The dramatic conclusion of *The Life of Vaxtang* features another Sasanian invasion of eastern Georgia. Vaxtang was convinced that the Sasanians now sought nothing short of the complete obliteration of Christianity in Caucasia. By habit the aged king went to the battlefield and was fatally wounded.²⁴⁸ Ultimately, the Sasanian assault upon Mc'xet'a proved futile. Soon after, the Romans under the personal command of Emperor Zēnōn clashed with the Iranians at Karnip'ora.²⁴⁹

Near death, Vaxtang summoned the royal family, the *katholikos* and the aristocrats of his realm. He commanded them to hold fast to Christianity and instructed the nobility:

“You, inhabitants of K'art'li, remember my good deeds [*ket'ilni*], because first from my house you received eternal light, and I honoured you, my kin, with

მივგზავნე ცეცხლის-მსახური ქალაქსა თქუენსა და იყვნენ მუნა ეპისკოპოსნი მათ ზედა სჯულისა ჩუენისანი. და ვინცა ქართველი ნებითა თესითა აღირევედეს სჯულსა ჩუენსა, ნუ აყენებთ”.

²⁴⁴ See pp. 140–142.

²⁴⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 145.

²⁴⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 146.

²⁴⁷ See pp. 295–296.

²⁴⁸ Vaxtang probably died in his early eighties, a circumstance calling into question his dangerous exploits as a *bumberazi*-king from his teenage years.

²⁴⁹ The anonymous author explains the etymology of Karnip'ora as “stomach of blood” and ties it to this battle. But as Thomson observes, the etymology is not Georgian: *p'or* (ქორ) is the Armenian word for “stomach”. See *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 203; and Thomson 1996a, 222 (fn. 86).

temporal glory. Do not despise our house, nor abandon the friendship of the Greeks”.²⁵⁰

These putative words enshrine a historical reality of Christian Caucasian society: the condominium of Iranian culture and Christianity in Late Antiquity.²⁵¹ Thus, while the imagined Vaxtang afforded priority to Christianity and, with it, to good relations with the Christian Roman Empire, he simultaneously stressed the enlightenment of the K'art'velian aristocracy through his “temporal glory”, *q'orc'ielebri didebay* (ჰორციელებრი დიდება). As we have seen, *didebay* renders “glory”. Ecclesiastical texts often use this word for the glory of God, Christ and the saints. But in pre-Bagratid historiographical works, *didebay* can denote royal glory and majesty and, in Iranian and Iranic contexts, *xwarrah*. In this instance, the author qualifies *didebay* with “temporal” to emphasise the royal “glory” of the Christian Chosroid-Mihrānids. Legitimacy was thus proven and guaranteed by Vaxtang's possession of a Christianised kingly *xwarrah*, what Iranians called *xwarrah ī kayān*.²⁵² Throughout the narrative Vaxtang is closely associated with the Sasanians and his adornment with *xwarrah* is never in doubt. Even his name is connected to *xwarrah* through its inspiration, Vərəθrəyṇa. Vaxtang's most direct linkage to the Sasanians was his marriage to Princess Balenduxt, the “daughter” of Hormizd III. He also claimed a tie to the Sasanians, and all royal Iranians, through a common lineage from Nimrod.

Whereas *The Life of Vaxtang* extols Iran – and only Iran – as “the land of heroes and giants”, *k'ueqanay gmir't'a da goliat't'a* (ქუეყანად გმირთა და გოლიათთა),²⁵³ the Roman Empire and especially Constantinople is applauded as the divinely designated pivot of Christianity.²⁵⁴ The differences, tensions and physical conflicts between the Iranian and Romano-Byzantine worlds are frequently emphasised in contemporary sources and modern scholarship alike. Yet the experience of early Christian K'art'li demonstrates that many cultural, social and political facets of the bitter rivalry could be reconciled in cosmopolitan environments like the Caucasian crossroads.

²⁵⁰ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 203^{14–17} = Thomson trans., 222–223: “... ‘თქვენ, მკგდრნო ქართლისანო, მოიგსენენით კეთილნი ჩემნი, რამეთუ პირველად სახლისა ჩემისა მიერ მიიღეთ ნათელი საუკუნო, და მე ჰორციელებრითა დიდებითა გადიდენ თქვენ ნათესავთა ჩემთა. და სახლსა ჩვენსა ნუ შეურაცხ-ჰყოფთ, და სიყვარულსა ბერძენთასა ნუ დაუტეობთ”.

²⁵¹ Cf. Braund 1994, 261: “Iberia had been abandoned [by the Romans in the late fourth century]: local tradition records Persian suzerainty in Iberia until a momentous shift to Byzantium under Vakhtang Gorgasali in the sixth century” (emphasis added). But the picture painted by *The Life of Vaxtang*, our principal Georgian source for the period, is considerably more complicated.

²⁵² On *xwarrah ī kayān*, see above pp. 229–230.

²⁵³ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 170.

²⁵⁴ Magdalino 2010, for the centrality of Constantinople.

Sasanian Coinage

Our analysis of *The Life of Vaxtang* concludes with a consideration of numismatic evidence through both textual references and physical coinage. Following his liberation of Mirianduxt in Alania/Ovset'i, Vaxtang triumphantly entered Mc'xet'a where "men and women spread their sleeves and garments beneath his feet. And at his head they threw *drams* and *drakans* ..." ²⁵⁵ Sometime later, during his Anatolian campaign, Vaxtang assured the inhabitants of Pontos that military operations were ceasing and "gave donkeys to the infirm, and to the young three *drahkans* each ..." ²⁵⁶ Coinage is also attested in the other pre-Bagratid works of K'art'lis c'xovreba. In his continuation of *The Life of Vaxtang*, Ps.-Juanšer reports the filling of the mouth of the commandant of the Kala fortress with *drahkans* in retribution for his slur against Herakleios during the Byzantine siege of Tp'ilisi. ²⁵⁷ *The Life of the Kings* supplies a pre-Sasanian example: under the first-century diarchs Azork and Armazel, the K'art'velians promised the Armenian king Artašan to mint *drams* bearing his image. ²⁵⁸ The Armenian Arsacid Aršak I (r. 34-ca. 35) is probably intended.

Numismatic references pointing to the Sasanian era mention both *drams* and *dra[h]kans*. ²⁵⁹ The coins are not physically described and their issuing authority is unknown. Given the chronology and Caucasia's economic relationship and geographical proximity to Iran, it is likely that all are allusions to Sasanian coinage. If so, *drahkans* must be Sasanian drachms (sing. MPers. *drahm*), which tended to be struck at just over four grams of silver. ²⁶⁰

The Life of the Kings implies that the K'art'velians had the capacity to mint coinage already in the first century AD, yet prior to the sixth and seventh centuries we lack definitive proof for the striking of coins on the territory of

²⁵⁵ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 157₂₁-158₂ = Thomson trans., 172-173: "... მამათა და დედათა მიუფენდეს საკვლთა და სამოსელთა მათთა ფერკთა ქუეშე მისთა. და აყრიდეს თავსა დრამასა და დრაკანსა ..."

²⁵⁶ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 164₅, Thomson trans., 181: "უძღურთა მისცა საკვდრები და ჭაბუკთა სამ-სამი დრაჰკანი ..."

²⁵⁷ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 225₁₀.

²⁵⁸ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 49₁₈.

²⁵⁹ *Life of Vaxtang*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 182₄, once mentions Byzantine *bezants* (sing. *bizioni*, ბიზონი). Because the Western European term is typically found in sources from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, this is probably a later insertion, perhaps by the eleventh-century editor Leonti Mroveli.

²⁶⁰ During the Bagratid "Golden Age", *drahkan* could designate Byzantine coinage, e.g., *nomismas* and *bezants*: Blake 1940, 23; and, e.g., Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *Vita Iovane and Ep'twme*, cap. 8, Abulaže ed., 52₁₂. Consider the throwing of *drams* and *drahkans* in celebration of King Bagrat III (r. 1008-1014) in the eleventh-century *Chronicle of K'art'li*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 299₁₈, Thomson trans., 292. For weights, see Frye 1973.

eastern Georgia.²⁶¹ In the first centuries of Christianity the eastern Georgian economy was monopolised by foreign coinage, with Parthian coinage circulating alongside its Roman counterpart.²⁶² T'amar Abramišvili's study of the Parthian coins in the collection of the Georgian National Museum enumerates fifty-five find sites, forty-six of which are in eastern Georgia. At the time of its publication in 1974, eighty-six Parthian coins had been discovered in burials and others were contained in hoards, one from western Georgia. Parthian coins are plentiful for the first centuries BC and AD, particularly for the reigns of Orodēs I (r. ca. 80 BC) and Gotarzēs II (r. 43/44–50/51 AD).²⁶³ While the numismatic evidence is too patchy to draw firm conclusions about the extent of circulation, this was a period of intense Partho-Caucasian interaction.

Medea Tsotselia (Cocelia) has devoted much of her career to the Sasanian coinage discovered in eastern Georgia. Specimens dating to the third century have come to light,²⁶⁴ but Tsotselia emphasises their rarity and, she plausibly reasons, narrow dissemination. They might have belonged to the sumptuous gifts – including silver bowls and other luxury goods – presented by Sasanian authorities to K'art'velian élites.²⁶⁵ Sasanian coins in eastern Georgia are more numerous beginning in the fifth century and are plentiful for the sixth. The find-spots of Sasanian coins, like their Parthian counterparts, are distributed especially in K'art'li proper, including the Armeno-Georgian marchlands and along the Kura/Mtkuari and Aragwi Rivers, collectively the transportation and communications hub of eastern Georgia. Late Roman coinage is evident from the start of the fifth century, but it is “more likely that [it was] of minor importance and Sasanian silver drachms dominated ...”²⁶⁶ However, Roman coins held sway in the western Georgian domains, including Lazika, where the Romans maintained a substantial presence.

In her 2003 catalogue Tsotselia identifies thirty hoards containing Sasanian coinage.²⁶⁷ Among them is a hoard of Sasanian drachms found at Bolnisi, the

²⁶¹ Imitations of Roman coins were *possibly* struck in K'art'li in the third century AD. In addition, imitations of Hellenistic coins *might* have been minted on K'art'velian territory; cf. Dundua 1987, 42–102; and Dundua and Dundua T'. 2006, 122–132 and 300. In the Greek colonies of littoral western Georgia, coinage was produced as early as the sixth century BC: Kapanaze 1955, 31–45; and Lang 1955, 8–10.

²⁶² Their numbers seem to have been roughly equal: Braund 1994, 43 and 208.

²⁶³ Abramišvili 1974. See now Sherozia and Doyen 2007.

²⁶⁴ One silver coin, coated in gold, has been ascribed to the reign of Ardashir: Tsotselia 2003, 34. It was discovered in an aristocratic burial at Mc'xet'a.

²⁶⁵ See Figure 3.1. Silver bowls were sometimes valued by their weight in drachms. Tsotselia 1965; and Tsotselia 2003, 22. The exchange of diplomatic gifts is a recurrent theme in *The Life of Vaxtang*, for which see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 392–393. For images of some of the Sasanian silver bowls found in Georgia, see: Amiranašvili 1963, pls. 18–21; and Javakishvili A. and Abramišvili 1986, pls. 68–69 and 74–75.

²⁶⁶ Tsotselia 2003, 23.

²⁶⁷ Tsotselia 2003, 28–29 *et seq.* See also Lomouri T'. 2005.

site of the late fifth-century basilica upon which was carved the oldest dated specimen of Georgian writing, the foundational inscription mentioning *Šāhan šāh* Pērōz. All twenty-nine Sasanian drachms of the Bolnisi hoard were minted precisely in the name of Pērōz (r. 459–484). The dated coins belong to 464–466, a span falling completely within the reign of Vaxtang Gorgasali. As is typical of hoards found in Georgia, a wide assortment of Sasanian mints is represented including Khurāsān, Pārs, Media, Kermān and Māh.²⁶⁸ Another hoard was discovered in a clay jug north of Mc'xet'a at T'olenji. The exact size of the hoard is unknown, but seventy-one drachms eventually made their way to the Georgian National Museum. The known T'olenji hoard consists of two coins of Pērōz, two of Balāš (r. 484–488), sixty of Kavād (r. 488–496, 498–531), one of Zāmāsp (r. 496–498) and six of Xusrō I (r. 531–579).²⁶⁹ The largest of the Georgian hoards comes from Cit'eli-cqaro (Tsiteli-Tskaro) in the far southeastern corner of the country. Buried around 641, it consists of 1,385 Sasanian coins and only ten Byzantine hexagrams, all issued under Herakleios.²⁷⁰ The Sasanian specimens are dispersed among the three later *šāhan šāhs*: ninety-six of Xusrō I (the earliest of which dates to 552), 743 of Hormizd IV (r. 579–590) and 429 of Xusrō II (r. 590, 591–628). These coins also exhibit a broad range of mint marks, although the preponderance was struck in western Iran.

Were any of the Sasanian coins found on Georgian territory actually produced there? No mint mark has yet been identified with K'art'li, although a Sasanian mint with its own mark operated in neighbouring Armenia. Georgian documentary sources do not clarify the situation.²⁷¹ However, we possess material evidence for the striking of a modified late Sasanian silver coinage in K'art'li.²⁷² Approximately forty specimens of the so-called K'art'velo-Sasanian issue have come to light.²⁷³ Two-thirds are based on drachm types of Hormizd IV (r. 579–590). One series, consisting of eleven examples, is patterned on a type of his successor Xusrō II.²⁷⁴ Because the obverse of all the K'art'velo-Sasanian coins bears the simplified image of either Hormizd IV or Xusrō II, none predates Hormizd's reign, which began in 579.²⁷⁵ Their production occurred after the suppression of the K'art'velian monarchy by the Sasanians – an event dated by Toumanoff to ca. 580 – and especially during the presiding principate, which began in 588.

²⁶⁸ Tsotselia 2003, 45–47. Cf. Abramišvili and Tsotselia 1977, 150–158.

²⁶⁹ Tsotselia 2003, 49–54.

²⁷⁰ Tsotselia 2002. Cf. Dzhalagania 1980, 5–6 and 135; and Dzhalagania 1982, 129 and 132.

²⁷¹ Tsotselia 1975, 233–236; Pakhomov 1970, 17–36; and Kapanaze 1955, 46–48.

²⁷² There exist many examples of modified Sasanian coinage in the later Sasanian and early Islamic periods.

²⁷³ Tsotselia 2009, 431. Only two specimens have been discovered *in situ*.

²⁷⁴ Tsotselia 2009, 434 (and fn. 16).

²⁷⁵ Pakhomov 1970, 16–36. See also: Kapanaze 1955, 46–48; Toumanoff 1963, 428–434; Dundua 1976; and Dundua and Dundua T'. 2006, 133–156. Cf. Akopian A.V. 2011, 187–188.

K'art'velo-Sasanian coins are typically adorned with *asomt'avruli* letters and/or monograms that in most cases represent the names of prominent *erist'avis* and presiding princes (*erist'avt'a-mt'avaris*) of the late sixth and early seventh century. Among the earliest such examples are coins whose margins are inscribed with the characters ႦႦ, GN. A specimen in the collection of the museum of the American Numismatic Society bears the marginal abbreviation ႦႦႦ, GRG.²⁷⁶ Both abbreviations must be read Gurgen. The depiction of the later Hormizd IV completely rules out a reading of Gorgasali or a corruption such as Gurgaslani. But Gurgen poses a conundrum: Georgian literary sources are unacquainted with a presiding prince by this name. Toumanoff solved the problem by demonstrating that Gurgen was the form of Guaram used in diplomatic and official contexts. Accordingly, Toumanoff identifies Gurgen, GN (and we may add GRG), as the first presiding prince Guaram I (r. 588–ca. 590).²⁷⁷

Another drachm of the late sixth century is inscribed with the enigmatic abbreviation ႦႦ, JO. Because *asomt'avruli* u can be written either by the diphthong ႦႦ (oy) or by the truncated Q (o), some numismatists have interpreted JO as the name Juanšer, a high-ranking member of the K'art'velian political élite (literary sources mention no early presiding prince by this name). But it is odd for a shortened word to terminate in –o unless it marks the vocative case. Back in the mid-nineteenth century, J. Bartholomaei proposed the reading ႦႦ[ႦႦႦႦႦ]Ⴆ, j[uar]o, “O, Cross”.²⁷⁸ Doubts linger because this explanation diverges from the hypothesis of the abbreviations representing the names of presiding princes or other esteemed secular officials. Moreover, the word *juaro* is otherwise unattested on Georgian coinage. But this is, I am confident, the correct reading because such vocative constructions are commonly found at the beginning of early Georgian inscriptions. A short abbreviated fifth-century inscription from Bolnisi Sioni commences † ႦႦႦႦႦႦႦ ႦႦႦႦႦႦႦ, † ႦႦႦႦႦႦ ႦႦႦႦႦႦႦ, “† O Holy Trinity ...”²⁷⁹ Relatively common is ႦႦ, CO, the abbreviation of the vocative ႦႦႦႦႦႦ, *cmidao*, “O, Holy ...” It is attested, for example, on a ninth-century inscription at Cromi.²⁸⁰ More directly, the damaged first characters of a 595/605 inscription from Juari (mod. Jvari) – the Church of “the Cross” – have been convincingly reconstructed [ႦႦ]Ⴆ, [j]Ⴆ, “O, Cross ...”²⁸¹ The *asomt'avruli* inscription on the seventh-century Kataula stone cross pillar similarly begins ႦႦ.²⁸² The inclusion on an official Sasanian coin of a Christian

²⁷⁶ Akopian A.V. 2011.

²⁷⁷ Toumanoff 1963, 432–434.

²⁷⁸ Bartholomaei 1859, 98 and 78, cited in Toumanoff 1963, 430.

²⁷⁹ Šošiašvili 1980, #5, 70–71. The same formula opens an eighth-century inscription from Tbsi: *ibid.*, #35, 104–106.

²⁸⁰ Šošiašvili 1980, #75, 168–169.

²⁸¹ Šošiašvili 1980, #68, 159–160.

²⁸² Mačabeli 2008, #40.



Figure 6.6. K'art'velo-Sasanian coin with obverse *asomt'avruli* inscription ႠႠႠ (GRG), Gurgen. American Numismatic Society 1999.54.1.



Figure 6.7. K'art'velo-Sasanian coin with obverse *asomt'avruli* inscription ႠႠ (GN), Gurgen. Georgian National Museum, no. 4058.

formula, condensed and comprehensible only to a literate local audience, is remarkable. Despite its Christian accoutrements, this was a Sasanian coinage.

In my view, the earliest variants of the K'art'velo-Sasanian issue were inscribed ႠႠ (JO), "O, Cross". Then, once the presiding principate was firmly established, the numismatic inscriptions shifted to monograms such as ႠႠ (GN) and ႠႠႠ (GRG), "Gurgen/Guaram". These monograms of the second phase identified important local princes, especially presiding princes administering eastern Georgia during the *interregnum*.

Subsequent presiding princes exhibited even greater boldness with regards to their religious affiliation. The third and final phase of the series is distinguished by a small cross replacing the sacred flame atop the otherwise standard image



Figure 6.8. K'art'velo-Sasanian coin with obverse *asomt'avruli* inscription
 𐭠𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥, STEP'ANOS. Georgian National Museum, no. 5870.

of a Zoroastrian fire altar.²⁸³ The series begins with the abbreviated name 𐭠𐭥𐭥, SP'NS, that is, Step'anoz I (r. 590–627). It is positioned in the obverse margin around Hormizd's effigy without obscuring the Middle Persian legend. As noted, the Zoroastrian altar, whose detail has been further diluted, is surmounted by a cross. The adaptations culminate later in the reign of Step'anoz or possibly under Step'anoz II (r. 642–650). Now the full name 𐭠𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥, Step'anos,²⁸⁴ monopolises the field on both sides of the *šāhan šāh*'s image so that the Middle Persian inscription featuring the name and regnal year of the king of kings has been eliminated.²⁸⁵

What were the circumstances in which this hybrid coinage was first produced?²⁸⁶ Following the Sasanians' suppression of the K'art'velian monarchy around 580, Ctesiphon made overtures to the local aristocracy and then recognised the authority of the presiding principate, an institution which had taken shape with Roman encouragement in 588. As we have seen, the initial coins of the K'art'velo-Sasanian issue, dating from the beginning of the *interregnum* (ca. 580–588), were probably inscribed JO, "O, Cross." This was an acknowledgment of a principal marker of identity among the eastern Georgians. Literate K'art'velians would have recognised what was essentially a coded message; the addition of a

²⁸³ For a review of all the variants, including a few lacking monograms but with a cross capping the fire altar, see Tsotselia 2009.

²⁸⁴ Rendered 𐭠𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥, Step'ano[s], on a late sixth-/early seventh-century inscription on the exterior of Juari: Šošiašvili 1980: 95–97. See Figure 7.2.

²⁸⁵ Lang 1957b, 139, describes a specimen now in the Coins and Medals cabinet of the British Museum that I examined in November 2010.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Tsotselia 2009, 432: "As the country broke away from Sasanian control an important monetary reform took place. In place of the Sasanian drachms which had previously circulated in the region a local coinage, of silver drachms only, was produced". And *ibid.*, 435: "The limited number struck points to a coinage which was issued for political rather than economic reasons. They were minted to demonstrate the increasing independence and Christian orientation of the Georgian governors".

cross – whose meaning was evident to non-literate and non-Christian audiences – would come later. The transformation of the inscribed *JO* into the abbreviated and then full names of presiding princes must be connected to the famous anti-Sasanian uprisings led by the Mihrānid Bahrām Čōbīn and Vistahm Ispahbudān. Vistahm's insurrection is of special importance. At the very end of the sixth century, Vistahm (d. ca. 600) gathered northern and eastern territories under his control, including *kūst-i Ādurbādagān*, an area encompassing a significant part of southern and eastern Caucasia. (As was suggested in Part I, Vistahm might be Ustam, the Sasanian commandant of Mc'xet'a mentioned in the *vita* of Evstat'i).²⁸⁷ These insurgencies posed a serious challenge to the Sasanians, and the resulting instability allowed the K'art'velian presiding principate to expand its power. This is the context for the adornment of K'art'velo-Sasanian coins with the initials and then names of early presiding princes. Eventually, under the emboldened Step'anoz I (or, less likely, Step'anoz II) the standard numismatic image of a Zoroastrian fire altar was crowned with a cross, the universal Christian symbol. As we shall see in the next chapter, these developments are connected with the construction of several new churches, including the famous Church of the Cross, Juari, above Mc'xet'a.

²⁸⁷ See p. 53.

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Chapter 7

Ps.-Juanšer's Continuation

Of the three known pre-Bagratid historians, Ps.-Juanšer is chronologically nearest to the events he describes. Writing around the year 800, he begins with the Chosroid Dač'i (r. 522–534), son and successor of Vaxtang, and addresses several moments marking Caucasia's transition from Late Antiquity to the medieval epoch, including the last war between the Sasanian and Roman Empires, the breakdown of the Sasanian enterprise, and the meteoric expansion of the Arabs and Islam. Ps.-Juanšer also treats the initial phase of the *interregnum* before closing with St Arč'il (r. 736–786), the Chosroid prince of Kaxet'i. A dedicated hagiographical account of Arč'il's martyrdom immediately follows Ps.-Juanšer in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*.¹

Although Juanšer Juanšeriani has traditionally been credited with writing *The Life of Vaxtang* and its continuation,² doubts remain about his identity and whether or not he was the original author of either component of *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasliša*. Scholarship continues to favour an eleventh-century date for this suite. Some specialists, however, have attempted to trace its core as far back as the time of Vaxtang and his immediate successors. A few have even made Juanšer a close relative of Vaxtang.³

Careful scrutiny of internal criteria places the composition of both narratives, as received, sometime between ca. 790 and 813.⁴ Thickening the mystery, the passage conveying the supposed authorship of these sources is appended to the subsequent *vita* of Arč'il.⁵ There, Juanšer Juanšeriani is identified as the husband of Arč'il's niece, which brings us closer to the genuine ca. 800 date. Authorship by a relative of the martyr Arč'il would help to explain the text's "extreme legitimism".⁶ Toumanoff regards the actual writer as a scion of the Chosroid dynasty whose Guaramid branch emerged as one of K'art'li's principal power

¹ The authorship of Arč'il's *vita* is usually associated with Leonti Mroveli. See Rapp 2003, 469–480.

