

History

The Dates of the Reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali

Sanadze Manana,
The University of Georgia

Georgian historiography dates the reign of King Vakhtang Gorgasali to the 2nd half of V c. The king is considered to have died in 502 in a fight with Persians. Cyril Toumanoff has expressed an opinion about the identification of Vakhtang Gorgasali with the King of Kartli Gurgen, mentioned by Procopius of Caesarea in 523. Accordingly, he believed that in case of such an identification, Vakhtang Gorgasali should have died in 527 during the big Persian invasion of Georgia. We have noticed that the author of the martyrdom of David and Constantine, who was based on the ancient chronicle ('Dzveli Utskebani' - Old Story) and who created his hagiographic work in the middle of XI c., made a big mistake: erroneously, due to the similarity of names, he identified the sons of Georgian King Vakhtang Gorgasali Darchil and Mirdat and the invasion of Persians in their reign with the sons of the ruler of Georgia (Kartli) Stephanoz III Mirdat and Archil and invasions of Arabs and Marwan ibn Muhammad (Murvan Qru - "Marwan the Deaf") that took place two centuries later, in the 30s of VIII c. Consequently, the author related the martyrdom on the background of Arab invasions. The fact that according to the author of the martyrdom, the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali were in West Georgia, namely Anakopia, and fought the so-called Arabs there, makes it clear that the historical developments were taking place in the period of the Great Persian-Byzantine War of 542-562. In the title of the work it is mentioned that the invasion, during which the martyrdom of David and Constantine took place, happened in the vicinity of the death of Vakhtang Gorgasali. Thus, it becomes clear that King Vakhtang Gorgasali could not have died during the Persian-Byzantine War of 502-505 and that the Great Invasion of Persians described in the "Georgian Chronicles", in which Vakhtang Gorgasali was wounded, could only have happened in 527; the king must have died during a war between Persia and Byzantium in 527-532, more specifically in 527 when Persians invaded Georgia. Proceeding from the above, the surmise of Cyril Toumanoff regarding the death of Vakhtang Gorgasali in 527 becomes more convincing and well-grounded. Since it is known that King Vakhtang Gorgasali lived 60 years, the date of his birth can be presumed to be 466-467. This gives us an opportunity to establish a more precise date of reign of Vakhtang's father - Mirdat and his grandfather - Archil. The dates of reign we have put forward for kings Mirdat and Archil (Archil - 430-463, Mirdat - 463-473) correspond to the information of the Assyrian version of the Life of Peter the Iberian.

Chronology of kings is one of the central issues in the history of ancient and early feudal Georgia. Restoring the correct picture of the political history of the country depends a lot on a somewhat precise determination of the chronology of the kings. The chronology of Vakhtang Gorgasali has one of the key places in this regard. Some Georgian and non-Georgian scholars have made an attempt to determine the approximate dates of reign of the great king who ruled Georgia on the verge of the late ancient and the early feudal epochs. Research into the timeline has been done on various levels, starting from a more superficial level and ending with profound studies. Nonetheless, the issue is still widely debated, partially due to scarcity in the source studies base, and partially due to the inadequate critical analysis of the existing sources. The objective of the current presentation is to offer a different perspective on the period of rule of King Vakhtang Gorgasali and hence set the correct record of the chronology of Christian Georgian kings of IV-VI cc. I am planning to present my point of view based on the new interpretation of data from sources related to the dating of King Vakhtang Gorgasali.

As we know (Ammianus Marcellinus), by the year 368, for a short while Kartli was split into two parts again, between the Sassanid Persia and the Roman Empire: the left bank of Mtkvari, ruled by the King of Kartli (Eastern Georgian Kingdom) Asparug, fell under Persian influence, while the right bank of Mtkvari called Gugark in Armenian sources (the same Gogarena of Strabo - the name comes from Persian Gorgan as they referred to Kartli - Iberia) ruled by Saurmag, fell under the general Roman jurisdiction, more specifically - it was subdued by Armenia.

In the Georgian Chronicles Asparug is placed before Mirian. As we have shown in our monograph, this is the result of the duplication of the line of kings (Sanadze, 2001, pp. 133-148) and the reading of Varaz-(As) parug (from Varaz-Asparug) as Varaz Bakur as well.

Rev, Vache (nickname of Mirian), Bakur, Mirdat, Aspagur

Rev, Mirian (the real name of Vache), Bakur, Mirdat, Varaz-Bakur

If we take out the duplicated names of kings in the second line Rev, Mirian, Bakur, Mirdat we will get the correct version of the line of kings: Rev, Vache (the same Mirian), Bakur, Mirdat, Asparug, Varaz-Bakur.

Varaz in Persian stands for ‘the boar’, so Varaz-Bakur means the powerful, boar Bakur, and is the same as Great Bakur of the Greek version of the ‘Life of Peter the Iberian’.

