

Unknown Georgian Chronicles Recounting the Persian-Byzantine War of 541-562 and the Khazar Capture of Tbilisi in 628 (Theses)

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ABSTRACT

While researching the details of the Georgian hagiographic work written around 1058 – The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine – it became evident that the invasion described therein, followed by the martyrdom of the principals of Argveti, Davit and Costantine, was not actually the invasion of the armies of Marwan the Deaf and the Arabs, despite the attempt of the 11th-century author to portray it as such. But it narrates the history of the Persian-Byzantine War that took place in 541-562. Historian of the second half of the 11th century, Leonti Mroveli, possessed another chronicle describing the same event, different from the one available to the hagiographer. Because the text of The Georgian Chronicles in his possession had already been extended prior to the appearance of the Arabs and the reign of Stephanos II (mid-7th century), he positioned the obtained chronicle immediately after Stephanos II to further continue the narrative. In this way, the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali, who lived during the Persian-Byzantine War and participated in it, namely Darchil and Mihrdat (also known as Mihr), turned into the sons of Stephanos II, Archil and Mihr. Another piece of information from one more chronicle, which Leonti also inserted, albeit with chronological confusion, is a narrative about Juansher and Ioane, whom he presented as the sons of Archil and actors of the end of the 8th century. In reality, the chronicle tells us about the situation in Kartli in 628–635 – specifically, the capture of Tbilisi by the Khazars in 628 and the history of the representatives of the Revian branch of the Sassanians (Khosrowids) of the Kartli Kingdom, Juansher, and his sister Shushana.

Keywords: The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine, hagiography, Vakhtang Gorgasali, the Mighty, Persian, Anacopia Fortress, Darchil, Tsuketi, Kasri, Khazars, Khagan, Juansher, Shushana

INTRODUCTION

Georgian historians have remained puzzled as to why our ancient historiography does not mention, even briefly, such a significant and epoch-making event for our country as the war between Persia and Byzantium in 541–562, especially considering the fact that it occurred mainly in the territory of Georgia, particularly Egrisi.

A special examination of a well-known hagiographic work known as *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine*, along with the section of *The Georgian Chronicles* dedicated to the life and activities of the alleged sons of Stephanos II – Mihr and Archil (including *The Martyrdom of Archil*) – has made it clear that both the unknown hagiographer, while composing his hagiographic work, and Leonti Mroveli, while extending the section of *The Georgian Chronicles* following Stephanos II, used chronicles that did not tell us about the Arabs, Marwan the Deaf, and the events of the 8th century in general. Instead, they depicted Khosrow Anushirvan’s invasion of Georgia (542/543) during the Persian-Byzantine War of 541–562, as well as the events happening during this invasion.

Also erroneously, this time, the chronicler of Bagrat IV (although the mistake may again belong to Leonti Mroveli), whom we consider to be the author of the section known as *Matiane Kartlisa* (Sanadze, 2019, pp. 235–237), chronologically misplaced the chronicle that narrated not the story of Arabs and the events happening at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, but rather the developments of the first third of the 7th century, in particular the events in Kartli during and following the departure of Heraclius Caesar from Kartli and the capture and annihilation of Tbilisi by the Khazars in 628. He “rejuvenated” the events by inserting them more than a century and a half later in the epoch of Asim Chichnaum, in the section describing historical events before Ashot Curopalates.

METHODS

The study employs an analytical approach, juxtaposing and critically analyzing information preserved in various ancient sources, including hagiographic works, chronicles, and historical records, to uncover and interpret the misplacement of historical events, figures, and timelines within Georgian historiography. This method enables the identification of errors and the accurate contextualization of narratives related to the Persian-Byzantine War and the Khazar invasion of Tbilisi.

RESULTS

Two ancient chronicles recount the Persian-Byzantine War of 541–562. One of these chronicles served as the basis for the hagiographic work composed by an unknown author in 1058 – *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine* (see Sanadze & Arakhamia, 2013, pp. 26–30). The second chronicle, somewhat later, at the end of the 11th century, was used by Leonti Mroveli as the foundation for both his narrative of the events of the first half and the middle of the 8th century in *The Georgian Chronicles* and a hagiographic work he specifically created – *The Martyrdom of Archil* (Sanadze, 2020, pp. 27–31, 154–182).