² Rapp 2003, 198–204. The name is corrupted Juanber (*Ջանիբեր*) in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*'s Armenian adaptation: e.g., *Vita Arč'il in Patmut'wn Vrac'*, Abulaže ed., 208₃ = Thomson trans., 255. The error is the result of the confusion of *nusxuri š* (*յ*) and *b* (*բ*).

³ E.g.: Sanaže 2001, 157–165 and 18; and Goilaže 1991b.

⁴ Rapp 2003, 197–242. For a date in the late eighth century, see also Musxelišvili 1999.

⁵ *Vita Arč'il*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 248_{10–16}, Thomson trans., 255. Rapp 2003, 237–242. Unlike *Vita Nino*, *Vita Arč'il* has not reached us independently of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*.

⁶ Toumanoff 1963, 358.

brokers during the *interregnum*. But the trustworthiness of the authorship claim is suspect: it is integrated into an altogether different work, one belonging to a different genre, and composed by another author. Simply put, the Juanšeriani Passage is a later addition that was probably inserted by the eleventh-century editor Leonti Mroveli. It was, however, based on an earlier but garbled authorship tradition. We cannot entirely dismiss the possibility of the name Juanšer Juanšeriani having been concocted for literary effect. Georgian Juanšer faithfully transcribes Iranian Juwānšēr, “young lion”.⁷ Thus, the saga of Vaxtang Gorgasali, “the Wolf’s Head”, was related by Juanšer, “the Young Lion”.⁸ But the name Juanšer was current in late antique Caucasia,⁹ the continuation itself mentioning a Juanšer Juanšeriani, an esteemed member of the Chosroid house.¹⁰ Within the text we find absolutely no indication that this Juanšer Juanšeriani was the author.

It is highly doubtful that Juanšer Juanšeriani wrote either section of *C’xorebay vaxtang gorgasli*. As we shall see, the pronounced divergences of *The Life of Vaxtang* and its continuation strongly suggest detached authorships. In light of the convoluted problems posed by the Juanšeriani Passage, we can do no better than to identify the author of the continuation as Ps.-Juanšer.

The Royal Hero Quieted

Ps.-Juanšer’s work is unquestionably a pre-Bagratid monument, yet it departs from *The Life of Vaxtang* – and *The Life of the Kings* – in a fundamental way. Although Ps.-Juanšer organised his narrative around kings and presiding princes, he reduces the bases of their authority to two principal factors: dynastic connections and Christian affiliation. Neither is contemplated in any detail. Hero-kings endowed with legitimising *xwarrah* and their *bumberazis* are alien to this composition. This makes for another abrupt change within *K’art’lis c’xovreba* since physical prowess, courage and duelling champions are ubiquitous in the preceding *Life of Vaxtang* and *Life of the Kings*. The presentation of Vaxtang as a heroic king living in epic times stands in sharp contrast to Ps.-Juanšer’s unembellished depictions of Vaxtang’s successors. Ps.-Juanšer abstains from epical flourishes and never deploys the Iranic concepts *bumberazi*, *goliat’i* and *gmiri*. This difference alone makes it extremely unlikely that the same author is responsible for *The Life of Vaxtang* and its continuation.

⁷ Andronikašvili 1966, 418, 452, 476 and 510; and Č’xeiže 1987, 103. In the later *Amirandarejaniani*, “lion” (*lomi*, ლომი) is a common epithet for heroes and champions including *bumberazis*.

⁸ Rapp 2003, 242 (fn. 135).

⁹ Perhaps the most famous example is Juanšēr the seventh-century presiding prince of Albania: Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, II.17ff. See also Toumanoff 1990, 570.

¹⁰ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 242.

The one person to whom Ps.-Juanšer sparingly applies pre-Bagratid heroic vocabulary is the presiding prince Step'anoz I (r. 590–627). Immediately obvious is the onomastic departure: Step'anoz is the first ruler to bear an explicitly Christian name since the foundation of the eastern Georgian monarchy in the early Hellenistic period. Despite his Christian name and the crosses adorning his modified Sasanian coinage (discussed in Chapter 6), we read that "... Step'anoz was impious and did not fear God; he did not serve God, nor did he increase the religion and [the embellishment and building] of churches".¹¹

Step'anoz administered K'art'li during a pivotal moment in Near Eastern history: Phōkas' rebellion against Maurikios (Maurice, r. 582–602), Herakleios' overthrow of Phōkas (r. 602–610), and the bloody war between the Sasanian and Romano-Byzantine Empires during which Herakleios (r. 610–641) passed through Caucasia. Probably a non-Chalcedonian Christian, Step'anoz aligned himself politically with the Sasanians even though his Guaramid princely house had come to power with Roman encouragement towards the end of the sixth century. In the words of Ps.-Juanšer, Step'anoz "ruled as *mt'avari* [i.e., prince] over all K'art'li; he resided in Tp'ilisi and was subject to the Iranians".¹² When Herakleios stood before Tp'ilisi's citadel in 627, Step'anoz refused to acquiesce. During the ensuing siege the presiding prince entered into battle:

Step'anoz was a valiant [*k'ueli*] and enterprising [*šemmart'ebeli*] [mounted?] warrior [*mq'edari*]; he made daily forays outside the city gates and fought the Greeks. Then in one encounter they cut down Step'anoz and killed him.¹³

This is one of only three references Ps.-Juanšer makes to *mq'edaris*, a staple of pre-Bagratid historiographical literature and late antique K'art'velian military culture. But the term's evolution from "mounted warrior" to the generic "warrior, soldier" is already evident. Thus, in the second example, Phōkas, the Roman soldier who toppled Maurikios, is styled *mq'edari*,¹⁴ a rare pre-Bagratid instance of the term's extension to an individual outside the Iranian world. By *mq'edari* Ps.-Juanšer demonstrates his knowledge of Phōkas' military background. In the

¹¹ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 222^{14–16} = Thomson trans., 232: "... ესე სტეფანოზ იყო ურწმუნო და უშოში ღმრთისა, არა ჰმსახურა ღმერთსა, არცა ჰმატა სჯულსა და ეკლესიათა". For a confessional explanation of the apparent discrepancy of Ps.-Juanšer's testimony and the crosses on Step'anoz's coinage, see below, p. 345 (fn. 62).

¹² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 223^{14–16} = Thomson trans., 233: "და სტეფანოზ მთავრობდა ყოველსა ქართლსა ზედა, და დაჟდა იგი ტფილისს, და ჰმორჩილებდა იგი სპარსთა".

¹³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 224^{9–12} = Thomson trans., 233: "... სტეფანოზ იყო ქუელი მჴედარი და შემმართებელი; დღეთა ყოველთა გამოვიდის კართა ქალაქისათა, და ებრძოდის ბერძენთა. მაშინ უკუე მას წყობასა შინა ჩამოადგეს სტეფანოზ და მოკლეს".

¹⁴ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 223^{2–3}, two instances, both referring to Phōkas.

last instance, *mq'edaris*, cavalry forces, are mentioned in connection with the military activities of the Muslim general Murvan Qru (“the Deaf”) in western Georgia, including his destruction of the “triple walls” of C'ixe-goji.¹⁵ In another departure from its pre-Bagratid analogues, Ps.-Juanšer displays an increased awareness of the history and geography of the domains on the western side of the Surami Mountains. Along with C'ixe-goji he mentions “the city C'xumi of Ap'šilet'i”, the forerunner of the city in Ap'xazet'i/Abkhazia today called Soxumi/Sukhumi.¹⁶

Challenges to the Enduring Iranic Onomasticon

The names of political élites remain the most recognisable literary indicator of the Irano-K'art'velian bond. In Ps.-Juanšer's coverage of the end of the K'art'velian monarchy, the last five Chosroid kings bear Iranic names. Identical forms are preserved in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's* second *Royal List*.

522–534	Dač'i	Dārčīhr < MPers. <i>dar</i> (“court, palace”) + <i>čīhr[ag]</i> (“seed, origin”). ¹⁷
534–547	Bakur II	Pakur < Mir. <i>bagpuhr</i> , “son of a god”; Arm. Bakur (<i>Բակուր</i>); Gk. Pakoros/Bakour (Πάκορος/Βάκουρ); Lat. Pacorus/Bacurius.
547–561	P'arsman V	Uncertain Iranian background, but probably related to <i>xwarrah</i> through an older Iranian form <i>farnah</i> ; Arm. P'arsman (<i>Փարսման</i>); Gk. Pharasmanēs (Φαρασμάνης).
561–?	P'arsman VI	See above, P'arsman V.
?–580	Bakur III	See above, Bakur II.

But the onomasticon shows signs of a transformation during the *interregnum*. The presiding princes documented by Ps.-Juanšer and the related third *Royal List* are:¹⁸

¹⁵ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 238₈₋₉, during the presiding principate of Mir/Mihr. For C'ixe-goji's triple walls (*sam-zyude*, სამ-ზღუდე), see *ibid.*, 235₂.

¹⁶ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 235₃, Thomson trans., 242: “ქალაქი აფშილეეთისა ცხუმით”.

¹⁷ For *dar* and *čīhr[ag]*, see MacKenzie 1986, 22 and 24. I wish to thank Touraj Daryaei for his assistance with this etymology.

¹⁸ Cf. Toumanoff's reconstructed list of presiding princes: Toumanoff 1963, esp. 382–407; and Toumanoff 1990, 533.

588–ca. 590	Guaram I	Arm. Goram (<i>Գորամ</i>); probably an indigenous Iranian name, but its etymology is unknown.
ca. 590–627	Step'anoz I	Gk. Stephanos (Στέφανος); Eng. Stephen.
627–637/642	Adarnase I	Adnese in <i>Royal List III</i> , §13; Ādurnarseh; Arm. Atrnerseh (<i>Ատրնհրսեհ</i>). ¹⁹
637/642– ca. 650	Step'anoz II	See above, Step'anoz I.
650–685		<i>presiding principate reportedly vacant during the initial Arab conquest</i> ²⁰
685–736	Mir	Mihr; Arm. Mihr (<i>Միհր</i>).
736–786	Arč'il	Cf. Dač'i/Dārč'īr ("scion of the court") in the previous list; probably an indigenous Iranian name.

In actuality, Mir/Mihr and Arč'il were Chosroid princes of Kaxet'i, not presiding princes of K'art'li.²¹

Iranic names were by no means discarded during the *interregnum*. But starting with the Guaramid Prince Step'anoz I, the ruling strata increasingly favoured Judaeo-Christian names alongside traditional Iranian ones. Because religious affiliation was a badge of loyalty, some presiding princes may have been given Christian names at birth or once enthroned may have deliberately taken them. (The presiding principate had been created with Romano-Byzantine encouragement.) Thus, the son and successor of the first presiding prince Guaram was Step'anoz, who paid with his life in the failed resistance to Herakleios' troops at the Tp'ilisi fortress. The son and successor of the third presiding prince Adarnase – a son of the last Chosroid king Bakur III who had been installed by the Byzantines after Step'anoz I's defeat – also bore the name Step'anoz. This implies the name had no local stigma attached to it, and its redeployment may have been intended as a public ridicule of Byzantine interference.

From their seizure of the presiding principate, if not before, the Bagratids selectively appropriated and adapted conspicuous aspects of Byzantine culture. The accelerated use of Judaeo-Christian names by K'art'li's Bagratid rulers is but one facet of this trend. Yet many of Georgia's Near and Middle Eastern socio-cultural connections endured. Economic ties with the Islamic world prospered at the height of the medieval Bagratid kingdom, a situation leading to the use of Arabic legends on some Bagratid coinage.²² Considerably later, Iranian names gained new momentum owing to Georgia's close bonds to the Safavid Empire

¹⁹ Adarnase and Step'anoz were Chosroids, not Guaramids.

²⁰ Cf. the Chosroid Adarnase II (r. ca. 650–684): Toumanoff 1963, 397–398.

²¹ Toumanoff 1963, 397.

²² Lang 1955, 18–33.

and remained popular to the end of the Bagratid millennium.²³ It should be noted that the favoured dynastic name Bagrat, sometimes rendered Bagarat in Armenian, is an old name replicating Middle Iranian Bay-dād which ultimately derives from Old Iranian Bagadāta-, “god-given”.²⁴ And we have already observed the continued Bagratid usage of the standard Middle Persian suffix *-duxt*, “daughter”, especially through the popular name Guaranduxt.

Builders and Defenders of the Faith

Reminiscent of *The Life of Vaxtang* and *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Ps.-Juanšer makes the defence of Christianity and the adornment and building of churches central pursuits of legitimate K’art’velian rulers. Vaxtang’s son and successor Dač’i reportedly built the church of Cqaros-t’avi in Javaxet’i. P’arsman VI “was pious [*morcmune*] like his father’s brother [i.e., his predecessor P’arsman V] and he increased the adornment of all the churches”.²⁵ Bakur III, P’arsman’s successor and the last king ahead of the *interregnum*, “was pious and was a builder of churches. He multiplied churches and priests in his kingdom, and K’art’li was purified of all impiety”.²⁶

The monarchy’s demise did not alter this fundamental aspect of Christian rulership. In 588 Guaram founded the Guaramid dynasty of presiding princes, a cadet branch of the Chosroids-Mihrānids.²⁷ When the Sasanians also threw their support behind the presiding principate, the Romans promoted Guaram to the esteemed rank of *kouropalatēs* (κουροπαλάτης).²⁸ Following the assistance Maurikios lent to Xusrō II during Bahrām Čōbīn’s insurrection (for which see further), the Roman emperor interceded on behalf of the Christian K’art’velians. Maurikios is made to say:

“Since the K’art’velians have abandoned idolatry, henceforth they are subject to the Greeks. For at the time of your tyranny K’art’li was oppressed, let alone that you have no rights over K’art’li. Now, by the command of God, since you and I are in perfect friendship, let K’art’li be autonomous [*t’avisup’ali*] in peace

²³ For Georgian–Safavid relations, see the publications of Hirotake Maeda.

²⁴ Garsoïan in *Epic Histories*, “Bagrat Bagratuni”, 362.

²⁵ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 207₆₋₇ = Thomson trans., 226: “და იყო იგი მორწმუნე ვითარცა მამის ძმა მისი, და ჰმატა ყოველთა ეკლესიათა შეშენებას”.

²⁶ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 215₂₂₋₂₄ = Thomson trans., 227: “... იყო მორწმუნე და მშენებელი ეკლესიათა. ამან განამრავლნა ეკლესიანი და მღვდელნი სამეფოსა შინა თჳსსა. და განწმიდა ქართლი ყოვლისა ურწმუნოებისაგან”.

²⁷ The biological connection with the toppled royal family provided the Guaramids with ready-made legitimacy. Because of the connection, the princely Guaramids could have claimed *xwarrah*, but received texts give no indication of such an assertion.

²⁸ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 218₇.

between us. I am the supporter [*mce*] and steward [*mouravi*] of all K'art'velians and of all Christians". Then the king of the Iranians agreed with *caesar*, and the K'art'velians were autonomous. This Guaram *kouropalatēs* remained in subjection to the Greeks. He was a pious [*morcmune*] man, a builder of churches. He began the church of the honourable Cross [i.e., Juari]. Up to then Juari was on ground level, and he built the church up to waist height.²⁹

This insightful passage shows the proliferation of the Romano-Byzantine claim of ultimate authority over all Christians no matter where they might live. Both parts of *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasliša* thus demonstrate a K'art'velian awareness of this central pillar of Romano-Byzantine ideology by ca. 800 and probably already by the sixth century.³⁰

Under the Roman protectorate, Guaram began the construction of one of eastern Georgia's most famous and picturesque churches, Juari (mod. Jvari), "the Cross". Perched above Mc'xet'a at the confluence of the Kura/Mtkuari and Aragwi Rivers,³¹ Juari is easily seen from the former royal seat and from its prominent churches of Sueti-c'xoveli and Samt'avro. Not by accident, Juari eclipses in height and visibility the old royal and polytheistic site of Armazis-c'ixe on the opposite side of the river. Ps.-Juanšer credits Juari's completion to the presiding prince Adarnase.³² Step'anoz II, the last presiding prince before the Arab conquest of Iran, added fortifications to Juari. He "was the most pious of all the kings and *mt'avaris* [princes] of K'art'li, a purifier of the religion and a builder of churches".³³ In this case, "purifier" and "pious" may be christological beacons.

²⁹ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 221⁵⁻¹⁵ = Thomson trans., 230-231: "ვინათგან დაუტეობით ქართველთა კერპთ-მსახურება, მუნიოგან მორჩილნი ბერძენთაი არიან; რამეთუ ჟამსა შინა მძღავერებისგან თქუენისა იქმნის განრყუნელ ქართლი, თუ არა სამართალი თქუენი არა არს ქართლსა ზედა. აწ ბრძანებითა ღმრთისათა, ვინათგან სრულსა სიყუარულსა ზედა ვართ მე და შენ, და ქართლი ჩუენ შორის იყავნ თავისუფალ მშვედობით: მე ვარ მწე და მოურავი ყოველთა ქართველთა და ყოველთა ქრისტიანეთა. მაშინ ერნდა სპარსთა მეფე კეისარსა, და განთავისუფლდეს ქართველნი. და ესე გუარამ კურაპალატი დადგა მორჩილებასა ზედა ბერძენთასა. იყო კაცი მორწმუნე და მაშენებელი ეკლესიათა. ამან იწყო ეკლესია ჯუარისა პატიოსნისა; და აქამომდე ჯუარი ველსა ზედა იყო, და ქმნა ეკლესია წელთამდის ოდენ".

³⁰ For the historiographical importance of the sixth century, see the Epilogue.

³¹ On Juari, see Čubinašvili 1948. For additional images, see Amiranašvili 1963, pls. 28-35.

³² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 227¹¹⁻¹². During the intervening reign of the "impious" Step'anoz I, Ps.-Juanšer reports Step'anoz's sickly brother, Demetre, taking charge of the project (*ibid.*, 223). Tp'ilisi Sioni (T'bilisi Zion), another church started by Guaram, was also finished by Adarnase: Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 222 and 227.

³³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 228¹⁰⁻¹¹ = Thomson trans., 236: "... იყო უმეტეს ყოველთა ქართლის მეფეთა და მთავართა მორწმუნე და განმწმედელი სჯულისა, მაშენებელი ეკლესიათა".



Figure 7.1. Juari (mod. Jvari).

The ca. 800 author seems to have been a nominal Chalcedonian and by his time subscription to Chalcedon – or lack thereof – was emerging as a primary element of Christian K’art’velian and then Georgian identity.

The building of a prominent church in the K’art’velian spiritual capital so soon after the Sasanians’ suppression of the local monarchy is noteworthy. Considering the unsettled political situation, including Roman overtures intended to curtail Iranian power, it is not surprising that the iconography of Juari’s exterior mixes Sasanian and Romano-Byzantine styles. Some of its plaques are adorned with *asomt’avruli* inscriptions flaunting the names of local political élites alongside newly bestowed Roman dignities, e.g.: *სტეპანოს პატრიკიოს* = Step’anos *patrikios* (πατρίκιος); *დემეტრე ჰუპატოსი* = Demetre *hypatos* (wpatosi; Gk. ὑπάτος, “consul”); and *ადრნერსე ჰუპატოსი* = Adrnerse *hypatos*.³⁴ The exact identities of these men continue to be debated. Wachtang Djobadze supports the standard interpretation equating Step’anos *patrikios* with Step’anoz I. However, Toumanoff identifies him as Step’anoz II.³⁵

Roman influence in this part of Caucasia was routinely checked by Ctesiphon despite Constantinople’s conferral of impressive titles. Under Step’anoz I, if not under his father and predecessor Guaram I, a mint began operations in eastern

³⁴ Šošiašvili 1980, #31, 95–97.

³⁵ Djobadze 1960–1961; and Toumanoff 1963, 395–397.



Figure 7.2. Step'anos *patrikios*, inscription and exterior plaque, Juari.

Georgia. As we have seen, it produced modified Sasanian drachms and not Roman coins, which says as much about the political situation as it does about the orientation of Caucasia's economic life. The earliest K'art'velo-Sasanian coinage was inscribed with the abbreviated JO, "O, Cross". This was followed by the abbreviated name of the presiding prince and, then, his full name and even a cross surmounting the modified portrait of a Zoroastrian fire altar. K'art'velo-Sasanian coinage and the building of Juari and other new churches may belong to a package of concessions granted to the K'art'velian aristocracy by the *šāhan šāh* and, it should be stressed, by Parthians rebelling against Sasanian authority. Such allowances would have served a three-fold purpose: to acquire and solidify K'art'velian loyalty; to gain the upper hand against rivals within Iran; and finally to counterbalance and undermine Roman intrusions. At the same time, these

developments are a local flexing of K'art'velian political power *vis-à-vis* the rival Sasanian and Roman Empires.

The imperially-fueled tension between Christianity and Zoroastrianism, so rampant in *The Life of Vaxtang*, is largely absent in Ps.-Juanšer. The major exception is an account of the martyrdom of the Armenian princess Šušanik. As we saw in Part I, this episode is specially treated in a Georgian *vita* composed shortly after her demise in the late fifth century. Ps.-Juanšer chronologically muddles the story thanks to a confusion of Hormizd III and Hormizd IV.³⁶ Accordingly, the author situates the apostasy of Varsk'en and his murder of Šušanik within the reign of Bakur III (?–580). Using the form Vask'en, which is reminiscent of the Armenian Vazken, he generically identifies Šušanik's husband as “the son of *mt'avaris*” and not of *bidaxšes*.³⁷ There can be no question that Ps.-Juanšer exploited the tradition enshrined in the fifth-century *vita*. But he also introduced certain elaborations. Thus, in Ps.-Juanšer's rendition the *šāhan šāh* exonerated the K'art'velian king after Va[r]sk'en's execution since the Sasanians feared that the explosive situation would thrust eastern Georgia into a Roman alliance.³⁸

Dissolution of the K'art'velian Monarchy

In *The Life of Vaxtang* K'art'velian kingship is caught in the incessant crush of competing imperial interests and yet is made to be powerful and durable under the majestic Vaxtang Gorgasali. There is no reason to doubt the historical Vaxtang's aptitude and courage, but the particular accomplishments catalogued in his Iranic bio-epic display considerable aggrandisement and are rarely borne out by other sources. Among other things, Vaxtang's historian reconfigured imperial competition in such a way that it proved and enhanced the hero-king's majesty. Ps.-Juanšer advances a more pragmatic vision of kingship. He emphasises how eastern Georgia's enervated political culture had been ripped apart by the turbulent struggle of Iran and Rome, an imperial contest that would be perpetuated by early Islamic Caliphs and Byzantine emperors. This is the context within which the last remnants of Chosroid kingship were swept away by the Sasanians around the year 580.³⁹

³⁶ See pp. 43–44.