We have a few footings to determine the chronology of kings after Varaz-Bakur (Great Bakur) who seemingly reign for a short period of time: Trdat, his father-in-law, then his son Parsman, Mirdat (Bosmarios - the father of Peter the Iberian), Archil I (the grandfather of Vakhtang Gorgasar), Mirdat (the father of Vakhtang Gorgasar).

1. First we will overview the chronology of the King of Kartli Parsman V, who became the first king between Varaz-Bakur's (Great Bakur's) sons. Parsman had to escape from Arcadius, the Emperor of Eastern Rome (395 - 408) and leave the capital as soon as the Emperor married Eudocia – the woman that Parsman V had been dating before the marriage of Emperor on her. Eudocia and Arcadius married in April, 395, which means that Parsman was in Georgia that year and he could have become king if not the same year, then at least soon after (Goiladze, 1990, pp. 41-45; Bogveradze, 1999, pp. 60; Beradze, Sanadze, 2003, pp. 80). Arcadius himself could have helped him ascend the throne. In any case, "The Georgian Chronicles" emphasizes the closeness of Parsman V to the emperor and the assistance rendered by the latter to Parsman V in his fight against Persians. Parsman, according to the Georgian Chronicles, ruled Kartli for a short while and passed away shortly after. Thus, he presumably reigned in 395/96-400. In the thirty five year period, from the beginning of 360s till 395 there were four kings in power: Mirdat (Miriban of Ammianus Marcellinus), Asparug, Varaz Bakur (Great Bakur) and Trdat. At first glance, it might look like too many kings for a relatively short period of time, yet, the number of kings will no longer seem suspicious if we take into account the fact that in the Sassanid branch (Khosroians) reigning Kartli, the throne was not passed on from father to son, but to the eldest person in family (the brothers of the king), which explains why kings ascended thrones at quite an old age.

The second chronological footing in the date of birth and the taking hostage of Peter the Iberian. Based on the Asyrian Life of Peter Iberian (Lolashvili, 1988) and some other Byzantine sources (Kaukhchishvili, 1960, pp. 66, 199, 265-266) the birthday of Peter is considered to be in 411/12, while the year when he was taken hostage - 423/424, since it is well-known that Peter the Iberian was taken hostage by Theodosius the Younger (408 - 450) when the former was 12 years old. Bosmarios (Bosorg Mitra in Persian, the same Great Mitra, Mirdat), the father of Peter the Iberian, the same King Mirdat of the Georgian Chronicles (the son of Varaz-Bakur, the brother of Parsman) who reigned after Parsman V personally accompanied his son while sending him hostage to the emperor; thus by 424 he was still on the throne of Kartli. According to the Georgian Chronicles, Persians took hostage of King Mirdat and took him to their land, where he passed away. The same chronicle relates that before the death of Mirdat in Persia, and hence the selection of a new king in Kartli, the throne of Kartli was empty for three years. And after the death of Mirdat, noblemen enthroned his nephew Archil there. Thus, it will not be a big mistake to regard 425/27 - as the time when Mirdat was taken hostage, 428-430 – as the kingless period and the vicinity of 430/431 – the time when Archil was seated on the throne. The dates above can be sub-

stantiated by the strict policy of Iran in the South Caucasus, which was revealed through an aspiration to bring local governments to an end; in 428 Iran abolished the kingdom in Armenia. This is the time when the King of Kartli Mirdat, the father of Peter the Iberian, must have been taken hostage.

Archil must have reigned for quite a long time, because in his reign Kartli had three different archbishops, with the fourth starting to serve still in the reign of Archil. Thus, the reign of the king is supposed to have lasted for at least 25-30 years, i. e. till 455/60. After this, Mirdat, the son of Archil and the father of Vakhtang - ascended the throne. Mirdat was already the king when Vakhtang was born, while at the time of the death of Mirdat, Vakhtang was seven years old. Thus, the reign of Mirdat is supposedly no shorter than 8 years. This way, Vakhtang could not have been born before 462. Such dating is completely different from the versions spread in the Georgian historiography dealing with the life time of King Vakhtang. Indeed, the date of the death of King Vakhtang is generally believed to be 502. (Vakhtang Goiladze even mentions 491 as the death date). In such a case it turns out that Vakhtang was born in 442 (correspondingly, Vakhtang Goiladze points out 431), since, based on "The Georgian Chronicles" Vakhtang was 60 years old when he died. Proceeding from all the above mentioned it becomes clear that the version of the date of birth of King Vakhtang (442), so far prevailing in Georgian historiography, - is absolutely groundless. Changing the date (not earlier than 462) makes a significant change in terms of dating Vakhtang's death, which, therefore, cannot be earlier than 522; it also gives us a different perspective on the identification of the King of Kartli Gurgen, mentioned in the events of 523 in the work of historian Procopius of Caesarea. If Vakhtang is still alive by 523, then we are led to believe that Gurgen, the King of Iberia, who visits the Byzantine Caesar, is actually Vakhtang himself. Seemingly, similar logics led the American historian Cyril Toumanoff to the same conclusion (Toumanoff, 1963a, p. 199-200; Toumanoff, 1976b, p. 286). The point is that the Persian word *Gurgen* carries the meaning "of the wolf"; the pronunciation of Vakhtang's nickname *Gorgasal* is a distorted version of the Persian *go/urg -a- sar* - "having the head of a wolf": *gurg* - wolf, *a* - a vowel connecting two words and *sar/ser* - head; (compare with the Georgian word სერ-ი (ser-i, hill). "R" and "n" are both nasal sounds and are phonetically equivalent in pronunciation. Thus, Greeks could have interpreted *Gurg-(a-s)a/er* as Gurgen; especially as under Persian influence the name Gurgen was familiar to them, in so far as it was a popular name for people of Georgian or Armenian origin.