The first mistake made by the hagiographer was setting the Arab era as the historical backdrop for the events depicted in his source during the process of paraphrasing. This adjustment made the narrative in his newly created hagiographic work appear 200 years younger than the actual time.

The account of the battle and torture of the princes of Argveti was not given in the text that Leonti had access to. Nonetheless, his chronicle did recount the invasion of the enemy at Anacopia and the battle against the kings of Kartli, alongside the flood – the overflowing of the Tskhenistskali and Abashistskhali rivers – and the demise of a substantial number of horses (35,000).

Since these stories had already been described against the backdrop of the invasion of the Arabs and Marwan the Deaf by the hagiographer preceding Leonti, and the manuscript of *The Georgian Chronicles* he was working on to extend and continue the narrative ended with the description of the reign of Stephanos II – the son of Adarnase – and the appearance of the Arabs, Leonti reworked the information of the chronicle he had discovered and placed it after Stephanos II. He continued the narrative with the words: “And Stephanos had two sons, Archil and Mihr” (*The Georgian Chronicles*, 1955, p. 232). It should be noted that neither Stephanos III nor Stephanos II had children with these names. Regarding Stephanos III, it is known that he died in 738, while the following Erismtavari (the old Georgian equivalent of *Patrician*) of Kartli was Adarnase – the father of Erismtavari Nerse II, according to *The Martyrdom of Abo of Tbilisi* (Sabanisdze, 2020, p. 55).

The ancient chronicle available to the hagiographer primarily focused on the battle and torture of the princes of Argveti, Davit and Costantine. However, it also recounted a flood that struck the enemy army, resulting in the deaths of a large number of enemy horses (40,000), the battle of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s sons against the enemy at the fortress of Anacopia, and the death of Mihr.

In our view, the chronicle available to Leonti was the final section taken from

The Georgian Chronicles by Juansher (together with the testament), which Leonti placed following the narrative of Stephanos II (see Sanadze, 2019, pp. 100–101). This chronicle did not mention Davit and Costantine at all; instead, it focused on the battle of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s sons, Darchil and Mihr, against the Persians. Meanwhile, as a result of multiple cases of rewriting the text, Darchil had already been transformed into Archil. This section taken from *The Georgian Chronicles* by Juansher recounted the activities of Darchil in Western Georgia, including his construction of the fortress “above the border of Guria and Greece,” which is the same as the Petra fortress. The chronicle then recounted the Persian invasion, the battle of Darchil and Mihr against the enemy at Anacopia, and Mihr’s death. It also described the disintegration of Kartli into principalities, narrated through marrying Mihr’s daughters off to representatives of the elite families of Kartli and giving them territories as dowry. Later, the chronicle discussed the return of Darchil (the same Archil) to Eastern Georgia, his settlement in Kakheti, and activities in Mtianeti on the left bank of the Alazani River (“Kakheti Highlands”). Leonti based his own hagiographic work, *The Martyrdom of Archil*, on information from this same chronicle. In this work, he expanded the brief account of Darchil’s martyrdom, which is available in the chronicle, against the backdrop of the Arab commander Asim Chichnaum’s campaign in Kartli. It is worth noting that early on, C. Toumanoff equated Asim Chichnaum with the Arab commander Khuzayma ibn Khazim, who governed Armenia in the 780s (Toumanoff, 1963, pp. 409–410).

Likely influenced by the hagiographer of the mid-11th century, Leonti set the Arab era and the invasions of Marwan the Deaf as the historical backdrop for the stories narrated in this section taken from Juansher’s *The Georgian Chronicles* because his senior contemporary had already established the epoch!

No special attempt has been made to compare the accounts of *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine* and the corresponding sections of Leonti Mroveli’s narrative.¹ Research in this direction has revealed that these accounts do not originate from the same source and that their authors used different chronicles that presented the same events from different perspectives, leading to the fact that even the events recounted in both chronicles are presented in different ways. The most significant differences are as follows:

1. The timing of the flood: According to the hagiographer, the Persian army was caught in the flood while traveling to Tsikhe-Goji. However, according to Leonti’s source, this happened on the return journey after passing by Tsikhe-Goji.