³⁷ Vask'en is also employed in some variant manuscripts of Šušanik's *vita*: Iakob C'urtaveli, *Vita Šušanik*, cap. 1, Abulaže ed., 11, *apparatus criticus*, #13.

³⁸ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 216.

³⁹ McDonough 2011, 300: “By the sixth century few regions of the Sasanian Empire remained under the authority of regional ‘kings’. The hodgepodge collection of local kingdoms of the Arsacids was largely supplanted, first with Sasanian royal princes, but finally by a system of royally appointed governors, *marzpanan* (‘border lords’) and *sharaban* (‘satraps’), alongside financial auditors, *hamarkaran* ...”

Ps.-Juanšer is cognisant of the end of the K'art'velian monarchy, though he reports it in a subdued and circuitous way. Part of the crown's weakness, and a serious complication in Sasanian eyes, was the splitting of imperial loyalties by Vaxtang's progeny. From the reign of P'arsman V "... the descendants of King Vaxtang were divided. For the sons of Dač'i were subject to the Iranians, while the sons of Mirdat remained subject to the Greeks".⁴⁰ In other words, Vaxtang's line through Dač'i, his successor and eldest son by his first wife Balenduxt, "daughter" of Hormizd III, favoured the Sasanians. Conversely, the Romans were favoured by the branch led by Prince Mirdat, whose mother was the Roman princess Helena, Vaxtang's second wife. The two imperial and cultural worlds reconciled by Vaxtang were now pulling eastern Georgia apart at the seams. If the Sasanians hoped to curtail Roman influence by abolishing K'art'velian royal authority, they were to meet disappointment. Within a decade the emperor extended his sanction and high Roman honorifics to the presiding princes. Herakleios' passage through eastern Georgia, his defeat of the Sasanians, and the Arab conquest of the Sasanian Empire pushed the K'art'velians and their neighbours deeper – but not exclusively – into the Byzantine Commonwealth.

Ps.-Juanšer hints at the erosion of the K'art'velian crown. In the first reign he addresses, three *erist'avis* "led off" Helena and two of her sons to western K'art'li, where they seized local power. The historian implies their self-installation: "They were not called king [*mep'e*], but *erist'avt'a-mt'avari*; and they were subject to their brother King Dač'i".⁴¹ These pro-Roman *erist'avis* did not set themselves up as direct rivals to the monarchy. Yet they asserted autonomy and assumed the distinguished title *erist'avt'a-mt'avari* (ერისთავთა-მთავარი), literally "prince of the *erist'avis*". Although their power was in a state of accelerated decay, the Chosroid dynasty clung to royal status for another sixty years or so.

Ps.-Juanšer's recital of the K'art'velian monarchy's last gasp is restrained:

Then Bakur [III] died; he left young children who could not govern the kingdom. Then the king of the Iranians Hormizd [IV; Geo. Urmizd] gave Rani and Movakani [i.e., Albania] to his son, who was called Xusrō [II] Abarwīz [K'asre Ambarvez]. He came and resided at Partaw [Bardavi], and began to confer with the *erist'avis* of K'art'li. He promised great benefits, and set in writing their ancestral rights as *erist'avis* from son to son. In this way, by flattery he seduced them; so the *erist'avis* rebelled, and each separately paid tribute to Xusrō Abarwīz. Bakur's sons remained in the mountainous territory of Kaxet'i. The descendants of Mirdat, the son of Vaxtang who governed

⁴⁰ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 207₁₋₃ = Thomson trans., 225: "მიერთგან განიყვნეს ნათესავნი ვახტანგ მეფისანი. რამეთუ შვილნი დაჩისნი ჰმორჩილობდეს სპარსთა, ხოლო შვილნი მირდატისნი დაადგურეს მორჩილებასა ბერძენთასა".

⁴¹ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 205₂₋₃, Thomson trans., 224: "და არა ეწოდა მათ მეფედ, არამედ ერისთავთა-მთავრად, და იყვნეს მორჩილებასა ძმისა მათისა დანი მეფისასა".

Klarjet'i and Javaxet'i, remained in the rocky area of Klarjet'i. All the rest of K'art'li, Somxit'i and Vaspurakan [Asp'uragan] was held by the Iranians; and they waged war on the Greeks [i.e., Romans].⁴²

A few years later the Sasanians were forced to counter an invasion by the "Turk's". The Romans took advantage and struck Mesopotamia. When Xusrō departed Albania to lend assistance to his father, the same treacherous K'art'velian *erist'avis* dispatched an envoy to the Roman emperor and petitioned for the installation of a new king from the former dynasty. The emperor dared not provoke the Sasanians by restoring kingship, and at any rate he wanted to maintain eastern Georgia as a weakened client. So he recognised Guaram – Vaxtang's relative – as presiding prince and bestowed upon him the coveted dignity of *kouropalatēs*, thus marking him as a friend of Constantinople. Guaram's son and successor Step'anoz I was mindful of the explosive situation and "did not dare [to adopt] the royal title for fear of the Iranians and Greeks, but they called him *erist'avt'a-mt'avari*".⁴³ Ps.-Juanšer says the same about Step'anoz's princely successor Adarnase.⁴⁴

K'art'velian kingship had fallen into abeyance. On the basis of Ps.-Juanšer's trustworthy evidence, Toumanoff dated the monarchy's final moment to the death of King Bakur III around the year 580.⁴⁵ Less than a decade later, in 588, the presiding principate was inaugurated through Roman initiative.⁴⁶ Enthroned

⁴² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 217⁴⁻¹⁴ = Thomson trans., 228–229: "და მოკუდა ბაკურ, და დარჩეს შვილნი მისნი წურილნი, რომელნი ვერ იპერობდეს მეფობასა. მაშინ მეფემან სპარსთამან ურმიზდ მისცა ძესა თუსსა რანი და მოვაკანი, რომელსა ერქუა ქასრე ამბარევი. მოვიდა და დაჯდა ბარდავს, და უწყო ზრახვად ერისთავთა ქართლისათა: აღუთქუა კეთილი დიდი, და დაუწერა საერისთოთა მათთა მამულობა შვილითი-შვილამდე, და ესრეთ წარიბირნა ღიქნიოთა. და განდგეს ერისთავნი და თუს-თუსად ხარკსა მისცემდეს ქასრე ამბარევსა. და შვილნი ბაკურისნი დარჩეს მთიულეთს კახეთისასა; და ნათესავნი მირდატისნი, ვახტანგის ძისანი, რომელნი მთავრობდეს კლარჯეთს და ჯავახეთს, იგინი დარჩეს კლდეთა შინა კლარჯეთისათა. სხუა ყოველი ქართლი, სომხითი და ასფურაგანი დაიპყრეს სპარსთა და ჰბრძოდეს ბერძენთა".

⁴³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 222¹²⁻¹³ = Thomson trans., 232: "მეფობისა სახელი ვერ იკადრა სპარსთა და ბერძენთა შიშისაგან, არამედ ერისთავთა-მთავრად ხადოდეს".

⁴⁴ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 226⁶⁻⁷.

⁴⁵ Toumanoff 1963, "Establishment of the Principate of Iberia", 382–389.

⁴⁶ Toumanoff described the presiding principate as "... an office combining the functions of the High Constable [Geo. *spaspeti*] (of which office, consequently, we hear nothing, with one exception, until the Bagratid restoration of the monarchy) with those of the viceroy of the country's imperial suzerain, and so an equivalent, on a dynasticist-feudal soil, of the Exarchates created by the same Maurice. Precisely the same development is observable in Armenia as well as in Albania and Lazica". See Toumanoff 1963, 387.

Partho-Caucasians in Armenia Major, Albania and eastern Georgia thus met the same fate at the hands of the Sasanians. But whereas the Armenian Arsacids were removed from power already in 428 and the Albanian Arsacids had lost power in 510, the K'art'velian Chosroids, descendants of the Mihrānids,⁴⁷ maintained their royal station until the late sixth century.

Bahrām Čōbīn's Rebellion and the Last Great War of Antiquity

According to Ps.-Juanšer, Guaram *kouropalatēs*, a nominal vassal of the Roman Empire, launched an offensive against Sasanian Ādurbādagān with reinforcements from northern Caucasia.⁴⁸ The historian then documents a major episode in Iranian history, one characterised by Pourshariati as “the first significant breakdown of the Sasanian-Parthian confederacy”:⁴⁹

Then there appeared in Iran a man who was called Bahrām Čōbīn [Baram Č'ubin]. He attacked the T'urk's who had invaded Iran, as is clearly described in *The Life of the Iranians*.⁵⁰ He killed Saba, the king of the T'urk's,⁵¹ and routed their army. The Greek troops who had entered Iran turned back and set out for home, while the Northerners [i.e., northern Caucasians] dispatched by Guaram *kouropalatēs* also returned. For since the Iranians had been freed of the T'urk's, they were fearful – as the K'art'velians also were afraid and nervous – of the Iranians. Guaram *kouropalatēs* began to strengthen fortresses and cities. Once more God had mercy on the Christians and cast another dispute on to Iran. For this same Bahrām Čōbīn rebelled against the king of the Iranians, and they burnt the eyes of the brothers of the wife of King Hormizd [Urmizd]. Čōbīn and Xusrō [K'asre] began to wage war. Xusrō was put to flight by Čōbīn and went to Greece [i.e., the Roman Empire]. The *caesar* Maurikios [*kaisari* Mavrik] gave his own daughter as wife to Xusrō, provided him with his army, and dispatched them against Čōbīn. Čōbīn was expelled from Iran, and Xusrō took control of Iran.⁵²

⁴⁷ A pedigree which, in part, helps to explain its relative longevity.

⁴⁸ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 219–220.

⁴⁹ Pourshariati 2008, 397, and for the revolt, 397–414.

⁵⁰ See above, pp. 191–198.

⁵¹ Thomson 1996a, 230 (fn. 6): “[T]he Georgian historian here combines traditional tales known from the Iranian epic with information of greater historical accuracy”. Sava's death is reported in Ferdowsī, *Šāhnāma*, Levy trans., 344.

⁵² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 220₄–221₄ = Thomson trans., 230: “მაშინ გამოჩნდა სპარსეთს კაცი ერთი, რომელსა ერქუა ბარამ ჩუბინი. ესე ეწყო თურქთა, სპარსეთს შემოსრულთა, ვითარცა წერილ არს განცხადებულად ცხოვრებასა სპარსთასა, მოკლა საბა, თურქთა მეფე, და აოტა ბანაკი მათი. ხოლო სპანი იგი ბერძენთანი, რომელნი შესრულ იყვნეს სპარსეთს, შეიქცეს და წარვიდეს შინა. და ჩრდილონი იგი, გუარამ კურაპალატისა შეგზავნილნი, წარმოვიდეს

The rebel, a Parthian Mihrānid, occupied the Iranian throne from 590 to 591. At this time Step'anoz I was assuming his father's place as presiding prince. An additional detail about the Caucasian dimensions of the revolt is supplied by the historian Sumbat Davit'is-ze. In *The Life and Tale of the Bagratids*, Davit'is-ze identifies a certain Vezan as Bahrām Čōbīn's "erist'avi" (general, governor) of Kambeč'ani in the southern corner of K'art'li and Kaxet'i.⁵³ We should bear in mind that Davit'is-ze was writing in the eleventh century. His source for this information has not been determined.⁵⁴

When Phōkas staged a successful rebellion against Maurikios in autumn 602, Xusrō II invaded Roman Anatolia. In Ps.-Juanšer's view, Xusrō was seeking vengeance on behalf of his father-in-law; earlier Maurikios had given one of his daughters in marriage to the *šāhan šāh*.⁵⁵ The presiding prince Step'anoz sided with the Sasanians. Meanwhile, Xusrō "captured Jerusalem and took away the True Cross. After this God revoked the hand of grace [*q'eli cqalobisa*] from Xusrō. His own son [Kavād II] seized him and put him in prison; and he died of a dreadful disease".⁵⁶ In fact, Xusrō's death occurred in 628 during the first year of the principate of Adarnase I.

It is fitting that Phōkas' eight-year reign was cut short by an insurrection which is tied to the last war between the Sasanian and Roman Empires. This monumental conflict is documented in three separate Georgian texts: Ps.-Juanšer; *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay's Royal List II*; and Davit'is-ze's *Life and Tale of the Bagratids*, which is found exclusively in the Mariamseuli-Mc'xet'ian-Mač'abliseuli (MQm)

ივინიკა შინა; რამეთუ ვინათგან მოიცალეს სპარსთა თურქთაგან, შეშინდეს, და ღაეცა შიში და ძრწოლა ქართველთა სპარსთაგან. და ამან გუარამ კურაპალატმან იყო ციხეთა და ქალაქთა მაგრებად. და კუალადცა წყალობა ეო ღმერთმან ქრისტიანეთა ზედა, და სხუა შუდელი დავარდა სპარსეთს: რამეთუ იგივე ბარამ ჩუბინი გაადგა სპარსთა მეფესა, და დასწუნეს თუაღნი ურმიზდ მეფესა ცოლის ძმათა მისთა, და იწყეს ბრძოლად ჩუბინმან და ქასრე. იოტა ქასრე ჩუბინისაგან, და წარვიდა საბერძნეთს. და კეისარმან მავრიკ მოსცა ასული თვის ცოლად ქასრეს, და მოსცა სპა მისი და წარმოგზავნა ჩუბინსა ზედა. იოტა ჩუბინი სპარსეთით, და ქასრემან დაიპყრა სპარსეთი".

⁵³ Sumbat Davit'is-ze, cap. 7, Araxamia ed., 41, Qauxč'išvili ed., 374¹⁴⁻¹⁵.

⁵⁴ Curiously, a Mamia Čōbin is mentioned in a colophon of a manuscript of the Georgian Gospels produced in 1054 near Antioch: Djobadze 1976, 15.

⁵⁵ This tradition is also known elsewhere, e.g., Theophilos of Edessa, Hoyland trans., 52.

⁵⁶ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 223⁸⁻¹⁰ = Thomson trans., 232-233: "... წარმოტყუენა იერუსალემი და წარიყვნა ძელი ცხოვრებისა; და შემდგომად ამისსა აღიღო ღმერთმან კელი წყალობისა ქასრესგან: შეიპყრა იგი ძემან თვსმან, შესუა იგი საპყრობილესა, და მოკუდა სენითა ბოროტითა". "The hand of grace" is a creative and roundabout way of indicating *xwarrah*. The *šāhan šāh*'s sacral legitimacy was thus rescinded. The assassination of Xusrō II is reported in other Caucasian sources, especially Ps.-Sebeōs, cap. 39, and dependent accounts: T'omva Arcruni, II.3; and Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.13. See also the seventh-century *Khūzistān Chronicle*, Nöldeke trans., 29.

recension of K'art'lis c'xovreba.⁵⁷ There can be no question that Ps.-Juanšer's account – or a lost common source – served as the basis for the others.⁵⁸ Having secured as mercenaries “T'urk's from the west”, i.e., Khazars or perhaps Kōk Turks,⁵⁹ the new emperor Herakleios embarked on a campaign against Iran in 627.⁶⁰ En route he passed through K'art'li and other Caucasian territories including Lazika, Albania and Armenia Major.⁶¹ Step'anoz I had already aligned himself with the Sasanians. The presiding prince's ambivalence to and perhaps outright rejection of Chalcedon only widened the rift with Constantinople.⁶² But it was K'art'li's alliance with Iran that Herakleios could not accept.

Step'anoz's forces bore the brunt of the Byzantine onslaught from Kala, Tp'ilisi's fortress. After the presiding prince was killed in battle, the Byzantines closed upon the resistance. At a desperate moment Kala's commandant, the c'ixist'avi, insulted Herakleios by comparing his beard to a goat's. The emperor turned the situation on its head by reciting a famous prophecy in the book of Daniel: the East would be destroyed by a goat from the West.⁶³ Herakleios pressed on to Iran, leaving his mercenaries to storm Kala. They took the c'ixist'avi into custody and tortured him to death. In retribution for Step'anoz's impudence,

⁵⁷ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 223–228; *Royal List II*, §§22–27, Abulaže ed., 95–96; and Sumbat Davit'is-ze, caps. 11–12, Araxamia ed., 42–43 = Rapp trans., 353–354 (and Qauxč'išvili ed., 374–375). For the MQm recension, see Rapp 1997, vol. 1, 22–32. Although comparatively meagre, the importance of these sources has been unfairly neglected (and oftentimes ignored and completely eclipsed by their Armenian counterparts) in Byzantine and Sasanian studies. This having been said, of all the Caucasian accounts, the history attributed to Sebēos is the most substantial. Important information is also supplied by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, the relevant passages of which have been newly translated by Tim Greenwood in Greatrex and Lieu 2002, 201–203 (II.10), 207–208 (II.12), 201–212 (II.11) and 217–219 (II.12–13).

⁵⁸ Cf. Shapira 2007a, 332–346.

⁵⁹ Golden 1980, 37–42 and 51–59; and Kaegi 2003, 142–143.

⁶⁰ For Khazar and other Turkic mercenaries in Herakleios' service, see Theophanēs, AM 6117–6118. See also Zuckerman 2007.

⁶¹ Herakleios' army included Caucasian troops: Theophanēs, AM 6115, de Boor ed., 309.

⁶² Toumanoff 1961, 288–289 (fn. 171): “The pro-Iranian Prince of Iberia, Stephen I, whom [Herakleios] destroyed in 627, appears to have been a pro-Monophysite as well, and Adarnase I, whom he installed in the other's place, a Catholic”. See also Toumanoff 1954, 175–176. In Armenian sources, including the history of Elišē, “impious” (*anōrēn*, *անֹրեն*) is routinely used in connection with Zoroastrian Iranians. In Georgian texts, however, the common *urc'muno* (ურც'მუნო), “without belief”, denotes heretics, heathens and infidels. On the term, see Toumanoff 1963, 461. Although *usjulo* (უსჯულო), “without religion”, is also used in this way, it is often applied to adherents of rival faiths, e.g., the false-bishop Mobidan. For its earlier application to polytheists, see *Vita Children of Kolay*, cap. 3, Abulaže ed., 185₃₁.

⁶³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 224; and Daniel (Geo.) 8.1–14, Doč'anašvili ed., 23–24. For another account of the siege of Tp'ilisi, see Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, II.11. See also Theophanēs, AM 6117, de Boor ed., 316, who renders Tp'ilisi – Tiphileōs (Τιφίλεωζ).



Figure 7.3. T'bilisi's restored Narikala fortress, presumably on or near the site of Kala.

the Byzantines seized lands to the southwest in Speri and Klarjet'i. Meanwhile, Herakleios prevailed in Iran and retrieved the True Cross.⁶⁴ In the expedition's seventh year, the Byzantine emperor returned to Anatolia via eastern Georgia and at Manglisi and Erušet'i confiscated the footrest and nails of the Crucifixion which, according to tradition,⁶⁵ had been gifted to Mirian by Constantine the Great back in the fourth century.⁶⁶

A crucial dimension of this episode not breached by Ps.-Juanšer is religion.⁶⁷ The second *Royal List* emphasises Herakleios' effort to purge Zoroastrians from

⁶⁴ Theophanēs, AM 6120, de Boor ed., 328.

⁶⁵ According to Romano-Byzantine sources, these were discovered in Jerusalem by Constantine's mother Helena: Sōkratēs, cap. 17; and much later Theophanēs, AM 5817, de Boor ed., 26.

⁶⁶ *Conversion of K'art'li*, §14, Abulaže ed., 86–87 (Čeliši [¶] variant); and *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 117–118.

⁶⁷ Surviving Georgian historiographical and ecclesiastical sources pass over in silence some of the most pivotal religious developments of the era, including the K'art'velian Church's acceptance of the Council of Chalcedon and the schism declared by the Armenians at the Third Council of Duin. The literature devoted to these subjects is

eastern Georgia. The emperor presented “worshippers of the flame” – and, reportedly, Christian heretics – with a stark choice: convert to (Chalcedonian) Christianity or face execution. *Royal List II* reports violent resistance: “rivers of blood” flowed through the churches. In the end, the faith of Christ was “purified” (*gancmida*, გაწმინდა, lit. “made holy, sanctified”, < *cmiday*, “holy, saint”), which says as much about other religions as it does about contending Christian confessions.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, the next presiding prince Adarnase, who was invested by Herakleios, displayed a keen interest in Chalcedonian Christianity. He instituted a regular assembly of the *katholikos*, bishops and priests on Fridays at the newly finished church of Juari in Mc’xet’a.⁶⁹ All Fridays were celebrated as though they were Good Friday. Other celebrations were convoked on Thursdays at Tp’ilisi Sioni, by then the headquarters of the *katholikos*. And in Mc’xet’a on Tuesdays were held memorial services for the martyrs who had been slain by the Iranians. Conspicuous among these were the ascetic Abibos Nekreseli, one of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers. As we have seen, Abibos had proselytised east of the Aragwi River in Kaxet’i and had actively combatted Zoroastrianism.⁷⁰ The Iranian martyr Ražden would also have been commemorated.

It is worth noting that Zaza Alek’size has described Juari as a symbol of Chalcedonian Christianity and as “a direct participant in the ecclesiastical schism in the Caucasus”.⁷¹ The construction of this important church certainly took place as religious tensions between K’art’velian and Armenian prelates were spinning out of control. It is less clear, however, whether Juari was deliberately built as a monument to Chalcedon.

Twilight of the Sasanian Empire

From his later vantage, Ps.-Juanšer knew that the Sasanians’ days were numbered. He blames the expiration of the Sasanian Empire on the chaos associated with Herakleios’ victory and especially on the Arab invasions:

voluminous, but see: Garsoïan 1999b; Alek’size in his *Geo. trans. of Girk’ T’lt’oc*; Mahé 1996; Javaxišvili 1998b; Sarkissian 1965; Zekiyan 1982; and Akinean 1910.

⁶⁸ Under Herakleios were two important – but failed – attempts at christological compromise: Monoenergism and Monotheletism. The Alexandrian patriarch Kyros, the *ex-katholikos* Kwrion of eastern Georgia, was a force behind the former. For Kyros-Kwrion, see also p. 106.

⁶⁹ As is the case with other historiographical texts treating the Christian era, Ps.-Juanšer records the succession of chief prelates, who from the late fifth century were styled *katholikoi*. Contemporaneous K’art’velian *katholikoi* are also enumerated in *Mok’c’evay k’art’lisay’s Royal List III*. For a comparison of the lists, see Rapp 2003, 330–331.

⁷⁰ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč’išvili ed., 228–229. Cf. *Royal List III*, §2, Abulaže ed., 97. Abibos’ activities are acknowledged in *Vita Nino* (K’C’), Qauxč’išvili ed., 126.

⁷¹ Alek’size 2011a.

In those times appeared Muḥammad [Mohmad], a descendant of Ismā'īl [Ismael], teacher of the religion of the Saracens [Sarkinozni]. He conquered all Arabia and Yemen. He died, and Abū Bakr [Abobik'ar] succeeded in his place. The latter invaded Iran, because since the time that King Herakleios had attacked Iran that land had been in disorder, and there was no one to oppose him in Iran. So this Hagarene [Agariani] Abū Bakr conquered Iran, entered Ctesiphon ["Baghdad"], and by force compelled innumerable people to abandon fire-worship [c'ec'xlis-msaxureba⁷²], converting them to the Saracen [religion]. He died and was succeeded by 'Umar [Omar], who became even more powerful.⁷²

Ps.-Juanšer thus describes the formation of Islam under the Prophet Muḥammad and the establishment of the Caliphate under Abū Bakr (r. 632–634) and 'Umar (r. 634–644). According to prevailing chronology, however, Ps.-Juanšer has misplaced the conquest of Sasanian Iran: Ctesiphon fell under 'Umar in 637, not long after the Arab victory at Qādisiyya. The Sasanians' defeat at Nihāvand in 642 opened the central Zagros region to the Arabs. In 649–650 the religious centre of Persepolis was sacked by Arab forces. Finally, in 651 under Caliph 'Uthmān (r. 644–656) the last *šāhan šāh* Yazdgird III was murdered in Khurāsān.