In which battle with Persians could Vakhtang have perished, especially as the Georgian Chronicles presents large-scale military operations? Hostilities of the scale in those times were only those of the Persian inva-

sion of Egrisi in 527, which was carried out via Kartli. The Persian invasion followed the visit of Gurgen (the same Vakhtang) and Egrisi ruler Tsate to the Byzantine Caesar. The time of Vakhtang's death - 527 allows for determining the precise date of his birth, which is 467. This, in its turn, give us an opportunity to come up with more precise dates for the death of his grandfather Archil and the enthronement of his father Mirdat. Vakhtang was four years younger than his elder sister Khvaramze. Accordingly, Khvaramze must have been born in 463. Mirdat was not yet a king when Khvaramze was born. This can be concluded from the following: when Mirdat married Sagdukht, as a prince he was given the saeristavo (administrative unit in old Georgia) of Samshvilde by Archil. Mirdat and his wife lived in Samshvilde for a while, where Sagdukht built the Sioni of Samshvilde. We should consider that Khvaramze, the first child, was born to the couple in Samshvilde. This point is further substantiated by another circumstance: in the "Georgian Chronicles" there is no reference to Khvaramze having a mamamdzudze (the head of a family to whom a prince is given for upbringing) at all, while in case of Vakhtang and his younger sister Mirandukht, the chronicles offer a detailed account of how the two were raised by mamamdzudze. It is only natural, the story of giving the child of Mirdat - Khvaramze, the daughter of the prince for upbringing would not make a story of top importance; however as for the children of Mirdat as a king, choosing a family that would raise him would already be an issue of domestic policy. Hence, Mirdat must have ascended the throne in 464-466; this is also the time of the death of Mirdat's father Archil.

We would like to touch on the etymology of Vakhtang's name as well. As we know, according to the "Georgian Chronicles", the full name of Vakhtang is Varan Khosrowtang. Khosrowtang can be found in other Georgian sources as well and stand for the Sassanid dynasty on the whole. Khosrowtang have to be a distorted version of Khosrotagn, which should be deciphered as Khosrotag(a)n and mean 'descending from Khosro's', the same 'descending from Sassanids'. As to the Persian name "Varan", it is the same "Guaram" of the later period. Thus, the name Vakhtang is the result of using an acronym while entering the full name Va (ran) Kh(osro) Tag(a)n in the text and the subsequent failure to understand the acronym. This accounts for the absence of the name Vakhtang among Vakhtang's offspring for centuries, while the name Guaram was quite widespread.

After Vakhtang, starting from 527, Kartli was ruled by the eldest son of Vakhtang from his first marriage (to Balandukht) Darchil (Dachi). Vakhtang had the son at the age of thirty-five (502/3). This way, at the time of enthronement, Darchil (in this context we do not mean ascension to throne at the age of five) was 25 years old. "The Georgian Chronicles", seems to reflect the Byzantian-Persian "permanent ceasefire" (532), in

the form of Vakhtang's will, according to which three South-Western provinces of the Kartli Kingdom: the saeristavos of Tsunda, Klarjeti and Odzrkhi came under the Byzantine protectorate. The governor of this part of Kartli was Vakhtang's son from his Greek wife (Helen), the younger brother of King Darchil - Mirdat, the same Mihr//Mir (Mitra), who had the title of a Byzantine Patrician ("Head of Eristavis", according to the "Georgian Chronicles").

Vakhtang's son King Darchil and his half brother patrician Mirdat (Mir) (Erismtavari of the Georgian Chronicles is the Georgian translation of the Byzantine Patrician), fought on the Byzantine side during the Persia-Byzantine War, which is best known as the great wartime and which took place in 540-562; the war was waged on the territory of Georgia starting from 542.