¹ In this regard, historians were interested only in determining whether the hagiographic work was Leonti’s source or vice versa.

2. The outcome of the battle near Anacopia: The chronicle used by the hagiographer as a source recounted the defeat of Mihr and Darchil near the fortress of Anacopia. The section of *The Georgian Chronicles* by Juansher, which had been removed from the work earlier and was available to Leonti, described the triumph of the kings of Kartli, or at least the narrative allowed Leonti to draw such a conclusion. Meanwhile, both chronicles documented Mihr's injury and eventual death.
3. The route of the Persian army's retreat: The hagiographer's source suggested the enemy's retreat along the seacoast, or at least its narrative allowed for such an interpretation of the route. In contrast, Leonti's source provided a much more precise account of the enemy army's retreat route: passing by Tsikhe-Goji, crossing the rivers Abashistskali, Tskhenistskali, and Rioni, and finally, via the Guria-Sper road.

As previously mentioned, Leonti's source was the concluding, removed section of *The Georgian Chronicles* by Juansher. As for the source of *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine*², it was likely a Greek-language chronicle that described Khosrow Anushirvan's campaign in Western Georgia in 542/3. Alongside the narrative of the battle of the princes of Argveti against the enemy, their capture and execution, the chronicle also provided details about the battle of Vakhtang Gorgasali's sons, Darchil and Mihrdat, at the fortress of Anacopia as well as the death of Mihr.

DISCUSSION

The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine

According to *The Martyrdom*, the children of Vakhtang Gorgasali, Archil and Darchil were fortified in the Anacopia fortress. They suffered defeat in a battle against the enemy. The "elder brother"³ Archil was wounded and subsequently passed away, while Darchil returned to the fortress. *Archil* and *Darchil* appear to be a copyist's mistake. Only one sanatorium text has preserved a relatively correct version of the brothers' names – Mihr and Archil; however, even here, there is a mistake – Darchil has turned into Archil.

² While discussing the sources of *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine*, we mean the narrative concerning Davit and Costantine themselves, and not the lengthy introduction where the hagiographer initially discusses Heraclius Caesar and then Apostle Muhammad. We have conducted a thorough analysis of the sources for this introductory story (See Sanadze & Arakhamia, 2013, pp. 8-14).

³ In reality, Darchil was the elder brother, and Mihr - the younger one. However, the hagiographer made a mistake, likely because in the text he used as a source, Mihr was mentioned first, and Darchil - second.

The fact that this entire story pertains to the lives of Vakhtang Gorgasali's sons, Persians, and Zoroastrians rather than Arabs, Marwan the Deaf, and the sons of Erismtavari Stephanos is evident in multiple places within the text (see Sanadze & Arakhamia, 2013, pp. 14–30; Sanadze, 2020, pp. 26–42). In this regard, let us first examine the introductory section of the work, which also serves as the title:

“The Martyrdom and Merits of Saints and Great Martyrs Davit and Costantine, martyred in the North country - Argveti area - Georgian Kingdom after the decease of the Great and Exalted King Vakhtang Gorgasali, who took the reign over the country and its glory with him to the grave, by the Ungodly and Powerful King of Persia Marwan Abul-Qasim called Marwan the Deaf, Nephew of the False Prophet Muhammad” (D. & C., 2013, p. 40).

As we can see in the first sentence, everything is in the correct place, i.e., there is no contradiction or anachronism: Kartli and Egrisi were referred to as the northern country both in Armenian and Byzantine sources and, influenced by them, in the Georgian writings of the Early and High Middle Ages. The fact that in the kingdom of Kartli, there is the Argveti region poses no contradiction or raises questions. It is not surprising that the recounted story, according to the chronicler, took place shortly after the decease of the Great and Exalted King Vakhtang Gorgasali – the ruler who, as the chronicler figuratively expresses, “took the reign over the country and its glory with him to the grave.” However, the second sentence comes as a surprise as it presents several pieces of information, none of which is true. Indeed, Marwan the Deaf and Abul-Qasim were not the same historical figure; they were separated by centuries. Marwan the Deaf and Muhammad were not related as nephew (sister's son) and uncle (mother's brother); they were not even relatives. Moreover, they belonged to different lineages. It is evident that the second sentence was fabricated by someone who had little or no knowledge of Arab history. When this author attempted to use the Arab period as the historical backdrop for the writing, errors were made.