After the Arabs conquered Syria (Geo. Šami and Jaziret'i), Ps.-Juanšer says that Herakleios marched to Palestine to confront the new adversary. There the emperor encountered a prophetic Christian monk who urged the Byzantines to come to grips with the loss of the South and to do the only sensible thing: evacuate. On his way back to Constantinople, Herakleios allegedly made a third circuit through K'art'li, where the emperor addressed Iranian refugees: "You know then that your kingdom has been destroyed; abandon the North and come with us".⁷³ Some exiled Iranians accepted Herakleios' offer, buried their valuables in the hopes of an eventual return (a major theme in Ps.-Juanšer), and departed. The North was now transformed into one of the principal arenas in which the rivalry between the Byzantine and Islamic Commonwealths was waged.

At the end of Late Antiquity, Caucasia tumbled into political disorder. Although Ps.-Juanšer does not draw attention to it, the K'art'velian presiding principate

⁷² Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 229^{10–167}, Thomson trans., 237: "მათ უამთა გამოჩენილ იყო მოჰამად, ნათესავი ისმაელისი, მოძღუარი სარკინოზთა სჯულისა, და ყოველი არაბია და იამანეთი დაიპყრა. და მოკუდა იგი, და დადგა მის წილ აბობიქარ, და შევიდა სპარსეთს. რამეთუ ვინათგან შესრულ იყო ერაკლე მეფე სპარსეთს, და განერყუნა სპარსეთი; და არღარავინ იყო წინააღმდეგომი სპარსეთს. ამან აბობიქარ აგარიანმან დაიპყრა სპარსეთი, შევიდა ბადდადს და მძლავრობით დაატეობინა უმრავლესთა ცეცხლის-მსახურება, და მოაქცივნა სარკინოზად. და მოკუდა იგი, და დადგა მის წილ ომარ, და უმეტეს განძლიერდა იგი".

⁷³ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 231^{3–4} = Thomson trans., 239: "უკეთუ უწყით, ვითარმედ დასრულდა მეფობა თქუენი; დაუტევეთ ჩრდილო და შემოვედით ჩუენ თანა".

possibly lay vacant during the initial Arab conquest for some thirty-five years between 650 and 685. The historian stresses that Step'anoz II apportioned his wealth between sons Mir/Mihr and Arč'il, both of whom found safe harbour beyond the reach of the Arabs in the western region of Egrisi. In some respects, the Arab invasions were extremely disruptive and even catastrophic. In the words of Ps.-Juanšer: "now at that time the lands of K'art'li, Somxit'i and Rani had been devastated, and there were neither dwellings nor food at all for men or beasts".⁷⁴ The royal siblings Mir/Mihr and Arč'il along with Leon, *erist'avi* of the northwestern district of Ap'xazet'i, dispatched an envoy to Constantinople to alert the Byzantine court to Christian Caucasia's miserable condition. The unnamed emperor responded with two crowns and a letter acknowledging "You had kingship [*mep'obay*], courage [*simq'ne*] and wisdom [*sibržne*] in K'art'li".⁷⁵ The emperor urged patience: after 300 years, he foretold, Byzantium would rise and annihilate the Arabs.⁷⁶ This would seem to be an insertion made by the eleventh-century editor Leonti Mroveli and reflecting the ambitions of Basil II (r. 976–1025).

In another letter to the *erist'avi* Leon, the unnamed emperor cites three occasions when K'art'li had given crucial support to Constantinople: first, through its conversion to Christianity, which the emperor falsely asserts to have transpired "by our hand";⁷⁷ second, through the protection afforded by Vaxtang to the "the great city of Pontos" – probably Trebizond (Trapezous) – against his renegade troops and then the peace he negotiated between the Romans and Iranians; and now through the buffer eastern Georgia provided against Arab aggression. The emperor wrote: "Now if God had not blocked the wicked enemy through them, it would have reached Constantinople ..." ⁷⁸ And then the emperor proclaims:

... God has made [the kings of the K'art'velians] outstanding among the sons of Nimrod, because in their land there was no lack of wise men, understanding and warrior-like [*mbrzoli*], as this written charter [*gujari*]⁷⁹ informs us, on

⁷⁴ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 239_{10–11} = Thomson trans., 245: "ხოლო იქმნა მას ჟამსა განრყუნელ ქუეყანა ქართლისა, სომხითისა და რანისა და არღარა იპოვებოდა ნაშენები, არცა საჭამადი კაცთა და პირუტყუთა ყოვლადვე".

⁷⁵ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 239_{15–16} = Thomson trans., 245, emphasis added: "თქუენი იყო მეფობა, სიმკნე და სიბრძნე ქართლსა შინა".

⁷⁶ Cf. Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 230, for the 250-year hegemony of the Arabs predicted in the books of Hermēs Trismegistos. His name is badly corrupted in the manuscripts, e.g., Rmistor Ijintoni in the Anaseuli redaction. See Rapp 2003, 215–217.

⁷⁷ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 240₁ = Thomson trans., 246, "under our auspices": "... ჰელსა ქუეშე ჩუენსა ..."

⁷⁸ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 240_{4–5} = Thomson trans., 246: "აწ თუმცა ღმერთსა არა მაგათ მიერ დაებრკოლა ბოროტი ვგე მტერი, შემომცასრულ იყო ვიდრე კოსტანტინეპოლედმდე ..."

⁷⁹ *Gujari* (გუჯარი) < NPers. *guzār*, for which see: Andronikašvili 1966, 305–306; and Šanize in *Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos*, 1. The term is not used in early Georgian

which are recorded the kings and nobles for their families [sing. *tomi*] and lands [sing. *sop'eli*].⁸⁰

The *basileus* himself, the epitome of the Byzantine Empire and the antithesis of the Iranian world, thus acknowledges the non-Eusebian legitimacy of the Christian K'art'velian monarchs, Iranic hero-kings who claimed descent from the first king of renown upon the Earth, the Iranian Nimrod.



The obliteration of the Sasanian Empire, the metamorphosis of the Roman into the Byzantine Empire, and the spectacular expansion of Islam signal the transition from one era to another. Although the autumn of Late Antiquity was well underway,⁸¹ its structures, conventions and symbols proved highly durable. In eastern Georgia and Caucasia, the dense web of cross-cultural encounters nurtured by the Iranian Commonwealth endured and provided a robust foundation for subsequent stages of Irano-Georgian interplay. Even at the apogée of the medieval Bagratid monarchy, when adapted Byzantine forms often took precedence, Georgian connections with Iranians and their culture were fostered through Caucaso-Islamic nodes like Šarwān/Širvān and Ganja⁸² as well as the Mongol Ilkhānate, of which Caucasia was a central component.⁸³ As part

hagiographical sources, the three components of *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. However, Ps.-Juanšer utilises it six times, this passage inclusive (Qauxč'išvili ed., 231^{5, 6, 7}, 236¹⁷, and 239¹⁴).

⁸⁰ Ps.-Juanšer, Qauxč'išvili ed., 240⁵⁻⁹ = Thomson trans., 246: "... და შვიდთა შორის ნებროთისთა წარხინებულ ყენა ღმერთმან ეგენი, რამეთუ არა მოაკლდეს ნათესავსა მაგათსა ბრძენი გულისხმისმოყუელი და მბრძოლი, ვითარცა ესე მოგვთხრობს ჩუენ აღწერილი გუჯარი, რომელსა შინა აღწერილ არიან მეფენი, წარხინებულნი ტომებით და სოფლებით მათით".

⁸¹ Though it certainly did not come to an immediate end with the expansion of Islam.

⁸² Minorsky 1953a and 1958. *Nozhat al-Majāles*, an anthology of Iranian poetry assembled by Jamāl al-Din Khalil Širvānī in the fourteenth century, associates at least 115 poets with eastern Caucasia and especially Azerbaijan; twenty-four are from Ganja. Among them is Asadī Tūsī, author of the eleventh-century *Karšāsp-nāma*. Dedicated to the ruler of Nakhjavān (Az. Naxçıvan), this epic supplements Ferdowsī and features the warrior-hero Karšāsp, a contemporary of Zafḥāk.

⁸³ A period treated by the lengthy fourteenth-century *Chronicle of a Hundred Years* (Asclovani *matiane*). K'art'lis c'xovreba's final invocation of *bumberazis* occurs in the preceding text, *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 40⁸, a thirteenth-century source which, as we have seen, deliberately (and very sparingly) employs select pre-Bagratid royal imagery. *Gmiri* occurs once in this narrative, in an archaising reference to Nimrod and Samson (*ibid.*, 3¹⁵). This is *gmiri*'s last appearance in K'art'lis c'xovreba. *Goliat'i* is employed twice in the same text (*ibid.*, 3¹⁶ [i.e., the Iranian giants "Spandiar, Tahamt'a and Siaoš"] and 5¹⁴ [describing the fourth-century Armenian king Trdat]) before it similarly fades from historiographical view. Significantly, this heroic terminology is

of their efforts towards selective Byzantinisation, the Bagratids and their allies eviscerated the Iranic basis of kingship that had dominated the political culture of eastern Georgia for a millennium. Despite this drastic change, many of the social, cultural and linguistic structures associated with the Persians, Parthians and Iranians would live on for centuries to come.

not applied to Bagratid Georgian rulers. The Irano-Caucasian nexus continued under the Islamic Safavids, for which see: Lang 1952 and 1957b; Maeda 2003, 2006 and 2009; and Bacqué-Grammont and Adle 1991.

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Epilogue

Hambavi mep'et'a and Sasanian Caucasia

Georgian literary sources for the Sasanian phase of the Iranian Commonwealth straddle the Sasanian and post-Sasanian epochs and pose a variety of analytical challenges. The oldest surviving specimens of original Georgian literature, the hagiographical celebrations of Šušānik, Gwrobandak-Evstat'i and the children of Kolay, are products of the Sasanian age. Although the autographs and ancient copies of these *vitae* have long since vanished, their cores have reached us in fundamentally the same condition as originally composed.¹ The central Sasanian authority receives meagre attention in these textual monuments to Christianity, but locally based imperial officials and their allies are prominent characters in the narratives devoted to Šušānik and Evstat'i. The disposition towards Sasanian agents in Caucasia is ambivalent at best, generally negative and sometimes hostile. Beyond the hagiographers' immediate interests, but still discernible in their works, are aspects of Caucasia's enduring interface with Iran, including the region's Iranic social landscape, the favouring of Iranic names and the extensive vocabulary Georgian (and Armenian and presumably Albanian) share with Middle Iranian languages, especially Parthian and Middle Persian.

The most significant Georgian materials for the Sasanian world are the historiographies preserved exclusively in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. The corpus's three oldest texts – *The Life of the Kings*, *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* and, to a lesser degree, Ps.-Juanšer's continuation – are heavily encoded with Iranic political and socio-cultural imagery. While their extant versions took shape after the Arab conquest, between ca. 790 and 813, they proceed in large measure from older sources emanating from the Sasanian and pre-Sasanian periods. The entire temporal span of the Sasanian Empire is collectively addressed by the three pre-Bagratid histories and the somewhat later *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, which was perhaps compiled in the eleventh century on the basis of a heavily filtered pre-Bagratid source.

The procession of K'art'velian kings and their Iranic names undergirding *K'art'lis c'xovreba*'s oldest components also frame the short historiographical texts of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*. Its *Primary History of K'art'li* and three *Royal Lists* elaborate a concise if not awkward backdrop for the fourth-century conversion of the K'art'velian royal family, the main subject of this corpus. Besides the royal onomasticon (which is sometimes more accurately preserved in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*), these unadorned accounts are mostly stripped of the Iranian orientation

¹ At least in terms of Šušānik and Gwrobandak-Evstat'i. There may have been some theologically inspired adjustments after Duin III.

and Iranic imagery characterising the pre-Bagratid section of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. The pronounced ambivalence of *The Primary History* and *Royal Lists* towards Iran, Iranians and things Iranian is to be expected considering their later ecclesiastical function.

Georgian narrative sources have struck some observers, particularly those outside the Georgian Republic, as impoverished fantasies. With regards to the history of Iran they are, it is true, characterised by a dearth of “hard” data for the nucleus of the empire, the conventional focus of Sasanian studies. Specific Georgian literary evidence is slight for the Sasanian administration based at Ctesiphon, especially when compared to Armenian sources.² References to *šāhan šāhs*,³ Sasanian interventions in Caucasia and imperial efforts to propagate Zoroastrianism at the expense of Christianity are amorphous at best. But all is not lost. These blurry allusions are usually predicated upon real individuals, events, institutions, attitudes and circumstances that over the centuries were encrusted with a legendary veneer.⁴ Imprecision, evolving traditions and the blending of history and epic need not imply fantasy. In fact, they are characteristic of the historiographical modes favoured among many peoples of the expansive Iranian Commonwealth, including the Iranians themselves.

Caucasia's encounters with the Sasanian regime are most amply documented for the imperial administrators stationed in the isthmus. The process by which high-ranking Sasanian officials were initially deployed to Caucasia and even the titles they possessed remain indefinite. But from an early time, perhaps mimicking the model of the Parthian Arsacids, imperial *bidaxšes* were established in and near the three kingdoms of southern Caucasia, polities the Sasanians considered to be their clients. From the mid-fifth century the *šāhan šāh's* chief representative in Albania held the prestigious rank of *marzbān*. All indications are that Pērōz purposely (re?)built Partaw as the capital of the new Albanian *marzbānate*. In or around 517/518, during the reign of Vaxtang Gorgasali, Kavād installed another *marzbān* at the new K'art'velian capital Tp'ilisi (mod. T'bilisi). *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa's* tradition of Tp'ilisi's foundation by Vaxtang (r. 447–522) may well conceal an earlier Sasanian presence there. Sasanian activity in eastern Georgia and Albania reflects Ctesiphon's interest in the few major passes through the Caucasus Mountains, a wall of granite stretching from the Black to the Caspian Sea. Foremost among the Sasanians' aims were the management of internal K'art'velian and Albanian affairs, the acquisition of human and natural resources, the control of long-distance commerce, and the regulation of nomadic access to southern Caucasia and Iran. What many traditions call the North was therefore a crucial facet of Sasanian strategy.

Despite the scarcity of information about the core Sasanian domains, early Georgian historiographies are a deep and largely untapped reservoir of Iranian and Iranic imagery. Specifically, these sources are imprinted with the cross-cultural

² For the Armenian evidence, see Garsoïan 2009a. See also Traina 2007.

³ *Šāhan šāhs* are generically designated “Xusrō” starting with Ardaxšīr.

⁴ See especially the publications of Javaxišvili and Toumanoff.

modalities of the late Sasanian era. *The Life of the Kings*'s extension of this imagery to legendary individuals, institutions and events is not merely a literary device. While some observers have rejected such testimony as perforce ahistorical, its origin, evolution and function confirm the region's ongoing membership in the Iranian Commonwealth.⁵ Taken as a whole, surviving sources from late antique Caucasia leave no doubt of a durable, dynamic and syncretic Irano-Caucasian nexus that continued to flourish for more than half a millennium after the triumph of Christianity.⁶

Caucasia's Iranian alignment and its profound Iranic social fabric coalesce in *The Life of the Kings*'s depiction of "pagan" kingship and culminate in *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*, the bio-epic of the great Christian hero-king. Starting with the first *mep'e* P'arnavaz (r. 299–234 BC), pre-Bagrattid historiography depicts eastern Georgia as an adaptive, creative and autonomous microcosm of the Iranian nucleus. K'art'li's polytheistic – and largely Mazdean – monarchs are localised *šāhan šāhs* brandishing biological ties, both imagined and real, to a wide range of Iranian political élites, including royalty. From Mc'xet'a they reigned over a congregation of dynastic aristocratic houses and were bolstered by mighty *bumberazi* champions. This kind of Iranic imagery extends into the Christian period with Vaxtang Gorgasali, an invincible champion and, it is asserted, a direct descendant of Nimrod. But Vaxtang's cross-cultural Nimrod is not the enigmatic hunter of the Hebrew Bible or the foolish, babbling giant of later Judaeo-Christian tradition. Rather, pre-Bagrattid historiography transformed Nimrod into an Iranian hero-king who was both the founder of Iran's dynastic monarchy and the first king of renown upon the entire Earth. Beneath this hybrid portrayal lurks Vaxtang's authentic Chosroid pedigree. The Xosroianis ("the descendants of Xusrō") were a dynasty actually established by Mirian (r. 284–361), the first Christian monarch of K'art'li. As his name implies, Mirian was a scion of the Parthian Mihrānid family, perhaps of the very principal of that house; he was born a Zoroastrian in Iran and migrated to Caucasia where he took control of the eastern Georgian throne. In order to fortify their royal status, the early Chosroids intermarried with remnants of K'art'velian P'arnavazianis and Caucasian Arsacids.

The ruin of the Arsacids in Parthia – and a few decades later in K'art'li⁷ – by no means spelled the end of Parthian influence in Iran and elsewhere in the commonwealth. In Caucasia acculturated families with conspicuous biological ties to the powerful Parthian aristocracy, and not just to the Arsacids, monopolised royal authority for several centuries after Ardashīr's enthronement. Chosroids held the reins of kingship in eastern Georgia until the late sixth century. So as to solidify their ideological position in an Iranic environment, the "K'art'velised"

⁵ Cf. Braund 1994, which, in large measure, attempts to translate the Graeco-Roman image of the Georgian lands and peoples into a dependable historical narrative.

⁶ Hence not only an Irano-Armenian nexus as is sometimes implied or claimed.

⁷ Mirian replaced Asp'agur, the last Caucasian Arsacid to sit on the K'art'velian throne. The Sasanians extinguished the Armenian Arsacid monarchy in 428.

and Iranic contexts under the Sasanian regime.¹¹ *Šaravandi* is frequently used in connection with *brcqinvale* (ბრწყინვალე), “brilliant, resplendent, magnificent.”

With few exceptions, scholars have handled pre-Bagratid texts and especially *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* in one of two ways: first, as overwhelmingly literal and factual accounts of the history of ancient and late antique eastern Georgia, a view prevailing among specialists active in Georgian ethno-national circles; and second, as late, exaggerated and legendary tales faintly echoing a past that is mostly lost and unrecoverable, a hypothesis found among some Western academics (who often are not proficient in Caucasian languages). In my view, both explanations overlook the historical circumstances of the production, evolution and transmission of Georgian historiographical literature. The worth of these sources is not limited to their literal narratives. As holistic objects they have their own histories that reveal cross-cultural vistas onto the interconnected Caucasian, Iranian and Romano-Byzantine experiences.

As the preparation of this volume was winding down, I could not put to rest a lingering impression about the existence of a lost Georgian tradition that served as the foundation of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. The surviving witnesses of these pre-Bagratid historiographies are, I am certain, substantially based upon remnants of a K'art'velian analogue to the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag*.¹² Both epic-histories are lost and are known only through later narratives making use of them. Ours is not simply a story of parallel imagery evolving in similar settings. Through the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition, Sasanian-era Iranian and Georgian historiography are directly linked.

An eleventh-hour re-reading of *The Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, Parvaneh Pourshariati's paradigm-rattling investigation of the Sasanian-Parthian “confederacy”, proved decisive. With infectious energy, Pourshariati attempts to dismantle images of the Sasanians which, she says, have often been frozen in place since the 1944 publication of Arthur Christensen's pioneering *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*. In the process, she adds her voice to the rehabilitation of (what remains of) the complex sources known as *Xwadāy-nāmag*. Standing upon the shoulders of giants, including Theodore Nöldeke and his groundbreaking “Das iranische Nationalepos” first published in 1896, Pourshariati upholds how the later Sasanians engaged in the writing and rewriting of an official myth-history as a way to enhance their power in times of crisis. This idealised multi-recensional tradition presented the dynasty as uniquely legitimate and exceptionally munificent and as sitting at the helm of the world's most powerful empire. The earliest iterations of *Xwadāy-nāmag* were created perhaps under Bahrām V Gōr (r. 420–438), Vaxtang Gorgasali's contemporary and, in a general sense, literary prototype.¹³ By the time of Xusrō I

¹¹ Rapp 1997, vol. 2, 658–662; and Rapp 2001, esp. 115–116.

¹² On the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, see especially: Nöldeke 1896; Yarshater 1983; and Shahbazi 1990.

¹³ The colourful descriptions of battles and *bumberazi* contests in pre-Bagratid historiographical literature (especially in *The Life of Vaxtang*) are broadly reminiscent of the Iranian epic and particularly of the legendary deeds of Bahrām Gōr: Allen 1932,

(r. 531–579) written versions of *Xwadāy-nāmag* were definitely in existence.¹⁴ In the words of Pourshariati:

The belated effort of the Sasanians at representing their realm and their history proved successful. It remains one of our most basic founts for reconstructing the Sasanian history of Iran with any degree of certainty. It portrays the Sasanians from a legitimist, monarchical perspective. It sanctifies, naturally, the Sasanians' view of themselves as a centralized and benevolent hegemonic polity. And, in view of what seems to have been the wholesale destruction of this corpus in its original Pahlavi renditions, and through the process of translation, this history was adopted *in toto* by classical Islamic history ...¹⁵

Contrary to popular understanding, the Sasanians sponsored narrative history. Constructed as a fusion of historiography and mythology, the epic vision of the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition had a sharp political intent: the promotion of the Sasanian dynasty as uniquely legitimate for all time.

Many of *Xwadāy-nāmag*'s characteristics are shared with its lost Georgian analogue and the pre-Bagratid historiographies reliant upon it. But we do not know whether K'art'velian royalists deliberately obliterated historiographical works that would have celebrated powerful aristocratic houses, precisely the kind of texts dominating early Armenian historiography. It is unclear whether such narratives ever existed in Georgian. Notwithstanding, at least some early Georgian texts were written from a perspective other than the crown's. Iakob C'urtaveli's *Passion of Šušanik* categorically ignores the monarchy based at Mc'xet'a, which at the time was led by the hero-king Vaxtang. Instead the priestly C'urtaveli's political and ecclesiastical interests are concentrated narrowly upon the autonomous dynastic *bidaxšate* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands. The scholarly supposition of late antique K'art'velian kings having asserted *significantly* more authority over the aristocracy than occurred in neighbouring Armenia Major is perhaps more a product of the prejudice of surviving sources than a reflection of the situation on the ground.

None of the ostensible allusions to written sources and influences in pre-Bagratid historiography pertain to the lost K'art'velian tradition paralleling and in some ways imitating *Xwadāy-nāmag*.¹⁶ The tradition's title is lost, but what we decide to call it throws additional light on its origin and purpose. From at least the late eighth

77. In the twelfth-century *Life of King of Kings Davit'* (cap. 70, Šaniže ed., 202¹⁰, Šaniže ed. [Metreveli general ed.], 332¹², Thomson trans., 340), "Baramjur" – an obvious corruption of Bahrām Gōr – is said to have excelled in hunting and archery.

¹⁴ Pourshariati 2008, esp. 34–35.

¹⁵ Pourshariati 2008, 35.