A hagiographic work written in the middle of XI century, and devoted to the martyrdom of princes of Argveti: David and Constantine used the historical chronicle of VI century, but the Persians were interpreted as Arabians by him, as well as, while fire worshippers and the magi as followers of Islam. But this chronological mistake was easy to notice because the hagiographic work offers us information on the participation of Vakhtang Gorgasali's son's Darchil and Mirdat in the war (Sanadze, Arakhamia, 2013. pp. 105-116).

In the battle against Persians at Anakopia, King Darchil and his brother Mirdat suffered defeats and the Darchil got killed. This story was narrated much later by Leonti Mroveli, who identified the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali Darchil and Mirdat reigning in the mid VI c with Mir and Archil -- the sons of Stepanoz III, Erismtavari of Kartli, who were fighting Arabs in the 1st part of VIII c. This way the historian combined the story of the sons of Stepanoz III fighting against Arabs, with the story of Darchil and King Mirdat. Leonti was misled by the fact that in his era, the author of hagiographical work of Martyrdom of David and Constantine already had Arabs as the historical background for his story.

Considering the dates of Davit and Constantan's torture, and considering the difference that is given between Byzantine and Georgian versions "from the beginning of times", we can state that Darchil was killed at Anakopia by Persians in 545. At the time of his death, King Darchil would probably be 43 years old. At the same time, the Kartli throne was to be passed over to his son Bakur, who would be around 20-23 years old at the time of enthronement. The end of Bakur's reign coincides with the end of the wartime. This is the very period when reign was abolished in Kartli and Tbilisi turned into a residence of Persian officer-marzbans. As for the immediate offspring of Bakur and all the following 'kings': Bakur's son Parsman VI, the nephew of Parsman - Parsman VII and the son of the latter Bakur – they still called themselves 'kings', yet out of the royal Kartli territories they only ruled Kakheti.

Thus, in approximately a two-century span, from 375/80 to 562 i. e. after the reign of Asparug and before the end of reign of kings in Kartli, the kings of Kartli are laid out according to the following chronology:

Asparug	aprx. 368–375
Varaz Bakur (the same Great Bakur, the grandfather of Peter the Iberian),	aprx. 375–385
Trdat (Father –in-Law of Varaz Bakur)	aprx. 385-395
Parsman V	aprx. 395/396 - 400
Mirdat//Bosmarios (father of Peter the Iberian)	aprx. 400 – 427
Archil	aprx. 430/431–463
Mirdat (father of Vakhtang-Gorgasali)	aprx. 463–473
Vakhtang (the same Varan/Guaram I)	aprx. 473 – 527
Darchil	527-545
Mirdat, brother of Darchil the Patrician and parallel ruler in the South West Kartli	532– aprx. 550s
Bakur the son of Darchil	545– aprx. 550s

References

- Beradze, T., Sanadze, M. (2003). *Sak'art'velos istoria* [History of Georgia]. Tbilisi, pp. 80.
- Bogveradze, A. (1999). *Petre iberis c'xovreba* [The Life of Peter the Iberian] by John Rufus, as a source of the history of Georgia. *Historical Issues of Feudal Georgia, VII*, pp. 60.
- Kaukhchishvili, S. (1960). *Georgika* [Georgica]. *Information of Byzantine Authors about Georgia*. [Translation from Greek, review and comments], I, Tbilisi, pp. 66, 199, 265-266.
- Goiladze, V. (1990). *P'arnavaziant'a saxlis k'ristian mep'et'a k'ronologia* [The Timeline of Christian Kings of the Parnavazian Family]. Tbilisi, pp. 41-45;
- Sanadze, M. (2001). *K'art'lis c'xovreba da sak'art'velos istoriis uzvelesi periodi k'art'losidan mirianamde* [The Georgian Chronicles and The Ancient Period of the History of Georgia (from Kartlos till Mirian)]. Tbilisi. pp. 133-148.
- Sanadze, M., & Arakhamia, G. (2013). *VI s. istoriuli k'ronika "davit' da kostantines camebaši"* [The VI Century Historic Chronicle in "The Martyrdom of Davit and Kostantin"]. pp. 105-116.
- Lolashvili, I. (1988). *Petre iberis c'xovreba* [The Life of Peter the Iberian]. [Asyrian edition. Translation from German, review, comments and explanatory index]. Tbilisi.
- Toumanoff, C. (1963a). *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*. Georgetown University Press, p. 199-200.
- Toumanoff, C. (1976b). *Manuel de Généalogie et de Chronologie Pour l'histoire de la Caucasic Chrétienne. (Arménie-Georgie-Albanic)*, foma, p. 286.