Therefore, there is nothing contradictory or unbelievable about the first clause of the title-introduction, whereas the second clause is entirely fabricated, which clearly distinguishes the original part of the sentence from the hagiographer's fabrication. The mention of Vakhtang's sons in the text confirms that the events recounted indeed occurred shortly after Vakhtang Gorgasali's death:

“The children of the Great King Vakhtang Gorgasali – [Mihir] and Darchil were in the fortress called Anacopia, as they were scared of the Persians” (D. & C., 2013, p. 65).

Of course, aside from its literal meaning, in ancient Georgian texts, the word “child” also signifies a descendant (as Leonti likely understood it). However, we must clar-

ify to critics on this matter that understanding the intended meaning of the word requires consideration of the context. When the title states that the martyrdom of Davit and Costantine occurred “after the decease of the Great and Exalted King Vakhtang Gorgasali, who took the reign over the country and its glory with him to the grave” and later mentions that “at that time the children of the Great King Vakhtang Gorgasali – Archil and Darchil – were in the fortress called Anacopia,” the term “child” should naturally refer specifically to the king’s immediate offspring, not his descendants. Furthermore, the name Darchil mentioned in the text solely belonged to Vakhtang Gorgasali’s elder son. Neither before Darchil nor after him did anyone else in the royal family bear this name. The hagiographer concludes the writing with the following phrases:

“The saint martyrs Davit and Costantine were martyred in six thousand two hundred forty-nine from the beginning of times, in seven hundred and thirty after the crucifixion of Christ, in the period of the reign of the iconoclast – Leon Isaurian – over the Greeks, in the period of the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s sons over the Georgians and in the period of our faith in the Heavenly Kingdom of Jesus Christ” (D. & C., 2013, p. 75).

Leo the Isaurian, the Byzantine Caesar (717-741), is mentioned here due to the overlap of the final years of his reign with the rule of Marwan the Deaf in the Caucasus (735–738), the year 730 after the crucifixion of Christ was inserted in the text later⁴. The copyists who introduced this dating into the text failed to correlate it with the date based on *the beginning of times* – 6249 – which, according to the Byzantine era (5508), corresponds to 741. This date does not align with Marwan the Deaf’s presence in the Caucasus, which dates back to 735–738. The year 741 marks the death of Leo the Isaurian, who died on June 18th. It is hard to imagine anyone embarking on a campaign to Western Georgia during the early spring in those days. Thus, much like Marwan the Deaf, Leo the Isaurian was inserted into the text to provide a historical background for the narrative. The only reliable information in this case is the following: “In the period of the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali’s children over the Georgians.” In this context, it is impossible to understand the word “child” as a descendant of Vakhtang Gorgasali, especially considering the aforementioned sections of the text.

Several other circumstances support the assertion that the chronicle upon which the hagiographic work is based indeed portrays the events of the Persian invasion and

⁴ Dating based on *Christ’s Crucifixion* varies significantly across different manuscripts (synaxarium editions) of the text of *The Martyrdom*, whereas the date presented based on *the beginning of times* is consistently reiterated across all manuscripts. This testifies to the primacy of the date based on *the beginning of times* and the later development of the dating based on *the crucifixion of Christ*.

the great Persian-Byzantine War (542–562).

1. The fact that the work describes the era close to the rule of Vakhtang Gorgasali is additionally confirmed by the presence of Abashes in the Persian army. Historians have long debated the identity of these Abashes, who were allegedly part of Marwan the Deaf's army in the 730s. Some speculated they might be Abyssinians. The fact of the matter is that the Abashes appear right in *The Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali*. Vakhtang fights against these very Abashes when he journeys to India together with the Persian Shah. According to Juansher's account, after defeating the Abashes, the Persian Shah divided them: he left a part of them in the same place and relocated the other part from Persia's eastern borders to the west, within Persia itself. Thus, these very Abashes were present in the Persian army during the so-called Marwan the Deaf's invasion.
2. Mention of magi and magicians: The text also signifies its connection to the pre-Islamic era. The so-called Marwan the Deaf called:

“The magi and magicians of Persia sent them to the saint martyrs to convert them to their faith by cajoling” (D. & C., 2013, p. 59).