¹⁶ But *The Life of the Kings* cites the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition as *C'xorebay sparst'a*, *The Life of the Iranians*. For his part, Ferdowsi "never claims that his book is based on a Pahlavi text at all": Omidšalar 1996, 238.

century, *c'xorebay* (ცხოვრებად), “Life [off]” – and not *istoria* (ისტორია < Gk. *historia*, ἱστορία), “History [off]”¹⁷ – was the customary formula for the titles of Georgian historiographical works. This convention was borrowed from hagiographies, the earliest genre of original Georgian literature.¹⁸ In its initial literary sense, *c'xorebay* was equivalent to Greek *bios* (βίος) and Latin *vita*, “Life [off]”, the recorded good deeds and pious life of a holy person. Assuming it once had a dedicated title, the K'art'velian counterpart of *Xwadāy-nāmag* was quite possibly called *c'xorebay*, too. If so, *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*, the collective title adorning the three initial components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, may have been appropriated wholesale from the lost narrative. In order to distinguish between the received and lost traditions, a different title for the K'art'velian analogue of *Xwadāy-nāmag* is necessary. Because an Iranian phrase is fitting in light of its provenance, structure and function,¹⁹ I propose *Hambavi mep'et'a* (ჰამბავი მეფეთა), *The Tale of the Kings*.²⁰

¹⁷ Even under the Bagratids, who deliberately reoriented élite Georgian society towards Byzantine models, the application of the word *istoria* is uncommon. Only one Bagratid-era text uses *istoria* in its title, a narrative devoted to T'amar called *Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned* (*Istoriani da azmani šaravandedt'ani*, ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი). All of the instances of *istoria* in the medieval components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* appear in this text: Qauxč'išvili ed., 2₁₃, 2₁₈ (used in conjunction with *vasiloyrap'ia* [ვახილოვრაფია], i.e., “an account of the *basileis* [emperors]”), 7₁₄, 69₁₇, 81₁₂, and 83₁₅. Note also the use of *šaravandedi* in the title, here translated as “crowned” in the sense of consecrated.

¹⁸ Although *c'xorebay*, “life”, appears already in *Vita Šušanik* (cap. 7, Abulaže ed., 18₂₄), it does not refer to a title. Received titles of the earliest hagiographies do not employ *c'xorebay*: the narratives devoted to Šušanik, the children of Kolay and Habo are called “passions” (sing. Geo. *camebay*, წამებად; cf. sing. Lat. *passio*) and that dedicated to Evstat'i is called “martyrdom” (*martwlobay*, მარტვლობად < Gk. *martyrion*, μαρτύριον). But *c'xorebay*'s usage in the sense of *vita* became customary in early medieval times.

¹⁹ Another candidate is *matiane* (მატიანე), “chronicle, annals” and more generally “book, history, charter”: Abulaže 1973b, 220; and Cherkesi 1950, 112. *Matiane* and Arm. *matean* (Մատեն), “book, register, manuscript” (Bedrossian 1875–1879, 434), are derived from Mlr. *mādayān*, “book”: MacKenzie 1971, 105; and Andronikašvili 1966, 342–343. The term is featured in the title of one Georgian historiographical work, the anonymous eleventh-century *Matiane k'art'lisay* – “The Chronicle of K'art'li” (Thomson's “The Book of K'art'li”). This association with a Bagratid-era composition is undesirable for our purposes. Moreover, the term does not appear in any surviving pre-Bagratid historiographical texts and is rare in those of the Bagratid era, e.g., the twelfth-century *Life of King of Kings Davit'*, cap. 94, Šaniže ed., 217₁₂, Qauxč'išvili ed., 359₈, but this is a reference to “the old *Matiane k'art'lisay*” (ძველი მატიაანე ქართლისად). Abulaže's lexicon catalogues several instances in the book of Ezra: Abulaže 1973b, 220. *Matiane*, spelled *matiani*, also appears once in the eighth-century *Passion of Habo*: Iovane Sabanis-že, *Vita Habo*, Abulaže ed., 78₂.

²⁰ Assertions of lost sources for *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* are hardly new. Xoštaria-Brose 1999 postulated a lost seventh- or eighth-century source. The publications of Axvlediani (1974, 1977, 1979 and esp. 1990 and 2002) examine the “folkloric” bases of received Georgian historiography and suggest a number of lost

In his 1941 investigation of *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*, Pavle Ingoroqva discusses *hambavi* (ჰამბავი; var. *ambavi*, ამბავი),²¹ a word with two principal meanings: first, a “report” or “news”; and second, a “story”, “tale”²² or “account”. Armenian *hambaw* (Համբաւ) imparts the former sense as well as “repute” and “renown”. This terminology, along with Middle Iranian **hambaw*, derives from Old Iranian *ham.bav-*, “create, originate”.²³ *Hambavi* sporadically appears in early Georgian texts; the vast majority of references are clustered in *The Life of the Kings*.²⁴ In one instance, *hambavi* and *c'xorebay* appear in the same sentence: “But from here we shall begin and relate the story [*hambavi*] of K'art'li and of its people, and their life [*c'xovreba*, i.e., history] up to our own days ...”²⁵ Beyond the pages of *The Life of the Kings*, *hambavi* is intermittently deployed: twice in *The Life of Nino* (in its K'art'lis *c'xovreba* recension) in the sense of “report”; once in *Royal List III*, for the arrival of a “report” or “news” about the Arabs' seizure of Ctesiphon; and once in the dependent eleventh-century history of Sumbat Davit'is-ze, also regarding a “report” about the fall of the Sasanian capital to the Arabs.²⁶ Additionally, *hambavi* occurs in a few passages of the Georgian Bible, including Matthew 9.26²⁷ and Luke 4.14,²⁸ and in isolated hagiographical venues, for example in Giorgi Merč'ule's *vita* of Grigol Xanzt'eli²⁹ and in the *vita* of Iovane Zedazneli.³⁰ When it signals a narrative, such as a historiographical source, its application is primarily restricted to *The Life of the Kings*. Judging from extant

sources, including the Iranian epic tradition (Axvlediani 1990, 22–29). See also Rapp 2003, 108 (fn. 29), 142 (fn. 151), 164 (fn. 242) and 214 (fn. 42).

²¹ Ingoroqva 1941a. The patriotic Ingoroqva locates the composition of the initial text of K'art'lis *c'xovreba* in the eighth century. See also: Axvlediani 1990, 15–16; and Axvlediani 1974, 87, for *hambavi* reflecting folkloric – especially oral – traditions.

²² Also rendered by Geo. *ucqebay* (უწყებად), more commonly “to inform, notify, know”. *Ucqebay* is used in the title of Sumbat Davit'is-dze's eleventh-century text.

²³ Andronikašvili 1966, 221–222.

²⁴ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 7₂₃ (“story” of the Caucasian forefathers), 14₁₀ (“report”), 16₁₃ (“report”), 17₄ (“account” about Alexander the Great), 35_{16, 18} (“report”), 62₃ (“report”) and 69₉ (“account” about Trdat).

²⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'išvili ed., 8_{3–4} = Thomson trans., 9: “ხოლო აქათგან ვიწყობ და წარმოვქუთ ამბავი ქართლისა და ნათესავისა მათისა, და ცხოვრება მათი ვიდრე დღეთა ჩუენთამდე ...” The new edition by K'avt'aria, C'agareišvili and Sarjvelaže substitutes K'art'los for K'art'li (p. 28₂₄).

²⁶ Sumbat Davit'is-ze, cap. 14, Rapp trans., 354. Here Davit'is-ze clearly relies on an earlier Georgian source (almost certainly one of those mentioned here), hence his peculiar and isolated usage of *hambavi*. The term is not used in other “Golden Age” historiographies, though it occurs in certain Georgian epics of the period including Šot'a Rust'aveli's *Vep'xistqaosani*, for which see Andronikašvili 1966, 222.

²⁷ Matthew (Geo.), Doč'anašvili ed., 130.

²⁸ Luke (Geo.), Doč'anašvili ed., 212.

²⁹ Giorgi Merč'ule, *Vita Grigol Xanzt'eli*, cap. 62, Abulaže ed., 303₂₂.

³⁰ *Vita Iovane Zedazneli*, Abulaže ed., 199₂₇ (variant Ц only) and 213_{23–24} (Ц and ღ variants).

texts, *hambavi* was favoured more by pre-Bagratid writers than by their Bagratid-era counterparts. Given the close connection and similarities of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*, *hambavi*'s absence in both components of *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslisa* is surprising.

The *Hambavi mep'et'a* tradition illustrates that the structure and purpose of *Xwadāy-nāmag* were creatively adapted and extended by royalist K'art'velians in an effort to boost the local dynastic kingship. The model of *Xwadāy-nāmag* therefore reached beyond Iranian circles towards the end of Late Antiquity and was embraced by non-Zoroastrian communities. When Christian K'art'velian élites arranged their historical traditions systematically and comprehensively for the first time, their archetype was *Xwadāy-nāmag* and not a Romano-Byzantine, Armenian, biblical or other ecclesiastical model.³¹ This endeavour benefitted handsomely from new tools introduced during the Christianisation of Caucasia, particularly the Georgian script. The Iranian inspiration and flavour of *Hambavi mep'et'a* are bold, yet its production within a Christian climate must not be forgotten.³² In contradistinction to *Xwadāy-nāmag*, *Hambavi mep'et'a* was composed by and for Christians, but ones who had belonged to the Iranian world for a long time and who remained, consciously or not, contributing members of that dynamic enterprise. Significantly, the K'art'velian literary approach diverges from the aristocratic Armenian historiographies painstakingly studied by Nina Garsōian, Robert Thomson and others. Important traces of the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition are evident in some of these Armenian sources, but the Iranian epic did not serve as their main model.³³

³¹ This finding is at odds with the standard interpretation formulated by the great Kartvelological pioneer Ivane Javaxišvili, e.g., Javaxišvili 1977, 42. See also Xint'ibize 1996, 53: "As noted by Javakhishvili, up to the fourteenth century Byzantine historiography served as a model for Georgian chroniclers. The works of Georgian historians contain evidence from Classical Greek literature. It may therefore be assumed that Greek and Byzantine literature was well known in Georgia". Cf. the models of Armenian historiography: "In view of the long-standing involvement of Armenia in the Greco-Roman world it is natural that Greek literature provided the most influential models in the development of a native historiography, and that Constantinople was regarded (in Łazar's [i.e., P'arpec'i's] words) as the fountain of science whose streams spread out in all directions. Nonetheless, ... the Armenians never identified themselves wholly with Greek culture. Nor did they find solidarity in their Christian culture with their neighbors the Syrians or the Georgians. Armenian literature reflects this sense of separateness ..." (Thomson 1980, 148).

³² However, *Xwadāy-nāmag* was also based on received pre-Christian K'art'velian traditions.

³³ The basic scheme of *Xwadāy-nāmag* certainly influenced the *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac'i, which likewise ends with the destruction of the local monarchy. But Xorenac'i conspicuously drew upon Near Eastern and especially Hellenistic historiographical conventions, too, for which see: Terian 2001–2002; and the introduction

Although the basic structure of *Hambavi mep'et'a* often mirrors its Iranian counterpart, there are significant discrepancies. Both traditions commence with the origin of Perso-Iranian kingship long before the Achaemenids. But whereas *Xwadāy-nāmag* – according to Ferdowsī's *Šāhnāma* – positions Kayōmart (var. Gayōmard, lit. “mortal man”) as the world's first king, *Hambavi mep'et'a* and the dependent *Life of the Kings* harmonise the story with the Hebrew Bible (and associated apocrypha) and afford this honour to Nimrod. The names may be different but the essential function and effect are identical. The *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition then maps Iranian history from Kayōmart to the last Sasanian *šāhan šāh* Yazdgird III (r. 632–651), thus elaborating a continuous and linear vision that privileges the Sasanians, obscures the Parthian Arsacids, and concludes with the Sasanians' demise.³⁴ Identifiable remnants of *Hambavi mep'et'a* in *The Life of the Kings* exhibit a familiarity with several *dramatis personae* of *Xwadāy-nāmag*, including Farīdūn, Key Kāvus, Siyāwaxš and Key Xusrō. But they do not impart a sustained narrative of early Iranian history. Instead, the Achaemenid and pre-Achaemenid eras are broadly configured as the backdrop for the ethnogenesis of the major peoples of Caucasia and especially for the establishment and history of K'art'velian kingship. Starting with P'arnavaz in the early third century BC, *Hambavi mep'et'a*'s primary concern is the dynastic monarchy anchored at Mc'xet'a. Meanwhile, the chief cross-cultural and imperial contexts remain the Iranian Commonwealth.

Patterned upon *Hambavi mep'et'a*, the received *Life of the Kings* addresses the K'art'velian monarchs from P'arnavaz to Mirian, but only up to his Christianisation. The text's conclusion *within* Mirian's tenure, just prior to his acceptance of the Christian god, is uncharacteristically abrupt. The lost *Hambavi mep'et'a* must have covered Mirian's entire reign including its Christian chapter. It almost certainly pushed ahead with Mirian's Christian successors, through Vaxtang Gorgasali, and ended either with the deterioration of the Chosroid monarchy or its abrogation by the Sasanians around the year 580. By all indications, the crises of the sixth century were the stimulus for the codification of *Hambavi mep'et'a*. The fact that *The Life of the Kings* closes exactly where the ninth-/tenth-century *vita* of Nino picks up is either a remarkable coincidence, which I cannot accept, or a sign of intentional editing and manipulation. The forerunner of the received *Life of the Kings* and *Life of Vaxtang* thus crystallised at the end of the sixth and no later than the start of the seventh century. Originally an oral tradition, the composite, multi-authored *Hambavi mep'et'a* was consigned to writing no later than the mid-eighth century and probably much earlier.

The end of the *interregnum* and the rise of the Bagratids belong to an epoch of intense social, cultural and political transformation from one end of the Caucasian isthmus to the other. The Iranic *Hambavi mep'et'a*, with its real

to Thomson's English translation of Xorenac'i. Early Georgian historiographies were influenced by Near Eastern models but in a less direct and diligent manner.

³⁴ Pourshariati 2008, 36.

and perceived Iranian sympathies, fell victim to the Byzantinising cultural efflorescence sweeping through the monastic communities of Tao-Klarjet'i/Tayk'-Klarjk' and points beyond. In this atmosphere of change, the process of recasting *Hambavi mep'et'a* commenced around the year 800. In certain cases particular sections were revised and even erased. The manuscripts transmitting *Hambavi mep'et'a* were neglected and perhaps intentionally destroyed over the next few centuries as the power of the Bagratid dynasty and the all-Georgian Orthodox Church attained unprecedented heights.

Hambavi mep'et'a's vision of Iranic Christian kingship became increasingly obsolete as political and ecclesiastical culture was Byzantinised. Over time, *Hambavi mep'et'a*'s Iranic presentation of the earliest Christian monarchs, starting with Mirian's son Bak'ar I (r. 363–7380), was completely replaced with a less offensive, stripped-down narrative I call *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*. It uniquely survives as the final (untitled) component of the suite *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*. For their part, the author-compilers of the initial texts of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* – the corpus dedicated to the travails of St Nino culminating in Mirian's conversion to Christianity – handled *Hambavi mep'et'a* as a storehouse of information to be surgically mined instead of a definitive narrative or a literary paradigm to be emulated. In most respects these skeletal sources rejected the Iranic imagery and Iranian context and orientation that are perpetuated in the pre-Bagratid elements of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. Accordingly, *The Primary History of K'art'li* commences with Alexander's fictive invasion of Caucasia and lacks the Iranic institutions and conventions typifying *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*.³⁵ It does, however, contain an important allusion to a cryptic polity called Aryan K'art'li, a constituent or client of the Achaemenid satrapy of Caucasia ("Armina") and a predecessor of the subsequent realm based at Mc'xet'a.

Hambavi mep'et'a clarifies two unresolved problems of Georgian historiography. The first concerns the authorship and assembly of the three components of *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*, the opening suite of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. In many instances, *The Life of the Kings*, the initial and core text, faithfully follows and is patterned upon *Hambavi mep'et'a*. But its testimony has been refracted through two post-Sasanian lenses: first, the reworking by the anonymous ca. 800 author-editor; and second, the comparatively invasive editing carried out by Archbishop Leonti Mroveli in the eleventh century. The lost *Hambavi mep'et'a* surely did not cease with the baptism of Mirian; it must have continued through his Christian Chosroid successors to the *interregnum* or close to it. It is possible that the ca. 800 author-editor of *The Life of the Kings* was responsible for concluding the narrative on the eve of Mirian's Christianisation. But his text's final stanza is so abnormally abrupt, within Mirian's reign, that I suspect he supplied an account of the Christian Mirian and probably of his immediate successors too, thus

³⁵ Some Sasanian sources display an interest in Alexander and the Hellenistic Age, e.g., *The Letter of Tansar*.

emulating the broad dynastic scope of his primary source. Indeed, the ca. 800 writer – who certainly made other changes to the received *Hambavi mep'et'a*, perhaps adding the biblically inspired story of ethnogenesis to *The Life of the Kings* – could not have tailored his history for *The Life of Nino* because this *vita* did not yet exist. And the attachment of the existing story of Nino written in Georgian, the seventh-century *Conversion of K'art'li*, would have engendered a sudden stylistic and thematic change that would have tarnished both sources.

In my view, *The Life of the Kings's* – and, hence, *Hambavi mep'et'a's* – lost treatment of early Christian monarchs was expunged by Leonti Mroveli in the mid-eleventh century. The archbishop of the prominent see of Ruisi systematically re-edited *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and probably created the first incarnation of the corpus in the form we know it. Mroveli added several biblical vignettes to *The Life of the Kings*, including notices about Moses, the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and Jesus' birth. More substantially, the archbishop-editor deemed inappropriate the Iranian depictions of Mirian and subsequent Christian *mep'es*. Mroveli's *floruit*, we should remember, coincided with the zenith of Bagratid rule, an age when the application of Iranian imagery to Georgian monarchs had been abandoned. The archbishop purged the offending pages and in their place added what became the second and third parts of *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a*: first, *The Life of Nino*, an existing and widely accepted hagiographical work which, from its insertion, has treated the Christian period of Mirian's rule exclusively within *K'art'lis c'xovreba*; and second, *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*, an abbreviated and unvarnished royal narrative stripped of obvious Iranian trappings.

Mroveli's heavy editorial hand also affected the opening section of *The Life of Vaxtang*, where the reigns of Vaxtang's great-grandfather, grandfather and father are briefly addressed. In content and style, these short accounts are quite similar to *The Life of the Successors of Mirian*. Among other things, all intentionally avoid Iranian imagery and mute eastern Georgia's intimate socio-cultural relationship with Iran. *The Life of the Successors of Mirian* and the initial folios of *The Life of Vaxtang* were either written by the same person or were subjected to identical revision and manipulation.³⁶

The second historiographical problem revolves around the indisputable similarity of the structure, vocabulary, syntax and content of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. These pre-Bagratid narratives were written with comparable aims, in the same period, and in identical environments.³⁷ Significant elements of both texts were appropriated from *Hambavi mep'et'a*. Indeed, entire blocks of *Hambavi mep'et'a's* treatment of pre-Christian history were incorporated into *The Life of the Kings*. While its Iranian coverage of the Christian period was appreciably obscured and in some cases entirely effaced by Leonti Mroveli, *Hambavi mep'et'a's* account of Vaxtang survived by and large

³⁶ Rapp 2003, 205–207, for *Life of Vaxtang*^{pre}.

³⁷ On different grounds, a sixth-century date for *The Life of Vaxtang* has been advocated by some scholars in the Georgian Republic, e.g., Patarize 2008.

intact. Precisely why this is the case requires additional investigation, but an extended narrative with broad appeal and literary merit may have stymied its displacement. Though the early Bagratids had disposed of the Iranic model of royal authority with its *xwarrah*-endowed hero-kings, its magnetism had not entirely dissipated in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. If nothing else, with much of eastern Georgia remaining under Arab control, the riveting portrait of a strong Christian royal hero asserting ancestral autonomy in the face of imperial encroachment generated considerable interest.

Most if not all treatments of subsequent Christian K'art'velian kings were reframed, substantially revised, and in some cases wholly supplanted by new accounts. Within surviving early Georgian literature, Vaxtang Gorgasali is the only Christian K'art'velian monarch depicted in stout Iranic colours. Vaxtang's Christian Chosroid counterparts, beginning with Mirian and stretching to the Sasanians' abrogation of the monarchy, at one time must have been portrayed in a similar fashion. The Iranic imagery originally applied to the Chosroids was amputated either by Archbishop Leonti Mroveli in the mid-eleventh century, an interpretation I accept, or by the author-editors who assembled the extant *Life of the Kings* and *Life of Vaxtang* around the year 800.³⁸ At any rate, pauses in coverage between the ninth and eleventh century were rectified over the entire span, and accounts of more recent periods were appended, as we see especially with Ps.-Juanšer's continuation. Ps.-Juanšer ("Juanšer Juanšeriani") combines aspects of *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* with a new historiographical outlook oriented more towards the emergent Byzantine Commonwealth. The notion of Iranic hero-kings has been diminished, and the historian never uses the associated terms *bumberazi*, *goliat'i* and *gmiri*. Thus, the lack of Iranic imagery in pre-Bagratid historiography is not limited to Leonti Mroveli's editorial efforts. In many respects, Ps.-Juanšer's original narrative bridges the pre-Bagratid and Bagratid historiographical phases. This was partly of necessity because the profoundly Iranic *Hambavi mep'et'a* probably ended with or near the annulment of K'art'velian kingship. In the early ninth century the displacement of Iranic K'art'velian kingship was already under way. Its outright eviction would come under the royal Bagratids.³⁹

What have come down to us are filtered, multi-layered pre-Bagratid narratives that in at least two cases are heavily reliant upon *Hambavi mep'et'a*. *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* were not created *ex nihilo*. Rather, their received

³⁸ It is also possible that the de-Iranisation of the *Hambavi mep'et'a* tradition occurred in stages beginning ca. 800 and culminating with the antiquarian Mroveli in the eleventh century.

³⁹ Although he tends to regard *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* and *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasali* as organic texts belonging to the Bagratid "Golden Age", Axvlediani's investigation of their "folkloric" sources exposes the differences of *The Life of Vaxtang* and Ps.-Juanšer. See Axvlediani 1990, 74–90.

forms were *assembled, redacted and extended* around the year 800.⁴⁰ At their cores, all three pre-Bagratid components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* are products of the late Sasanian era. In a sense they are Sasanian texts, that is to say, literary sources produced within the Iranian Commonwealth during its Sasanian phase – but not by or for the Sasanian family itself. They feature a locally adapted model of the Sasanian hero-king. In comparison to their Iranian analogues, pre-Bagratid historiographical works typically enshrine different geographical, cultural and linguistic interests. They diverge from Armenian historiography's *naxarar* concerns and greater familiarity with the literature of the Graeco-Roman world.

Hambavi mep'et'a's influence reached beyond *K'art'lis c'xovreba*. All four of the historiographical texts of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* – *The Primary History of K'art'li* and the three *Royal Lists* – show signs of having selectively exploited the *Hambavi mep'et'a* tradition. But their collective sequence of K'art'velian monarchs might have been appropriated directly from *The Life of the Kings* prior to its editing by Leonti Mroveli, bypassing – and perhaps being entirely unaware of – *Hambavi mep'et'a* itself. Whatever the case, many of the discrepancies between pre-Bagratid historiography and its significantly shorter counterpart in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* are consistent with a common source existing in multiple recensions. This, more than anything, establishes that *Hambavi mep'et'a* is not identical to the original pre-Mrovelian formulations of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*'s pre-Bagratid works, especially *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*.⁴¹

The lost *Hambavi mep'et'a* may have been the literary wellspring for the K'art'velian diarchy, an institution which is possibly a muddled reflection of the association of (marchland and/or imperial) *bidaxšes* with Armazis-q'evi. Four of the six isochronal (!) pairs of diarchs reported in *The Life of the Kings* and *Royal List I* are virtually identical. But there is disagreement over the last two.⁴² Now that a common source has been revealed, some of the differences would appear to be reverberations of the composite nature of *Hambavi mep'et'a* and its transmission in more than one version.⁴³ Moreover, *Hambavi mep'et'a* may have existed simultaneously in oral and written forms. Some of the incongruities, particularly those in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, may be measured reactions against

⁴⁰ Indicative anachronisms are catalogued in Rapp 2003, chs. 1 and 3.

⁴¹ Pre-Bagratid historiographies and their analogues in *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* both claim to represent the authentic tradition. *The Life of the Kings* and *The Primary History* accordingly commence with the word *pirvel(ad)* [პირველ(ად)], “at first” or “in the beginning”. The *vita* of Nino in its *K'art'lis c'xovreba* recension also begins this way: *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 72.

⁴² *The Life of the Kings* ends with diarchs P'arsman K'ueli and Mirdat whereas *Royal List I* gives P'arsman K'ueli and P'arsman Avaz and adds the pair Rok and Mirdat: *Royal List I*, §§16–17, Rapp trans., 261.

⁴³ Hence the use of the title's Georgian form, following the convention observed throughout this book.

the Iranian tradition of *Hambavi mep'et'a*.⁴⁴ It is entirely possible, for instance, that *The Primary History* of K'art'li exploited *Hambavi mep'et'a* a century or more before the creation of the pre-Bagratid texts of K'art'lis c'xovreba. If so, the temporal gap helps to explain *Hambavi mep'et'a*'s existence in more than one recension. Like *Xwadāy-nāmag*, *Hambavi mep'et'a* was a living tradition manipulated over the course of centuries by various constituencies, some of whom were locked in fierce competition.

The multiple recensional faces of *Hambavi mep'et'a* are on full display in the received accounts of P'arnavaz and Mirian. The initial components of K'art'lis c'xovreba and *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* describe the respective fathers of these important kings differently. The discrepancy suggests long-term tampering with both traditions. *The Life of the Kings* mentions P'arnavaz's father, but does not record his name. His death at the hands of Alexander's soldiers is the impetus for P'arnavaz's rise (the seeking of vengeance is central here) and eventual defeat of Azon, the tyrannical Macedonian governor. P'arnavaz was subsequently enthroned as the first *mep'e* of the K'art'velians. *The Life of the Kings* emphasises that P'arnavaz was "the first king in K'art'li from among the descendants of K'art'los".⁴⁵ By contrast, *The Primary History* and *Royal List I* describe Azoy as the dynastic monarch of a late Achaemenid-era realm called Aryan K'art'li. They report Alexander's installation of Azoy as the first K'art'velian king to sit at *Mc'xet'a*. He was followed by P'arnavaz, who may have been Azoy's son. Curiously, there is no explicit statement about their relationship. This may be an indication of Azoy having been ousted, which is broadly consistent with *The Life of the Kings*. *Hambavi mep'et'a*'s connection to these divergent traditions has yet to be determined. It is instructive that both point to an Iranian orientation, but they do so by different means. As presented in *The Life of the Kings*, the story of P'arnavaz is saturated with tropes and vocabulary shared with the Iranian epic. For their part, *The Primary History* and *Royal List I* eschew Iranian trappings but refer to an earlier K'art'velian polity designated Aryan K'art'li. This "Iranian K'art'li", almost certainly a sub-unit or a client of the Achaemenid satrapy of Armina (i.e., Achaemenid Caucasia), is said to have met its end with Alexander's (legendary) invasion of Caucasia. Notwithstanding, *The Life of the Kings* and its pre-Bagratid companions attest the perpetuation of eastern Georgia's membership in the Iranian Commonwealth for many centuries to come. Although there is much we do not know, both traditions were probably incorporated into distinctive – perhaps contending – recensions of *Hambavi mep'et'a*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ And yet the Iranian royal onomasticon is sometimes better preserved in the components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*, a circumstance emphasised in the publications of Bielmeier.

⁴⁵ *Life of the Kings*, Qauxč'ivili ed., 26, Thomson trans., 37, emphasis added: "... პირველი მეფე ქართლსა შინა ქართველთა ნათესავთაგანი".

⁴⁶ Cf. Mamulia 1979.

Mirian's parentage is also described in contradictory terms. *The Life of the Kings* makes Mirian the first-born son of an unnamed *šāhan šāh*. Yet because he was an illegitimate son he had no legal right to claim the Sasanian throne for himself. This is a convenient circumstance given the lofty assertion and the fact that Mirian never became *šāhan šāh*. In reality, Mirian was a Parthian Mihrānīd who established an acculturating branch of his house in K'art'li. As noted, the royal Mihrānīds, who called themselves Chosroids ("Sasanians"), were linked to the Sasanians through "diplomatic" marriages. *The Life of the Kings* misleads and exaggerates as it paints an idealised portrait of Mirian, the first Christian king of the K'art'velians. Mirian's portrayal as the first-born son of an unspecified *šāhan šāh* is tendentious to be sure, but it demonstrates the concerted effort of the monarchy and its historians to stake a legitimate claim upon *xwarrah*. After all, the central problem for the Iranic kings of southern Caucasia, whose backgrounds blended local and Parthian aristocratic elements, was the possession of the sacral glory marking legitimate rulers.

Royal List I elaborates a less sensational origin for the first Christian king.⁴⁷ Having lapsed into a bare inventory of K'art'velian monarchs, it concludes with "Lev, the father of Mirean". Lev is almost certainly a distortion of Rev. Nothing more is said about this figure, and he is unattested in *The Conversion of K'art'li* and *The Life of Nino*, the last of which – in its K'art'lis c'xovreba recension – makes Mirian the uncle of an unnamed *šāhan šāh*.⁴⁸ But the fact remains that *Royal List I* portrays Mirian as the son of a K'art'velian *mep'e* and not of a Sasanian *šāhan šāh*.⁴⁹ We cannot be sure whether Mirian's father was actually named Rev (a confusion with Mirian's son Rev?), for this may be a reaction against *The Life of the Kings*. Alternately, Mirian's father may actually have been Lev/Rev but *The Life of the Kings* (and/or its source) resculpted the background of a leading K'art'velian hero for maximum ideological effect, something it may also have done with P'arnavaz. Might Lev/Rev have been the principal of the Parthian Mihrānīd house back in Iran?

Although the Sasanians envisioned *Xwadāy-nāmag* as an official history, dynastic Parthian families eventually contributed to its transmission and rewriting. Parthians retained considerable power throughout the life of the

⁴⁷ Mirian's status as the first Christian king of the K'art'velians was contested by the powerful *bidaxšes* of Somxit'i-Gugark'.

⁴⁸ *Vita Nino* (K'C'), Qauxč'išvili ed., 95.

⁴⁹ Had Mirian been a Sasanian prince, this extraordinary circumstance would have been worthy of grand commemoration in Christian Georgian sources. But this is not the case. While the author-compiler of *Royal List I* was probably a cleric or monk who deliberately ignored and concealed the Iranian heritage of K'art'li, there is a longstanding tradition in Georgian hagiography of celebrating non-K'art'velian Christians, e.g., the Armenian Šušanik, the Iranian Gwrobandak-Evstat'i, the Arab Habo and the Thirteen Syrian Fathers. Moreover, prior to the sixth and especially seventh century, Georgian *vitae* were primarily concerned with Christian affiliation in a broad sense and were not encumbered by the promotion of particular confessions or *ethnies*.

Sasanian Empire, especially in the north (including Caucasia) and in the east. In the words of Pourshariati:

This Parthian role in the transmission of their history, intertwined in the Sasanian accounts of the *Shāhnāma* is explained by their real power within the Pahlav territories, and even in the center of the empire. There is every reason to assume that in their regional capitals such as Rayy, Gurgān, Qūmis, or Tūs, the various Parthian dynasts of the Mihrāns, the Kārins, the Ispahbudhān, and the Kanārangyān, *held their own courts and their own mechanisms for retaining their histories and sagas for future generations ...*⁵⁰

The Sasanians neglected, marred and attempted to efface the memory of their reviled Parthian Arsacid predecessors, yet other Parthians managed to redact *Xwadāy-nāmag*, thereby inserting themselves into the narrative in positive ways.⁵¹ This occurred after the Arab conquest but also while the Sasanians were still in power. In eastern Georgia, branches of the Armeno-Parthian Arsacid (Arm. Aršakuni) and then K'art'velo-Parthian Mihrānid (Chosroid) houses occupied the throne from the accession of Rev I (r. 189–216) until the start of the *interregnum* around 580. The Sasanians did not directly hold royal authority in K'art'li and do not seem to have placed their own princes on the throne as they sometimes did in Armenia Major,⁵² yet élite K'art'velians were joined to the Sasanians through marriage. This circumstance makes more plausible Mirian's exaggeration as the senior but illegitimate son of the *šāhan šāh* in *The Life of the Kings*.⁵³ The historical and imagined Mirians encapsulate the uneasy Sasanian-Parthian coalition as well as the conditions enabling Parthian adjustments to *Xwadāy-nāmag*.

To the list of regional capitals where Parthian families retained considerable power and autonomy we must add the royal seats of eastern Georgia, Armenia Major and Albania. Sasanian Caucasia⁵⁴ therefore constitutes the Iranian

⁵⁰ Pourshariati 2008, 460–461, emphasis added. She continues: “Whether the Parthians cultivated their traditions in a written or through an oral tradition, we can as yet not ascertain with any degree of certainty. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that, as the *Shāhnāma* bears witness, the Pahlav dynasts continued to *speak the Parthian language* [Pourshariati's emphasis] until the end of the Sasanian period and probably for centuries thereafter ... [T]he Pahlav systematically preserved their traditions throughout the Sasanian and well into the post-conquest centuries”.

⁵¹ See now Pourshariati 2008, 9–10ff.

⁵² Armenia Major: Hormizd-Ardašīr (r. 252–ca. 272), Narseh (r. ca. 273–293) and Šāpūh (r. 418–422). For Hormizd-Ardašīr and Narseh, see: Toumanoff 1969b; and Garsoïan 1997a, 73.

⁵³ In 428, just prior to the Sasanians' abrogation of the Armenian monarchy, Yazdgird I installed his son Šāpūh as king of Armenia. He was replaced by the Arsacid (Aršakuni) Ardašēs/Ardašīr (r. 422–428), the last king before the *interregnum*. See Garsoïan 1997a, 92–93. For the Armenian *interregnum* see Garsoïan 2012.

⁵⁴ “Sasanian” insofar as culture and society were in alignment with Sasanian Iran.

Commonwealth's most dramatic example of predominately non-Iranian and non-Zoroastrian peoples who governed their own kingdoms and who articulated their own historical traditions in writing. It is worth remembering that Armenian, Georgian and Albanian literatures were born in the Sasanian age. Scripts for all three languages were invented around the year 400 and the first original Caucasian texts began to appear in the fifth century.⁵⁵

Curiously, like the survivals of *Xwadāy-nāmag*, both *Hambavi mep'et'a* and the dependent *Life of the Kings* robustly ignore the Parthian Arsacids.⁵⁶ The received Georgian tradition's suppression of the memory of the Parthian Arsacids is deliberate and comprehensive.⁵⁷ Caucasian Arsacids do not fare much better. *Hambavi mep'et'a* and its subsidiary texts describe only one Caucasian Arsacid in any detail, Asp'agur (r. 265–284), whose death marks the patrilineal *cul-de-sac* of the P'arnavaziani-Arsacids. The attention devoted to Asp'agur is the result of fortunate chronology: he was the immediate predecessor of the pivotal Mirian.

Also reminiscent of *Xwadāy-nāmag* is the staunch dynastic legitimism exhibited by *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang*. Their Sasanian-era precursor, *Hambavi mep'et'a*, took shape precisely as the K'art'velian monarchy faced extinction. Back in 428 the Sasanians had suppressed Arsacid royal power in Armenia Major.⁵⁸ Ctesiphon then made steady encroachments against the crowns of Albania and eastern Georgia. By the time *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* were consigned to writing around the year 800 (based on an existing written version of *Hambavi mep'et'a*), the sense of imminent peril had morphed into an appeal for the revival of autonomous dynastic kingship. Despite their pervasiveness in eastern Georgian society, local aristocratic houses play a muffled role in these texts. When particular nobles are attested, they are usually identified without family names and hence are deprived of a foremost badge of power.

On the whole, the *Hambavi mep'et'a* tradition projects a highly centralised and hierarchical kingdom ruled by magnanimous Iranic monarchs who radiated *xwarrah*. Thus, whereas the received self-image of the Sasanians is mediated by Parthian aristocratic families that deliberately inserted themselves and their values into *Xwadāy-nāmag*, *Hambavi mep'et'a* and its surrogates – *The Life of the Kings* and *The Life of Vaxtang* – maintain a strict legitimist focus on the successive royal houses of pre-Bagratid K'art'li (especially the P'arnavazianis and

⁵⁵ The creation under the later Parthian Arsacids of scripts for several Aramaic languages – e.g., Elymaic, Characenean and Mandaic – must have exerted some influence. For Mandaic, see Häberl 2006.

⁵⁶ And so, too, does *Royal List I*, which by the time of the K'art'velian Arsacids deteriorates into a list of kings.

⁵⁷ In a similar vein, the hushed role in pre-Bagratid historiography of Roman emperors – both polytheistic and Christian – must be understood through the prism of eastern Georgia's enduring membership in the Iranian Commonwealth and the Iranian inspiration of *Hambavi mep'et'a*.

⁵⁸ For the larger context of the events of 428, see Traina 2009.

Chosroids), which, starting in the second century AD, had strong Parthian ties. Like the *Xwadāy-nāmag* tradition, *Hambavi mep'et'a*'s mixture of epic and history was edited and manipulated by other constituencies, most notably a powerful archbishop of the Bagratid "Golden Age". Thus, pre-Bagratid historiography is not simply a Georgian and Caucasian literary monument. It is simultaneously a monument to – and a monument created within – the energetic and diverse Iranian Commonwealth.



At its most expansive vantage, this study has confirmed the consonance of Caucasian and Iranian history. To treat them as strictly bounded experiences undermines the image arising from the totality of received sources. At the same time, Caucasian history is distinctive: the K'art'velian and wider regional experiences show that membership in the transcendent multicultural blocs of pre-modern Eurasia need not be exclusive.⁵⁹ Significantly, Christianisation did not push the various Armenians, Georgians and Albanians absolutely or exclusively into the Romano-Byzantine sphere as is so often presumed. Christianisation did, however, present Caucasian élites with an expanded set of choices as they navigated competing imperial interests and evolved distinctive but flexible self-identities.⁶⁰

By no means did Christianity annul Caucasia's membership in the Iranian cultural world,⁶¹ but the faith's lasting dominance had two important consequences for the history of west-central Eurasia. First, the Iranian Commonwealth became even more heterogeneous. Second, Christianisation drew southern Caucasia as a *diverse but cohesive socio-cultural unit* into the emergent Eastern Christian *oikoumēnē*, the so-called First Byzantine Commonwealth.⁶² Christian Caucasia's concurrent affiliations with the Iranian

⁵⁹ Traditionally "civilisations", especially as conceived by Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, H.G. Wells, William McNeill and others. But I have avoided this term because of its modern imperial, colonial and Eurocentric baggage. I wish to thank Julie Nelson for her insights on this subject.

⁶⁰ Braund 1994, 237: "Roman gift lies beside Persian gift [at Armazi], a collocation which offers a further indication that the Iberian élite, just like élites elsewhere on the eastern frontier [of Rome], was Janus-like and could look simultaneously towards Rome and towards Parthia or Persia". I agree with this assessment but caution against the strength of the Mediterranean context of the K'art'velian experience presented by Braund.

⁶¹ Cf. Fowden 1993, 104: "When they turned to Christianity, Iberia and Armenia had at the same time turned away from Iran toward Rome". Fowden acknowledges that "... both Armenia and neighboring Georgia remained fields of cultural as well as diplomatic and military competition between the two superpowers".

⁶² Caucasia not only participated in both phases of the Byzantine Commonwealth but also contributed to their formation. See, e.g.: Rapp and Crego 2012, introduction; and Rapp *forthcoming C. For the Byzantine Commonwealth*, see: Obolensky 1971; and Fowden

Commonwealth and Eastern Christendom are manifestly evident in *The Life of Vaxtang*.⁶³ From a certain (skewed) point of view it may seem that Vaxtang and his compatriots were caught in an interstitial space *between* competing imperial universes with their attendant cultures and religions. In fact, the prospect of reconciling both while maintaining a distinctive identity is demonstrated by the K'art'velians' cross-cultural existence within the overlapping zone of Roman and Sasanian imperial interests.⁶⁴ Thus, Christianity did not out of necessity eject the peoples of Caucasia from their venerable position within the Iranian world and insert them suddenly, irrevocably, completely and exclusively into the Romano-Byzantine orbit. By the same token, the prevailing Iranic features and Iranian orientation of K'art'velian society did not thwart the participation of eastern Georgia and its neighbours in Eastern Christendom and the Byzantine Commonwealth.

At no point in its recorded history has Caucasia been a passive backwater. Although the region may have constituted a periphery from the viewpoints of Ctesiphon and Rome/Constantinople, when examined on its own terms and within regional and ecumenical contexts, Caucasia was a coherent, durable and dynamic *centre* of lively cross-cultural interplay. The isthmus was one of Eurasia's most vibrant crossroads.⁶⁵ Paradigms of unidirectional cultural diffusion emanating from what are deemed to be uniquely inventive imperial hubs fail miserably. Instead, polycentric landscapes and cultural syncretism were the norm. Cultural traits and products resulting from adaptation and syncretism were typically regarded by locals as domestic in origin. Accordingly, in most cases the Iranic aspects of eastern Georgian society were envisioned as inherently K'art'velian.

Because the roots of Caucasia's integration into the Iranian Commonwealth can be traced legitimately back to the Achaemenid epoch and because commonwealths by their nature were inclusive crucibles of sustained

1993. See also: Whittow 1996; and Cameron 2010, esp. ch. 1, "What Was Byzantium?" For the commonwealth in relation to Caucasia, see Rapp 2005. Eastmond 2010 advocates a broad definition of Byzantine art encompassing diverse cultural and theological groups.

⁶³ Hodgson 1974, 33, quoted in the epigraph of the Introduction above. See also Hodgson 1993.

⁶⁴ Canepa 2009, brilliantly exposes the dialogue of Rome/Byzantium and Sasanian Iran in terms of a shared art and ritual of kingship. See also Hodgson 1974, 33, quoted at the start of the Introduction above.

⁶⁵ Cf. Christian 1998, 9: "For several millennia, then, the centrality of Inner Eurasia ensured it a strategic role in the history of the Old World, and helped shape the history of the emerging Eurasian world-system. So, despite its small populations, Inner Eurasia has not been a region 'without history', in Eric Wolf's phrase". Christian's fascinating investigation tends to exclude Caucasia (and, e.g., Iran and Tibet) from its slippery definition of Inner Eurasia, for which see esp. pp. xv-xviii. In fact, the Iranian Commonwealth was one of the hinges of Inner Eurasia and was a principal bridge linking sedentary and nomadic/pastoralist communities.

communication, exchange and synthesis, it is often difficult – and imprudent – to draw a sharp distinction between what was “Iranian/Persian”, “Caucasian”, “Armenian”, “K’art’velian/Georgian”, “Albanian” and so on. Admittedly, the very labelling of the “Iranian” Commonwealth is deceptive, for it can falsely relegate non-Iranian peoples to the status of second-class cultural, social, political and economic citizens. But the peoples of Caucasia were anything but passive. Since commonwealths initially require imperial sparks and because they are typically sustained by imperial nuclei,⁶⁶ descriptors such as “Iranian” and “Byzantine” are appropriate so long as the concept of commonwealth is not restricted to its imperial centre and dominant *ethnie*.

The Georgian materials surveyed in this volume are a reminder of the cohesiveness of Caucasia in Late Antiquity.⁶⁷ While it is a justifiable exercise to explore the discrete Georgian, Armenian and Albanian experiences, it is misleading (at best) to treat one in isolation from the others or outside the context of the Caucasus region and the Eurasian and Afro-Eurasian ecumenes. Far too many studies of Armenian, Georgian and Albanian/(Azerbaijani!) history imply that one existed in virtual seclusion from the others, or that interactions between the three were not essential to their histories, or that one was inherently superior and privileged at the *ethnocentric expense* of the others. These widespread suppositions are not borne out by a critical, cross-cultural reading of the contemporaneous evidence.

Even today, when the deployment of cross-cultural and transnational methodologies to the Caucasian arena has become increasingly commonplace,⁶⁸ many inquiries continue to be framed within constrictive cultural, ethnic and national boxes. Meanwhile, modern political considerations and xenophobic patriotism still plague much of the scholarship produced in and about pre-modern Caucasia. This state of affairs is nothing new: it reared its ugly head in late imperial Russian and Soviet times, but its prevalence has been intensifying since the implosion of the USSR. Not surprisingly, modern politics have played a critical role in the study of the pre-modern Irano-Caucasian nexus or rather the lack thereof. Today as in the past the presentation and imagination of Caucasia’s pre-modern history are interwoven with the concerns of the present and fantasies

⁶⁶ Not all empires generate commonwealths: Fowden 1993. Note Fowden’s intriguing emphasis upon monotheism in the formation and sustainability of commonwealths. He also draws a distinction between world empires and commonwealths. For Achaemenid Persia and Sasanian Iran as world empires, see *ibid.*, 6, 19–21 and 24–36.

⁶⁷ Cyril Toumanoff’s underappreciated publications, especially his *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), expose an integrated Caucasian “civilisation” in Christian times. Likewise, Charles Burney and David Marshall Lang’s *The Peoples of the Hills: Ancient Ararat and Caucasus* (1972) demonstrates the interlaced cultures of Anatolia and Caucasia.

⁶⁸ E.g., the insightful anthropological essays in Grant and Yalçın-Heckmann 2007. See also the contributions in Suny 1996, especially by Garsoïan, Thomson and Golden.

of desired futures.⁶⁹ Consider, for example, the dogged quest of the Saakašvili regime to secure Georgian membership in Euro-American organisations, including NATO and the EU. Vital to the strategy was the encouragement of a distorted interpretation of the country's history, a post-Soviet programme frequently conjuring the discredited teleological and privileging narratives of "Western Civilisation".⁷⁰ Needless to say, the ancient and medieval connections with the Iranian world investigated above do not advance this political agenda.

The vision adopted here stands in stark opposition to this kind of linear, decontextualised and ethnocentric mythology. Instead it exposes late antique Caucasia as a diverse but cohesive cosmopolitan crossroads having nested, overlapping and synergetic affiliations with multiple commonwealths, empires, and cultural and religious systems. At a minimum, it is impossible to write about the various Georgian peoples and lands without taking into account the historical experiences and sources of their neighbours, including the Armenians, Albanians and the inhabitants of the Caucasian highlands. Further, the K'art'velian experience is not some lesser sibling of the Armenian. Eastern Georgian culture was original and followed its own internal logic, yet it simultaneously formed an integral part of the Caucasian whole which, in turn, was a contributing member of the Iranian Commonwealth.