We come across “magus activities” from the conqueror's side in another passage: the oppressor Marwan the Deaf “was cajoling and converting them” – Davit and Costantine (D. & C., 2013, p. 55). Obviously, the summoning of magi and magicians by Arabs professing Islam is inconceivable. It is well-established that *magus*, *magus activities*, and *magic* are characteristic attributes of the Zoroastrian religion and not of Islam, which vehemently opposed such practices. Only followers of Zoroastrianism, not Islam, would have addressed a magus and a magician to convert Christians to another faith. This is another argument supporting the assumption that the source of *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine* was created in the pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian epoch (Sanadze & Arakhamia, 2013, pp. 14–26).

3. Professional terminology in the text also indicates Persians, not Arabs. In various places, we encounter “spasalar” and “spaspet,” yet the term “emir” is never used. For example, the so-called Marwan the Deaf says to Davit: “You will be the spasalar and commander of my entire army” (D. & C., 2013, p. 55).

Another example:

“I have heard from you from my spaspets – that you are a wise man” (D. & C., 2013, p. 55).

The question arises: Why did the author name the conqueror who invaded Georgia and executed Davit and Costantine as *Marwan the Deaf* in his hagiographic work

if he was not truly an Arab commander and later the last representative of the Umayyad dynasty on the Caliphate throne, Marwan ibn Muhammad?

There is only one explanation: in the ancient chronicle, which recounted this invasion and the punishment of the princes of Argveti, Davit and Costantine by the enemy, and which was used as a basis for the work created by the hagiographer at the end of the 1050s, the name of the commander of the invading enemy was not recorded. Instead, he was referred to by the following titles: 1) *the King of Persians*, 2) *the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians*, and 3) *the Mighty*.

It was evident that he was fighting Christians, i.e., he was *filthy, faithless, and despising Christians*. For an author of the mid-11th century, such characteristics could have been attributed only to Muslim Arabs. Therefore, convinced (or aiming to convince the reader) that he was dealing with an Arab invasion, he added the term *Arab* to *Persian*, as mentioned in the old chronicle, to make the latter sound more convincingly Arabic. Referring to *the King of Persians*, and at the same time to the *Great Ghaghadisi of Persians* as *Marwan the Deaf* and *Abul-Qasim* can be explained by the historical memory of Georgian society, both written and oral, where the campaigns of Arab commanders left an indelible mark due to their cruelty. Therefore, the author of *The Martyrdom* “restored” *Abul-Qasim* and *Marwan the Deaf* as names of *the Mighty* mentioned in the chronicle, also considering them as names for the nameless, as he believed, Persian king – *the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians* (Sanadze, 2020, pp. 40–41). Moreover, he did not even doubt that these names referred to different historical figures (Sanadze, 2020, pp. 40–41). The ancient chronicle used by the hagiographer as a source referred to a Persian king, whom the chronicler called Marwan the Deaf – Abul-Qasim. At the same time, throughout the text, the hagiographer encountered the epithets of this Persian king, *the Mighty* and *the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians*, numerous times.

“The torturers took the order of the mighty” (D. & C., 2013, p. 54);

“Then the mighty told them in anger” (D. & C., 2013, p. 55); see also pp. 56, 58, 63, 66, 70, and many others. “Don’t you know that the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians... desires freedom and luxury for them?” (D. & C., 2013, p. 61);

“the Great Ghaghadisi of the whole land of Persians” (D. & C., 2013, p. 60).

Marwan the Deaf, whom the hagiographer believes to be the same as Abul-Qasim, is a character invented by the hagiographer; as for *the Mighty* and *the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians*, these are the terms taken by the hagiographer directly from the chronicle. This is how the king of Persia was referred to in the text. The great and powerful Shah of Sassanian Persia, Khosrow I (531–579), had two epithets: 1)

Anushirvan, which means invincible (*possessing an immortal soul*) in Persian. This epithet was translated by the author of the old chronicle, on which the hagiographer based his work, as *the Mighty* into Georgian; 2) As for the second epithet, *Dadgar*, in Persian, it means *the establisher and the herald of faith and justice*, which the creator of the old chronicle translated into Georgian as *the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians*. Thus, there is no doubt that in the old chronicle used as a source for *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine, the Mighty and the Great Ghaghadisi of Persians* is Khosrow Anushirvan, the same Khosrow Dadgar, whom the hagiographer willingly or unwillingly turned into Marwan the Deaf (Marwan Abul-Qasim) in the hagiographic work that he created.