This volume has specifically addressed Georgian literary narratives because, unlike their Armenian counterparts, they are not well known beyond the modern Georgian ethnic community. What's more, scholarship as a whole has rarely appreciated these sources's rich evidence for the Sasanian phase of the Iranian world. In retrospect, a more effective approach would have proceeded entirely from a regional point of view, placing front and centre an interrogation

⁶⁹ Again, this by no means applies only to Caucasia. For the Soviet context, see: Suny 2001; Martin 2001; and Slezkine 1994 and 1996.

⁷⁰ This policy has had numerous consequences. In 2009 Georgia's Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Ministry of Economic Development launched a flashy travel campaign under the slogan "Georgia: Europe Started Here": <http://www.georgia.travel/> (last accessed 19 January 2012). The immediate inspiration for this promotion is the remarkable hominid fossils – termed *Homo georgicus* – unearthed at Dmanisi in southern Georgia, some of which date from approximately 1.8 million years ago. These finds are of extraordinary scientific significance, but they have also spawned numerous misconceptions. Some specialists, Georgians and non-Georgians alike, have carelessly identified the remains as "European". See, e.g., "Fossils May be 'First Europeans'", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/745080.stm> (last accessed 18 July 2013). Notwithstanding this gross error of description, the Dmanisi fossils show Caucasia to have been "the apparent crossroads of hominid dispersal into Europe", where "Europe" is an amorphous geographical designation and nothing more: Gabunia *et al.* 2000, 1025. In Caucasia territorial claims are routinely justified through real and alleged habitation patterns in medieval, late antique and ancient times. Such arguments are common in the smouldering war-of-words over Abkhazia, South Ossetia and, most famously, Nagorno-Karabakh (to use the forms commonly found in English).

of Armenian, Georgian and what remains of Albanian literary evidence⁷¹ as a diverse yet coherent body of pan-Caucasian material.⁷² This is not to say that the various Armenians, Georgians and Albanians have ever constituted a single *ethnie*. They have not. Caucasia's diversity was legendary even in ancient times. And we must not forget that in the pre-modern epoch numerous closely related peoples were subsumed within each label, so to speak of "Georgians", "Armenians" and "Albanians" – and the corresponding terms in the various Caucasian languages – introduces its own complications.

One of the historian's tasks is to correlate difference and distinctiveness, on the one hand, and commonality and unity, on the other. A holistic view of the Armenian and Georgian literary sources for the Sasanian world underscores the importance of this charge. Despite their differences, *or rather because of them*, Armenian and Georgian materials preserve valuable information *from a variety of perspectives* about the region's long-standing dialogue with Iran. When engaged as a single body of evidence within regional and Eurasian contexts, Caucasian narratives demonstrate the isthmus's profound integration into the Iranian world in Late Antiquity.⁷³ And they are resplendent monuments to the cross-cultural engine at the heart of the Iranian Commonwealth.

⁷¹ As received, the composite *History of the Albanians* attributed to Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, who probably had an Albanian background, was originally composed and has come down to us exclusively in Armenian. Cf. Mamedova 2005.

⁷² For Caucasia as a world region, see: Rapp 2005 and 2006; Grant and Yalçın-Heckmann 2007; and Arutyunov 2007. Cf. Forsyth 2013.

⁷³ For the "One World" of the Achaemenids, see Frye 1963, 120, quoted at the start of the Introduction.

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Appendix I

Terminological Note

Despite considerable progress over the past two decades, a satisfactory vocabulary for describing and analysing pre-modern cross-cultural phenomena within large-scale polycentric arenas does not yet exist. The terminology employed here strives for the greatest possible precision, consistency and transparency. These concerns have sometimes necessitated unconventional usages.

Caucasia designates the cohesive yet diverse region whose core is the isthmus bounded by the Black and Caspian Seas. **Caucasian** denotes “of/from Caucasia” and is *never* applied in a (modern) racial sense; rather, it describes multi- and cross-cultural phenomena involving the eastern Georgians, Armenians, Caucasian Albanians and their neighbours, including various highlander societies. In the period under review, written sources produced by indigenous sedentary groups frequently restrict “Caucasia” to the highlands of the main chain of the Caucasus Mountains, what today is called northern Caucasia or the North Caucasus. **Transcaucasia/Transcaucasus** is encoded with a decidedly modern Russian perspective (“across [i.e., to the south of] the Caucasus Mountains”) and has no place in this study.

Georgia and **Georgian** are exonyms. The toponym is restricted to the unified medieval kingdom that combined lands on either side of the Surami Mountains, what is broadly called eastern and western Georgia. The unified polity Sak’art’velo, as it came to be called, was first assembled by the **Bagratid** dynasty at the turn of the tenth/eleventh century. Because this volume has a **pre-Bagratid** chronological focus (i.e., before the Bagratids seized the presiding principate of eastern Georgia in 813), it gives preference to the names of individual territories and districts.

K’art’li – roughly equivalent to Iberia in late antique Mediterranean sources – is the core region of eastern Georgia and is home to the royal cities Mc’xet’a and Tp’ilisi (mod. T’bilisi). **K’art’velian** refers to someone (k’art’veli)/something (k’art’uli) originating in or involving K’art’li and eastern Georgia. **Georgian** describes the dominant language even though k’art’uli is the term encountered in all indigenous texts and inscriptions. All this is not to dismiss historical ties among the various peoples we call “Georgians” today, but whenever possible contemporaneous terminology is used to avoid retrojections of modern notions of identity.

Iran designates not only the Sasanian Empire but in a panoramic sense its predecessors, especially when seen from Sasanian perspectives. **Persia** and **Parthia** refer specifically to the empires ruled by the Persian Achaemenid and Parthian Arsacid dynasties respectively. In pre-modern Georgian sources, no distinction is made among the various polities based in **Sparsēt'i** (Iran/Persia/Parthia) beginning with the first kingdom allegedly established by Nimrod. In this study, **Iranian** describes this spatially and temporally extended cultural world, even in pre-Sasanian times. **Iranic** denotes peoples and phenomena belonging to the Iranian Commonwealth; it embodies the active participation in this dynamic enterprise of non-Iranian peoples, including K'art'velians and Armenians. **Persianate** has been avoided because of its typical association with Islam.

Although it presents an artificial dichotomy and flies in the face of conventional scholarly usage, in this volume **Zoroastrianism** specifically relates to the orthodox form(s) of **Mazdaism** that was developed under – and advocated by – the Sasanians and their allies from the third century. In the context of late antique Caucasian history, Zoroastrianism refers to the largely *imported* imperial strain(s) while Mazdaism – and particularly K'art'velian and Armenian Mazdaisms – usually describes the various syncretic modes of religious belief and practice centred on Ahura Mazdā that developed substantially within Caucasia itself. In its widest sense, Mazdaism includes Sasanian Zoroastrianism.

Considerable debate surrounds the transition from the **Roman** to the **Byzantine Empire**. A case can certainly be made for Byzantium's inception with Constantine the Great (r. 324–337) and his acceptance of the Christian God in the first third of the fourth century (symbolised by his vision at Milvian Bridge on the outskirts of Rome in 312). To my mind, however, the reign of Herakleios (Heraclius; 610–641) marks the fundamental transition. This period witnessed, *inter alia*, the disruption of urban life throughout Anatolia, the sharp decline of Latin, the collapse of Sasanian power, its replacement and expansion by the Arabs, and Constantinople's permanent loss of most non-Chalcedonian, including Miaphysite (“Monophysite”), territories in the Near East and northern Africa.

Notwithstanding abundant creative efforts at rehabilitation, the concept of **civilisation** is too encumbered by Eurocentric colonial and imperial preconceptions to be practical for the study of Late Antiquity. **Commonwealth** is a particular kind of large-scale cross-cultural and multicultural configuration, generated and often sustained by certain empires, that characterises the late antique and medieval Near East, Caucasia and eastern Mediterranean. Although they possessed imperial cores (at least initially), commonwealths were polycentric and dynamic: they were energetic zones of intense cross-cultural communication and exchange. Their members were not passive receptors of unidirectional diffusion from some uniquely inventive centre. Intra-commonwealth interactions tended to be syncretic and adaptive rather than adoptive.

Appendix II

Georgian Literary Sources for the Sasanian Era

Titles proposed by modern scholars appear in brackets.

Individual hagiographical texts (passions and *vitae*) originally composed in Georgian

Vita Šušanik = The Passion of Šušanik = Iakob C'urtaveli, late 5th cent.
Camebay cmidisa šušanikisi dedop'lisay (იაკობ ცურტაველი,
წამება წმიდისა შუშანიკისი დედოფლისა)

Vita Children Kolay = The Passion of the Nine Children of Kolay 5th/6th cent.
= *Camebay qrmata' a cmidat' ay ric'xwt' c'xrat' ay* (წამება ერმათა
წმიდათა რიცხვთ ცხრათა)

Vita Evstat'i = The Martyrdom of Evstat'i = Martwlobay beginning 7th cent.¹
da mot'minebay cmidisa evstat'i mc'xet'elisy (მარტვლობა
და მოთმინება წმიდისა ევსტათი მცხეთელისა)

Hambavi mep'et'a (ჰამბავი მეფეთა) [lost]

As is argued in the Epilogue, the lost *Hambavi mep'et'a* is the principal source of the pre-Bagratid historiographical components of *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, especially the ca. 800 *Life of the Kings* and *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*. It was also employed – perhaps through oral means or indirectly – by the authors of the historiographical components of *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay*. *Hambavi mep'et'a* must have been a composite, multi-author work that was initially conceived as an oral tradition. In the form we can perceive, *Hambavi mep'et'a* took shape in the late sixth/early seventh century. Divergences in the dependent texts of *K'art'lis c'xovreba* and *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* imply its transmission in multiple recensions.

¹ Mid-sixth century according to most scholars in the Georgian Republic.

K'art'lis c'xovreba (ქართლის ცხოვრება)

K'art'lis c'xovreba is a historiographical corpus of thirteen original medieval texts first assembled between ca. 800 and the mid-eleventh century, probably by the archbishop Leonti Mroveli at the very end of this span. The corpus is informally and misleadingly known as the “Georgian Chronicles”; Toumanoff advocated the more precise “Georgian Royal Annals”. Although its oldest components were written ca. 800, the earliest surviving Georgian manuscript – the Anaseuli redaction – was copied between 1479 and 1495. *K'art'lis c'xovreba*’s oldest extant witness is a variant of its Armenian-language adaptation – *Patmut'iwn Vrac'* (*Պատմութիւն Վրաց*), “The History of the Georgians” – copied between 1274 and 1311.

1–3 *C'xorebay k'art'velt'a mep'et'a* (ცხოვრებაჲ ქართველთა მეფეთა). Suite traditionally ascribed to Leonti Mroveli (ლენტი მროველი), who probably assembled it in the mid-11th century.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | [<i>The Life of the K'art'velian Kings</i>] | ca. 790–813, based in large measure on the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |
| 2 | <i>Vita Nino = The Life of Nino</i> (<i>Mok'c'evay mirian mep'isay da mis t'ana qovlisa k'art'lisay cmidisa da netarisa dedisa c'uenisa nino moc'ik'ulisa mier</i> , მოქცევაჲ მირიან მეფისაჲ და მის თანა ყოვლისა ქართლისაჲ წმიდისა და ნეტარისა დედისა ჩუენისა ნინო მოციქულისა მიერ); almost certainly added to the corpus by Archbishop Leonti Mroveli | 9th/10th cent. |
| 3 | [<i>The Life of the Successors of Mirian</i>] , perhaps compiled by Leonti Mroveli on the basis of received materials | probably 11th cent., definitely after 813, influenced by the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |

4–5 *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgaslixa* (ცხოვრებაჲ ვახტანგ გორგასლისა). Suite traditionally ascribed to Juanšer Juanšeriani (ჯუანშერ ჯუანშერიანი).

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | [<i>The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali</i>] | ca. 790–813, based in large measure on the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |
|---|---|---|

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 5 | [Continuation by Pseudo-Juanšer] | ca. 790–813,
influenced by
the lost <i>Hambavi</i>
<i>mep'et'a</i> |
| 6 | <i>Vita Arč'il = The Passion of Arč'il (Camebay cmidisa da didebulisa mocamisa arč'ilisi, romeli iqo mep'e k'art'lisay,</i> წამება და დიდებულისა მოწამისა არჩილისი, რომელი იყო მეფე ქართლისად) | 786–11th cent.,
perhaps 9th cent. |
| 7 | <i>Sumbat Davit'is-ze, The Life and Tale of the Bagratids (C'xorebay da ucqebay bagratoniant'a,</i> სუმბატ დავითის-ძე, ცხორება და უწყება ბაგრატონიანთა) | ca. 1030 |
| 8 | <i>The Chronicle of K'art'li (Matiane k'art'lisay,</i> მატიანე ქართლისად) | 11th cent. |
| 9 | <i>The Life of King of Kings Davit' (C'xorebay mep'et'-mep'isa davit'isi,</i> ცხორება მეფეთ-მეფისა დავითისი) | 12th cent. |
| 10 | <i>The Histories and Eulogies of the Crowned (Istoriani da azmani šaravandedt'ani,</i> ისტორიანი და აზმანი შარავანდედთანი) | 13th cent. |
| 11 | <i>The Life of Monarch of Monarchs T'amar (C'xorebay mep'et'-mep'isa t'amarisi,</i> ცხორება მეფეთ-მეფისა თამარისი)
Frequently attributed to Basil Ezosmožuari (ბასილი ეზოსმოდუარი). | 13th cent. |
| 12 | [<i>The History of the Five Reigns</i>] (<i>Laša-giorgis droindeli mematiane,</i> ლაშა-გიორგის დროინდელი მემატიანე) | 13th cent. |
| 13 | [<i>The Chronicle of a Hundred Years</i>] (<i>Asclovani matiane,</i> ასწლოვანი მატიანე)
Previously attributed to a certain Žamt'aaymcereli (ჟამთააღმწერელი),
“Chronicler of a Bygone Age”. | 14th cent. |

Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay (მოქცევაჲ ქართლისაჲ)

Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay – literally “The Conversion of K'art'li” – is a corpus of six texts assembled in the ninth or, more likely, tenth century. It has come down to us in four variants: Šatberdi, Sin.Geo.N.50 and Sin.Geo.N.48, all of the early tenth century; and Čeliši of the thirteenth/fourteenth century. The “pre-Christian” section (components ##1–2) are vandalised in all but one of the extant witnesses. Šatberdi is the most complete version; within *Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay* it alone preserves accounts of eastern Georgia's “pagan” past. A closely-related recension of the *vita* of Nino is incorporated into *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, for which see above.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | [The Primary History of K'art'li] | 7th cent.(?), no later than 10th cent., influenced by the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |
| 2 | [Royal List I] | prob. 9th-10th cent., influenced by the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |
| 3 | The Conversion of K'art'li (<i>Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay</i> , მოქცევაჲ ქართლისაჲ) | 1st half 7th cent. |
| 4 | [Royal List II] | prob. 9th-10th cent., influenced by the lost <i>Hambavi mep'et'a</i> |
| 5 | [Royal List III] | prob. 9th-10th cent. |
| 6 | [Vita Nino = The Life of Nino] | 9th/10th cent. |

Other relevant Caucasian literary sources

The following narratives, including Dasxuranc'i's *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, were composed in Armenian.

5th cent.

Agat'angelos, *The History of the Armenians* (Patmut'iwn Hayoc'; Ագաթանգեղոս, Պատմութիւն Հայոց) = surviving "Aa" witness (other variants in a variety of languages, including Greek, Arabic and Syriac and fragments extant in Georgian)

The Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk'; Բուզանդարան Պատմութիւնք), previously attributed to P'awstos Buzandac'i (Pawstos [Faustus] of Buzand)

Koriwn, *Vita Maštoc'* (Vark' Maštoc'i; Կորիւն, Վարք Մաշտոցի)

Łazar P'arpec'i, *The History of the Armenians* (Patmut'iwn Hayoc'; Դազար Փարպեցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց)

5th/6th cent.(?)

The Primary History of Armenia (The Primary History of Armenia, i.e., Xostabanut'iwn yařajkay patmut'eanc'; Խոստաբանութիւն յառաջկայ պատմութեանց)

6th cent.

Elišē, *The History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (Elišēi vasn Vardanay ew Hayoc' paterazmin; Եղիշէի վասն Վարդանայ և Հայոց պատերազմին)

7th cent.

Anania Širakac'i, *Geography* (Ašxarhac'oyc'; Անանիա Շիրակացի, Աշխարհացոյց)

Girk' T'ġ'oc' (Գիրք Թղթոց) = *The Book of Letters*, including additions to the 13th cent.

Ps.-Sebēos, *History* (Patmut'iwn; Սեբէոս, Պատմութիւն)

8th cent.

Movsēs Xorenac'i (Khorenatsi, "of Chorene"), *The History of the Armenians* (Patmut'iwn Hayoc'; *Մովսէս Խորենացի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց*)²

10th cent.

Movsēs Dasxuranc'i (Kałankatuac'i), *The History of the [Caucasian] Albanians* (Patmut'iwn Ałuanic' ašxarhi; *Մովսէս Դասխուրանցի [Կաղանկատուացի], Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի*)³

T'omva Arcruni, *The History of the House of the Arcrunik'* (Patmut'iwn tann Arcroneac'; *Թովմա Արծրունի, Պատմութիւն տանն Արծրունեաց*)

Uxtanēs, *The History of the Armenians* (Patmut'iwn Hayoc'; *Սխտանէս, Պատմութիւն Հայոց*)

² Widely regarded as a historian of the fifth century by specialists in the Republic of Armenia. Although I have opted for an eighth-century attribution, a date anywhere between the seventh and ninth century is possible.

³ Lit. "The History of the Albanian Land". The core of the composite history attributed to Dasxuranc'i/Kałankatuac'i probably attained its received condition in the second half of the tenth century; however, earlier and later materials are evident, the former going back to the seventh century.

Appendix III

K'art'velian Kings and Presiding Princes until the End of the Sasanian Empire

The following table is based upon the meticulous research of Cyril Toumanoff, especially Toumanoff 1969a and 1990. In some cases the regnal dates below diverge substantially from the standard chronology espoused by specialists in the Georgian Republic, for which see Lort'k'ip'anize and Metreveli 2000. See also: Melik'išvili 1999a; and Gugušvili 1936. On the political instability immediately after Mirian III and the possible (re)establishment of diarchs in the second half of the fourth century, see Toumanoff 1990.

P'arnavazianis and affiliated dynasties, including the Nebrotianis (Nimrodids) and Artasēsids (Artaxiads)

299–234 BC	P'arnavaz
234–159	Saurmag I
159–109	Mirvan I (Nebrot'iani)
109–90	P'arnajom/P'arnajob (Nebrot'iani)
90–78	Aršak I (Artasēsīd)
78–63	Artag/Arik (Artasēsīd)
63–30	Bratman/Bartom (Artasēsīd)
30–20	Mirvan II/Mirean (Nebrot'iani)
20 BC–1 AD	Aršak II (Nebrot'iani)
1–58	Aderki/(Ade)rok

(Start of the alleged isochronal diarchy)

?	(Bratman/Bartom and) K'aržam/K'art'am
?	P'arsman I (and Kaos/Kaoz)
?	Azork/Arsok (and Armazel)
106–116	Amazasp I and Derok/Deruk
116–132	P'arsman II and Mirdat I

(End of the alleged diarchy)

132–135	Y'adami/Adami
135–185	P'arsman III
185–189	Amazasp II

Caucasian Arsacids

189–216	Rev
216–234	Vač'e
234–249	Bakur I
249–265	Mirdat II
[260–265]	Amazasp III , pretender supported by the Sasanian Empire]
265–284	Asp'agur I

Chosroid (Xosroiani)-Mihrānids

284–361	Mirian III
345–361	Rev (co-king)
363–?380	Bak'ar I/Bakur
365–380	Mirdat III
380–394	Varaz-Bak'ar II/Varaz-Bakur
394–406	Trdat
406–409	P'arsman IV
409–411	Mirdat IV
411–435	Arč'il
435–447	Mirdat V

447–522	Vaxtang I Gorgasali
522–534	Dač'i
534–547	Bakur II
547–561	P'arsman V
561–?	P'arsman VI
?–ca. 580	Bakur III

(Start of the interregnum; ends 888)

Guaramid presiding princes

588–ca. 590	Guaram I
ca. 590–627	Step'anoz I/Step'anios

Chosroid presiding princes

627–637/642	Adarnase I
637/642–ca. 650	Step'anoz II/Step'anios
ca. 650–684/685	Adarnase II (after whom the presiding principate reverted to the Guaramids)

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Appendix IV

Mihrānid *Bidaxšes* of Somxit'i-Gugark'

Toumanoff's list of the Mihrānid *bidaxšes* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchlands (Toumanoff 1990, 543) exploits the received sources to the fullest extent but remains incomplete.

ca. 330–ca. 7361	P'eroz (i.e., Pērōz)
after 394–after 430	Bakur I (Gk. Bakourios; Lat. Bacurius)
after 430–?	Ašušay/Aršušay I
mid-fifth century	Bakur II
?–before 470	Ašušay/Aršušay II
ca. 470–482	Va[r]sk'en
482–after 540/541	Ašušay/Aršušay III
ca. first decade 7th century	Ašušay/Aršušay IV
late 620s	Vahrām-Ašušay/Aršušay V
mid-8th century	Ašušay/Aršušay VI(?) ¹

¹ Theophanēs, AM 6118, de Boor ed., 491₁₁₋₁₂, Mango and Scott trans., 450, for Barsamoušēs (Βαρσαμούσης < Aram. Bar Šauma), “prince of the Iberians who are subject to Persia” (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν Ἰβήρων τῶν ὑπὸ Πέρσας). He is not attested in surviving Georgian sources. See also Toumanoff 1963, 263. Cf. *Pitioxēs* Bersoumēs; see above, p. 65.

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Appendix V

Sasanian *Šāhan šāhs*

This chronology follows *The Cambridge History of Iran* (1983).