A section of *The Georgian Chronicles* depicting the lives of Mihr and Archil

Upon analyzing a section preserved in *The Georgian Chronicles* portraying the lives of Mihr and Archil, it becomes evident that the narrative, placed by Leonti after the information given about Stephanos II, as a recount about the lives of his sons, and unfolded against the background of Marwan the Deaf's invasion, is actually about Vakhtang Gorgasali's sons, Darchil and Mihr (Mihrdat), and their battle against the Persians.

It is worth noting that Leonti introduces Stephanos's sons as Mihr (the elder) and Archil.⁵ (the younger). As for Vakhtang Gorgasali's children, Darchil was the elder, while his half-brother Mihr (also known as Mihrdat) was the younger. Now let's see how the dying Mihr addresses his so-called younger brother, Archil, in *The Manuscript of Anna of The Georgian Chronicles*: "I will now pass away, my brother-lord, to join our ancestors" (G. C., 1942, p. 153).

From this excerpt alone, it is evident that we are dealing with the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali: the younger brother Mihr and the elder Darchil, whose name was distorted by copyists and presented as Archil. Otherwise, the elder brother would not have addressed the younger one as "brother-lord."

Such a form of address was overlooked by Leonti Mroveli, who mistakenly placed the narrative of the chronicle available to him in the section concerning Stephanos II, the son of Adarnase. Otherwise, he would have "corrected" it. This correction, or "cleansing," was performed in the lists of the Mtskhétian edition; the editor-rewriter who created the common protograph noticed this contradiction and removed it.

⁵ Actually, Stephanos did not have children named Mihr and Archil! Stephanos III (not Stephanos II), who lived during Marwan the Deaf's stay in Georgia, passed away in 738. Afterwards (in 739-760s), the father of Nerse II (Nerse of Abo of Tbilisi), Adarnase (with a high likelihood, the son of Stephanos III) was the Erismtavari (Patrician) of Kartli.

The conversation between Archil and his brother Mihr proved equally intriguing. In our view, despite the additions later made by Leonti, it is evident here that the conversation occurs between the sons of Vakhtang Gorgasali, not the sons of Stephanos II. We will indicate Leonti's insertions with darker fonts.

“Then [D]archil said to his brother Mihr: ‘... if they capture us, they will inquire about the hidden treasures buried in our land, which have been gained by our **kings, first Mihrian wise by God, then Vakhtang wise by God and all their offspring, who gave birth to us. And they will demand of us what King Heracles hid,** the whole list we put together with two crowns of emerald, ruby and coral, which **our father the great King Vakhtang** brought here from India and Sindia... Take these two crowns, the golden one and the one made of red coral: **one belonging to King Mihrian, and the other to Vakhtang,** which was given him by the Persian King, together with the gold and silver which he loaded onto five hundred pack animals and two thousand infantry. You and our father placed all this in Kutaisi and Tsikhe-goji” (G. C., 1955, p. 236).

In the text above, the mention of Mihrian is an insertion by Leonti. It is evident that originally, only Vakhtang appeared in the text, and Mihrian was added later. However, this addition was done so crudely that the traces of the alteration are clearly visible.

We encounter a number of other unusual and inappropriate terms and facts in Leonti's account describing the lives and activities of the figures belonging simultaneously to the 7th century (the sons of Adarnase's son Stephanos) and mid-8th century (Marwan the Deaf's era), specifically, *erismtavaris* Archil and Mihr. This can only be explained if we assume that, similar to the author of *The Martyrdom of Davit and Costantine*, Leonti's source depicted events from the middle of the 6th century and the Persian era, rather than the 7th or the 8th centuries and the Arab rule.