224–240	Ardaxšīr I (Ardašīr)
240–270	Šāpūr I
270–271	Hormīzd I (also called Hormīzd-Ardaxšīr)
271–274	Bahrām I
274–293	Bahrām II
293	Bahrām III
293–302	Narseh
302–309	Hormīzd II
309–379	Šāpūr II
379–383	Ardaxšīr II
383–388	Šāpūr III
388–399	Bahrām IV
399–420	Yazdgird I
420–438	Bahrām V Gōr
438–457	Yazdgird II
457–?459	Hormīzd III
459–484	Pērōz
484–488	Balāš
488–496	Kavād I
496–498	Zāmāsp
498–531	Kavād I (again)
531–579	Xusrō I <i>anōšag-ruwān</i> (var. Anūšīrwān)
579–590	Hormīzd IV
590	Xusrō II
590–591	Bahrām Čōbīn (Mihrānīd)

591–628	Xusrō II (again)
628	Kavād II
628–629	Ardaxšir III
629	Šahrvarāz
630–631	Bōrānduxt
632–651	Yazdgird III

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AA	<i>Azərbaycan Arxeologiyası</i>
AAASH	<i>Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
ÄAT	<i>Ägypten und Altes Testament: Studien zu Geschichte, Kultur und Religion Ägyptens und des Alten Testaments</i>
AATr	<i>Astronomical and Astrophysical Transactions</i>
AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AC	<i>Acta Classica</i>
ACS	<i>Anatolian and Caucasian Studies</i>
ACSS	<i>Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia</i>
AEMA	<i>Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevii</i>
AEW	<i>Ancient East and West</i>
AF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
AFLNW	<i>Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen</i>
AG	<i>Analecta Gorgiana</i>
AGRL	<i>Aspects of Greek and Roman Life</i>
AGSRS	<i>American Geographical Society Research Series</i>
AI	<i>Analecta Iberica</i>
AIr	<i>Acta Iranica</i>
AIIs	<i>Analecta Isisiana</i>
AIUO	<i>Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AKM	<i>Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
AKPL	<i>Adrindeli k'art'uli p'eodaluri literatura</i>
ALCGF	<i>Armenian Library of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation</i>
AMIT	<i>Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan</i>
Analebi	<i>Analebi: istoriis, et'nologiis, religiis šescavlisa da propagandis samec'niero c'entri</i>
ANES	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
ANESS	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement</i>
ANJ	<i>American Numismatic Journal</i>

AnO	Analecta Orientalia
AN-S	Ancient Narrative, Supplementum
ANSMN	American Numismatic Society Museum Notes
AO	Ars Orientalis
AOASH	Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
AOC	Archives de l'Orient chrétien
APAMT ¹	<i>The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times</i> , Richard G. Hovannisian ed., vol. 1, New York, 1997.
APP	Ancient Peoples and Places
ArA	Archäologischer Anzeiger
Aramazd	<i>Aramazd: Armenian Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
ARAn	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
ArAs	<i>Artibus Asiae</i>
ARCA-CMT	ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts
ArG	Armeno-Georgica
ASSC	<i>Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia</i>
AUSBREN-SL	<i>Annales Universitatis Scientiarum Budapestinensis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae (Sectio Linguistica IV)</i>
BA	Byzantina Australiensia
BAI	<i>Bulletin of the Asia Institute</i>
BARIS	BAR International Series
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBA	Berliner byzantinische Arbeiten
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BCSR	Bibliothèque catholique des sciences religieuses
BHAW	Blackwell History of the Ancient World
BHW	Blackwell History of the World
BI	Beiträge zur Iranistik
BIAL	Brill's Inner Asian Library
BJRULM	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BK	<i>Bedi Kartlisa</i>
BOH	Bibliotheca orientalis Hungarica
BS	Byzantina-Sorbonensia
BSFN	<i>Bulletin de la Société française de numismatique</i>
BSGRT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
BSLP	<i>Bulletin de la Société de linguistique de Paris</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BSOS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies</i>

BSS	Black Sea Studies
BTAVO	Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients
BTT	Byzantine Texts in Translation
BVHS	Beiträge zur Vergleichend-Historischen Sprachwissenschaft
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CA	Colloquia Antiqua
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
Caucasica	<i>Caucasica: Zeitschrift für die Erforschung der Sprachen und Kulturen des Kaukasus</i>
CCAW	Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World
CEFR	Collection de l'École française de Rome
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CFM	Corpus Fontium Manichaeorum
CG	<i>The Caucasus & Globalization: Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CHI	<i>Cambridge History of Iran</i>
CHRC	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
CII	Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum
CJSS	<i>Caucasus Journal of Social Sciences</i>
CM	Collection Moneta
CMH	<i>Cambridge Medieval History</i>
CMRS	<i>Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CRAIBL	<i>Comptes-Rendus d'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSHACP	Collection des sources pour l'histoire de l'Asie Centrale pré-islamique
CSI	Cahiers de Studia Iranica
CSIC	Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization
CSNAIH	Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History
CSS	Culture and Society after Socialism
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
CUPAS	Columbia University Program in Armenian Studies, Suren D. Fesjian Academic Publications
CWHL	California World History Library
DAWBIO	Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientforschung
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui

DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DOS	Dumbarton Oaks Studies
DOT	Dumbarton Oaks Texts
EA	<i>Eurasia antiqua: Zeitschrift für Archäologie Eurasiens</i>
EAM	<i>Sak'art'velos mec'nierebat'a erovnuli akademiis moambe</i> = <i>Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences</i>
EAPS	<i>Eranos, Acta Philologica Suecana</i>
EAs	Encounters with Asia
ECTT	Eastern Christian Texts in Translation
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EI	<i>Encyclopædia Iranica</i>
EJWGMs	E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series
ErI	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ES	<i>Enat'mec'nierebis sakit'xebi</i>
EV	<i>Epigrafiika Vostoka</i>
EW	<i>East and West</i>
FKCA	Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GIP	<i>Gundriss der iranischen Philologie</i>
GKCŠ	Garejis kvlevis c'entri šromebi
GPTS	Gorgias Press Texts and Studies
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HA	<i>Handēs Amsōrya</i>
HAf	<i>History in Africa</i>
HAM	Histoire ancienne et médiévale
HANE/M	History of the Ancient Near East/Monographs
HATS	Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies
HC	Histoire du Christianisme
HIS	Harvard Iranian Studies
HMN	Handbücher der Mittelasiatischen Numismatik
HNE	A History of the Near East
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HSAE	Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HSK	Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft
HSNPL	<i>Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUAS	Hebrew University Armenian Studies

<i>Hugoye</i>	<i>Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies</i>
HUS	<i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i>
HZAG	<i>Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte</i>
IA	<i>Iranica Antiqua</i>
IbC	<i>Iberica Caucasia</i>
<i>Iberia and Rome</i>	<i>Iberia and Rome: The Excavations of the Palace at Dedpolis Gora and the Roman Influence in the Caucasian Kingdom of Iberia</i> , A. Furtwängler, I. Gagoshidze, H. Löhr and N. Ludwig eds., SZAKS, Langenweißbach, 2008.
IBK	<i>Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft</i>
IBS	<i>Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft</i>
IC	<i>Iran and the Caucasus</i>
ID	<i>Iranische Denkmäler</i>
IdS	<i>Identity Studies</i>
IIAN	<i>Izvestiia imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk</i>
IIG	<i>Istochniki po istorii Gruzii</i>
IP	<i>Iranisches Personennamenbuch</i>
IS	<i>Iranian Studies</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JGIS	<i>Journal of the Greater India Society</i>
JIES	<i>Journal of Indo-European Studies</i>
JIH	<i>Journal of Indian History</i>
JLA	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	<i>Journal of Persianate Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSAl	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
JSAS	<i>Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JTurkS	<i>Journal of Turkish Studies</i>
JWP	<i>Journal of World Prehistory</i>
KC ¹ , Qauxč'išvili ed.	<i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> , S. Qauxč'išvili ed., vol. 1, T'bilisi, 1955.
KC ² , Qauxč'išvili ed.	<i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> , S. Qauxč'išvili ed., vol. 2, T'bilisi, 1959.
KC, Metreveli ed.	<i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> , Roin Metreveli general ed., T'bilisi, 2008.
KCq	<i>K'art'uli cqarot'mc'odneoba</i>

Kekeliže, <i>Etiudebi</i>	Korneli Kekeliže, <i>Etiudebi žveli k'art'uli literaturis istoriidan</i>
Kent, <i>Old Persian</i>	Roland G. Kent, <i>Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon</i> , 2nd rev. ed., New Haven, CT, 1953.
KISK	K'art'uli istoriuli sabut'ebis korpusi
KJGS	<i>The Kartvelologist: Journal of Georgian Studies</i> (sometimes printed <i>Bulletin of Georgian Studies</i>)
KLCK	K'art'uli lapidaruli carcerebis korpusi
KMLA	Kevork Melidinetsi Literary Award
KSMŽ	K'art'uli saistorio mcerlobis žeglebi
KSSM	K'art'uli samonastro sult'a matianeebi
KV	<i>Khristianskii Vostok</i>
Lang, <i>Lives</i>	David Marshall Lang, <i>Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints</i> , rev. ed., Crestwood, NY, 1976.
LB	<i>Linguistique balkanique</i>
LC	Lapidaruli carcerebi
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LE	Linguistica Extranea
Lerner, <i>Wellspring</i>	Constantine B. Lerner, <i>The Wellspring of Georgian Historiography: The Early Medieval Historical Chronicle The Conversion of K'art'li and The Life of St. Nino</i> , London, 2004.
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LHTI	Literary and Historical Texts from Iran
LM	<i>Le Muséon</i>
LOAPL	<i>Langues orientales anciennes, philology et linguistique</i>
LOS	London Oriental Series
MA	<i>Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
MART	Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching
MBCB	Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava
MDOG	<i>Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
ME	<i>Medieval Encounters</i>
MEIMKIM	<i>Akad. N. Maris saxelobis enis, istoriisa da materialuri kulturis institutis moambe</i>
Melik'išvili, <i>Žiebani</i>	Giorgi Melik'išvili, <i>Žiebani sak'art'elos, kavkasiisa da axlo aymosavlet'is žveli istoriis dargši</i> , T'bilisi, 1999.
ML	Mediaevalia Lovaniensia
MM	Millennio Medievale
MMAA	Monographs of the Medieval Academy of America
MMH	Minnesota Monographs in the Humanities
MPMA	Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevii
NC	<i>The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society</i>

NE	<i>Numizmatika i epigrafika</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NIB	<i>Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān = International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies</i>
NMA	The New Middle Ages
NNM	Numismatic Notes and Monographs
NPNF	A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church
NSRV	<i>The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (New Revised Standard Edition)</i> , Michael D. Coogan ed., 3rd ed., Oxford, 2001.
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
ÖAWPHK	<i>Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-historische Klasse</i>
OBC	<i>Orientalia Biblica et Christiana</i>
OC	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OIG ²	<i>Očerki istorii Gruzii</i> , vol. 2, M.D. Lordkipanidze and D.L. Muskhelishvili eds., T'bilisi, 1988.
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
OO	<i>Oriens et occident</i>
OOM	Oxford Oriental Monographs
OSLA	Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity
OT	<i>Orbis Terrarum</i>
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PBH	<i>Parma-banasirakan Handēs = Istoriko-filologicheskii zhurnal Akademii Nauk Armianskoi SSR</i>
PCO	Peuples et cultures de l'Orient
PCSSAD	Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche: Atti e Documenti
PE	Peoples of Europe
PEFR	Publications de l'École française de Rome
PGIL	Pamiatniki gruzinskoi istoricheskoi literatury
PHC	Praeger History of Civilization
PHS	Persian Heritage Series
PIOL	Publications de l'Institut orientaliste de Louvain
PL	Patrologia Latina
PLNV-T	Pamiatniki literatury narodov Vostoka: Teksty (bol'shaia seriia)
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
PP	<i>Past and Present</i>

PPS	Publications of the Philological Society
PS	<i>Palestinskii sbornik</i>
PTS	Persian Text Series
RA	<i>Rossiiskaia arkeologiia</i>
Rapp, <i>Studies</i>	Stephen H. Rapp Jr, <i>Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts</i> , CSCO, vol. 601, Subsidia, vol. 113, Louvain, 2003.
REArm	<i>Revue des études arméniennes</i>
REB	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
REGC	<i>Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes</i>
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RH	<i>Revue historique</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RIERA	Actes du colloque organisé au Collège de France par le "Réseau international d'études de recherches achéménides"
RO	<i>Res Orientales</i>
RSO	<i>Revista degli studi orientali</i>
SA	<i>Social Anthropology</i>
SAr	<i>Supplementum Aristotelicum</i>
SAWB	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin</i>
SBE	<i>Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica</i>
SBK	Schriften der Balkan-Kommission
SCH	Studies in Comparative History
SChH	Studies in Church History
SGKAO	Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients
SH	<i>Subsidia hagiographica</i>
SHe	<i>Studia Hellenistica</i>
SI	<i>Studia Iranica</i>
SIC	<i>Studia Iranica, Cahier</i>
SIIŠ	<i>Ivane javaxišvilis saxelobis t'bilis saxelmci p'o universiteti humanitarul mec'nierebat' a p'akulteti, sak'art' velos istoriis instituti šromebi</i>
SMAM	<i>Sak'art' velos ssr mec'nierebat' a akademiis moambe</i>
SMGM	<i>Sak'art' velos mec'nierebat' a akademiis sazogadoebriv mec'nierebat' a ganqop'ilebis moambe</i>
SMM	<i>Sak'art' velos muzeumis moambe</i>
SMOMPK	<i>Sbornik materialov dlia opisaniia mestnostei i plemen Kavkaza</i>
SOP	Sasanika Occasional Papers
SOR	Serie orientale Roma
SOURS	Studi Orientali dell'Università di Roma 'la Sapienza'
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>

SPBS	Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies
SPOPP-AS	Scholars Press Occasional Papers and Proceedings, Armenian Studies
SR	<i>Slavic Review</i>
SS	Schwarzmeer-Studien
SSCISSM	Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo
SSMM	<i>Sak'art'velos saxelmcp'o muzeumis moambe</i>
SŠSIS	<i>Sak'art'velos šua saukuneebis istoriis sakit'xebi</i>
ST	Studi i Testi
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SWAPHK	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie, Phil.-Hist. Klasse</i>
SZAKS	Schriften des Zentrums für Archäologie und Kulturgeschichte des Schwarzmeerraumes
TAMS	<i>Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society</i>
TAVO	Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients
TCH	Transformation of the Classical Heritage
TEB	Traité d'études Byzantines
<i>Terminologia</i>	<i>Sak'art'velosa da k'art'velebis aymnišvneli uc'xouri da k'art'uli terminologia</i> , G. Païčaze ed., T'bilisi, 1993.
TH	Théologie historique
Thomson, <i>RCH</i>	Robert W. Thomson, <i>Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, the original Georgian texts and the Armenian adaptation</i> , OOM, Oxford, 1996.
<i>TICP</i>	<i>Travaux de l'institut catholique de Paris</i>
TLD	Trends in Linguistics: Documentation
TM	Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance
<i>TRAGF</i>	<i>Teksty i razyskaniia armiano-gruzinskoi filologii</i>
TSEC	Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
<i>TVOIRAO</i>	<i>Trudy vostochnago otdeleniia imperatorskago russkago arkheologicheskago Obshchestva</i>
UMM	University Museum Monograph
UPA	Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie
VC	<i>Vetera Christianorum</i>
VDI	<i>Vestnik drevnei istorii</i>
WEC	Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300–1500
WHC	World Histories of Civilization
<i>World of the Khazars</i>	<i>The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives</i> , Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai and András Róna-Taz eds., Leiden, 2007.
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

WWU	Worte—Weke—Utopien: Thesen und Texte Münsterscher Gelehrter
WZKM	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
XIM	<i>Sak'art'velos ssr mec'nierebat'a academia xelnacert'a institutis moambe</i>
ŽKALŽ	<i>Žveli k'art'uli agiograp'iuli literaturis žeglebi</i>
ŽKEKŠ	<i>Žveli k'art'uli enis kat'edris šromebi</i>
ŽKM	<i>Žveli k'art'veli mexotbeni</i>
ŽKMŽ	<i>Žveli k'art'uli mcerlobis žeglebi</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
ZVOIRAO	<i>Zapiski vostochnago Otdeleniia imperatorskago russkago arkheologicheskago Obshchestva</i>

Manuscripts

Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts (Sak'art'velos xelnacert'a erovnuli c'entri), formerly the Korneli Kekelize Institute of Manuscripts, T'bilisi

A-95	Parxali <i>mravalt'avi</i> (Parkhali <i>polykephalon</i> ; includes <i>Vita Šušānik</i>)	11th cent.
A-144	Klarjet'ian <i>mravalt'avi</i> (<i>polykephalon</i>)	10th cent.
A-170	Collection of Georgian <i>vitae</i> (includes <i>Vita Ražden</i>)	1733
H-341	Collection of texts (“ <i>krebuli</i> ”, includes <i>Vita Evstat'i</i>)	late 10th/early 11th cent.
H-600	Čeliši Codex (includes <i>Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay</i>)	13th/14th cent.
H-988	P'alavandišviliseuli (P) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> (Vaxtangiseuli recension)	1719–1744
H-2135	Mač'abliseuli (m) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> (Vaxtangiseuli recension, though this manuscript shares many traits with the pre-Vaxtangiseuli recension)	1736
Q-207	Čalašviliseuli (C) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i>	second half 16th cent.

Q-795	Anaseuli (A) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i>	1479–1495
Q-1219	Mc'xet'ian (Q) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i>	1697
S-25	Barat'ašviliseuli (b) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i> (Vaxtangiseuli recension)	1761
S-30	Mariamiseuli (M) redaction of <i>K'art'lis c'xovreba</i>	1633–1645/1646
S-1141	Šatberdi Codex (includes <i>Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay</i>)	10th cent.
S-3269	Ecclesiastical collection (includes <i>Vita Ražden</i>)	probably 1720s

Library of St Catherine's Monastery, Mt Sinai, Egypt

Sin. Geo.N.13	Palimpsest, Georgian ascetical and hagiographical works, with Albanian underwriting	10th–11th cents. (Albanian late 7 th –early 10th cent.)
Sin. Geo.N.48	Sin.Geo.N.48 redaction of <i>Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay</i> (fragment)	10th cent.
Sin. Geo.N.50	Sin.Geo.N.50 redaction of <i>Mok'c'evay k'art'lisay</i>	first half 10th cent.
Sin. Geo.N.55	Palimpsest, Georgian alphabetical apophthegms, with Albanian underwriting	10th cent. (Albanian late 7 th –early 10th cent.)

Ivērōn Monastery, Mt Athos, Greece

Ivērōn-57	<i>Menaion</i> (includes <i>Vita Children of Kolay</i>)	10th cent.
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Matenadaran, Erevan, Armenia

1902	<i>Patmut'iwn Vrac'</i> , redaction a (Arm/A)	1274–1311
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Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna

Vindo-
bonensis
georgicus 2

Palimpsest (upper layer is a 12th-cent. *menaion*
bottom layers belong to 5th/6th cent.)

5th/6th–12th cents.

Contemporary Texts and Published Manuscripts

NB: In most cases, titles of corpora and compilations are transliterated and those of discrete texts (even when transmitted exclusively within corpora) are translated into English. Translations of editions that have not been modified are indicated by “=” in the footnotes, e.g.: Vita Nino (K'C'), *Qauxč' išvili* ed., 106_{9–18} = Thomson trans., 115.

*Acts of the Ecumenical
Councils*

The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church, Henry R. Percival ed. and comm., NPNF, vol. 14, 2nd ser., New York, 1900.

Adiši Gospels

Adišis ot'xt'avi 897 clisa, Zurab Sarjvelaže ed., T'bilisi, 2003.

Agat'angelos

Arm. “Aa” witness of Agat'angelos = Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, R.W. Thomson trans. and comm., Albany, NY, 1976 (includes facing Arm. text). For Eng. trans. of Arm. (Aa), Gk. (Vg, Vo), Arab. (Va) and Syr. (Vs) witnesses, see *The Lives of Saint Gregory: The Armenian, Greek, Arabic, and Syriac Versions of the History Attributed to Agathangelos*, Thomson trans. and comm., Ann Arbor, MI, 2010.

Agathias

Agathias, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, Rudolfus Keydell ed., CFHB, vol. 2, Berlin, 1967. Eng. trans.: *The Histories*, Joseph D. Frendo trans., CFHB, vol. 2a, Berlin and New York, 1975.

Ammianus Marcellinus

Ammianus Marcellinus, *Histories*, John C. Rolfe ed. and trans., LCL, 3 vols., Cambridge, MA, 1935–1939.

Anania Širakac'i

Anania Širakac'i, *Ašxarhac'oyc'*; long recension: *Ašxarhac'oyc' Movsēsi Xorenac'woy*, A. Soukry [Sukrean] ed., Venice, 1881; short recension: “*Ašxarhac'oyc'*”, in Anania Širakac'i, *Matenagrut'yuna*, A.G. Abrahamyan ed., Erevan, 1944, 336–354. (Both recensions repr. Delmar, NY, 1994, with intro. by Robert H. Hewsen). Eng. trans.: *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhac'oyc')*: *The Long and the Short Recensions*, Hewsen trans. and comm., BTAVO, Reihe B, vol. 77, Wiesbaden, 1992.

Ananun žamanakagrut'iwn

Ananun žamanakagrut'iwn, B. Sargisēan ed., Venice, 1904.

- Anonymous Story-Teller "The Anonymous Story-Teller (Also Known as 'Pseudo-Šapuh')", Robert W. Thomson trans. and comm., *REArm* n.s. 21 (1988–1989): 171–232.
- Antiochos Stratēgos Geo. witness of *The Siege of Jerusalem* = *La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614*, Gérard Garitte ed. and mod. Lat. trans., CSCO, vols. 202–203, *Scriptores Iberici*, vols. 11–12, Louvain, 1960. Alternate Geo. text and Rus. trans., with a fragment of the Arabic text: Antiokh Stratig, *Plenienie Ierusalima persami v 614 g.*, N.Ia. Marr trans., TRAGF, vol. 9, SPB, 1909. Eng. trans. (based on Marr's Geo. text): Frederick C. Conybeare, "Antiochus Strategos' Account of the Sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 614", *EHR* 25/99 (July 1910): 502–517.
- Apocalypse of Daniel* *The Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel*, Matthias Henze trans., STAC, vol. 11, Tübingen, 2001.
- Arrian, *Anabasis* Arrian, *Anabasis Alexandri*, E. Iliff Robson ed. and trans., LCL, 2 vols., London and Cambridge, MA, 1929–1933.
- Arsen Iqalt'oeli, *Metaphrastic Vita Nino* Arsen Beri, *C'xorebay da mok'alak'obay da yuacli cmidisa da yirsisa dedisa c'uenisa ninoysi*, in *Žveli k'art'uli agiograp'iuli literaturis žeglebi*, Ilia Abulaže ed., vol. 3, T'bilisi, 1971, 7–51 [hereafter: *ŽKALŽ*]. See also: Arsen Iqalt'oeli, *C'xoreba da mok'alak'oba da yuacli cmidisa da yirsisa dedisa c'venisa ninoisi*, in *Žveli k'art'uli literatura*, Ivane Lolašvili ed., T'bilisi, 1978, 352–396.
- Beri Egnatašvili [The New K'art'lis c'xovreba: First Text] = Beri Egnatašvili, *Axali k'art'lis c'xovreba, pirveli tek'sti*, in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, S. Qauxč'išvili ed., vol. 2, T'bilisi, 1959, 326–442 [hereafter: *KC*², Qauxč'išvili ed.].
- Bible See NSRV (Abbreviations).
- Book of the Bee* *The Book of the Bee*, Ernest A. Wallis Budge trans., 2 vols., Oxford, 1866.
- Book of the Cave of Treasures* *La Caverne des Trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, Su-Min Ri ed. and trans., CSCO, vols. 486–487, *Scriptores Syri*, vols. 207–208, Louvain, 1987. Eng. trans.: *The Book of the Cave of Treasures: A History of the Patriarchs and the Kings, Their Successors, from the Creation to the Crucifixion of Christ*, E.A. Wallis Budge trans., London, 1927.
- Book of the Cave of Treasures* (Geo.) *La Caverne des Trésors: version géorgienne*, Ciala Kourcikidzé [K'urc'ikiže] ed. and Jean-Pierre Mahé trans., CSCO, vols. 526–527, *Scriptores Iberici*, vols. 23–24, Louvain, 1992–1993. Alternate Geo. ed.: *Dabadebisat'ws c'isa da k'ueqanisa (ganža k'vabi)*, K'urc'ikiže ed., in *K'art'lis c'xovreba*, Roin Metreveli general ed., T'bilisi, 2008, 657–711 [hereafter: *KC*, Metreveli ed.].

- “Canons of Mārūtā” *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqaṭ and Related Sources*, Arthur Vööbus trans., CSCO, vol. 440, Scriptores Syri, vol. 192, Louvain, 1982.
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