Indeed, Archil is consistently referred to as the *King* throughout Leonti's writing. However, none of the other rulers of Kartli (naturally, following the abolition of kingship), either before or after Archil, is mentioned as king by Leonti. He refers to them as *Curopolates* (Guaram), *Principals* (*Mtavaris* in Georgian), or *Erismtavaris*. “Then the Kings of Kartli Mihr and Archil were there,” states Leonti. It is evident that in Leonti's source, Darchil transformed into Archil, was recognized as the king of Kartli. Furthermore, even the Byzantine Caesar, when speaking of his and his lineage's merits before Byzantium, acknowledges him as a king: “Yours was the kingship, glory, and wisdom of Kartli, even though you are being persecuted here for the worship of the Cross” ... (G. C., 1955, p. 239).

Historians have struggled in vain to explain the reference to Archil as a king. How-

ever, clarity emerges when we recognize that the figure in question is Vakhtang's son, Darchil, rather than Stephanos's non-existent son, Archil.

Now, let's quote another passage from the relevant narrative of *The Georgian Chronicles*. In his recount of the invasion of the so-called Marwan the Deaf and the resulting situation in Kartli, Leonti Mroveli, influenced by the chronicle he used as a source, notes:

“There was... a small amount of *tadzreuli* of theirs; as for *pitiakhshes* and family members - only a thousand of them. As to the Apkhaz fighters, there were two thousand of them” (*G. C.*, 1955, p. 237).

Another example: “And all the principals and *pitiakhshes*, the lineage of the *eristavis* and the nobles entered the Caucasus and took refuge in the woods and ravines” (*G. C.*, 1955, p. 234).

As we can see, Leonti clearly attempts to explain to his contemporary reader who the *pitiakhshes* mentioned in the text are. According to Leonti, they are the ancestors of the *eristavis* and noblemen of his time, suggesting that, in his view, the *eristavis* and noblemen of his time trace their lineage back to *the pitiakhshes mentioned in the chronicle he used as a source*. However, how could there have been *pitiakhshes* in Georgia during the mid-8th century – a period of Arab rule? Of course, this is impossible. We find an inscription from approximately the same period (second half of the 8th century) in Sioni of Samshilde, where its *ktitors* refer to themselves as “offspring of the *pitiakhshes*,” indicating their descent from ancient *pitiakhshes*. They do not claim to be *pitiakhshes* themselves! The era of *pitiakhshes*, along with Persia, had consigned to history. It is clear that Leonti encountered the term *pitiakhshes* in the text he used as a source and was attempting to clarify its meaning to his readers.

We are dealing with the period immediately following the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali in the part of the text which narrates how Archil, the so-called son of Stephanos, marries off his brother Mihr's daughters to the principals of Kartli. We tentatively label this part as *The List of the Sons-in-Law of Mihr*. In fact, this part of *The Georgian Chronicles* represents a primitive attempt to explain the disintegration of the Kingdom of Kartli into principalities.

It is recounted here that after the death of his brother Mihr, [D]archil married off his daughters and gave them various territories of the Kingdom of Kartli as dowries.

“[D]archil summoned the *eristavis* of Kartli and married off his nieces to them:

He gave one niece to the nephew of his/her father – to the son of Guaram Curopalates, who ruled Klarjeti and Javakheti;

The second one [was given] to **a pitiakhsh** from Peroz's family who ruled in Trialeti, Tashir and A[sh]ots;

The third one [was given] to Nerse Nersian, who was one of the distinguished officials of King Vakhtang;

The fourth one [was given] to Adarnase Adarnasian.

And divided the Upper Country, that is, Kartli, between the two of them;

The fifth one [was given] to Varazman, and he gave him the area from Kotman to Kurdis-Khevi; Varazman was from the family of the Persian ruler of Barda, who was the father of Vakhtang's mother;

The sixth [was given] to Juansher Juansheriani, who was the descendant of King Mihrian, from the offspring of his son Rev; and he was given Jvari and Kherki and entire Mtiuleti, the Manglisi Khevi and Tpilisi... And as the above-mentioned noblemen saw that Juansher was given the most substantial part, they were somewhat dispirited. So, he (Darchil) sent these principals together with their spouses to their dwelling places" (G. C., 1955, pp. 241–242).

We can see that, once again, we are dealing with the epoch of pitiakhshes, Guaram Curopalates, and the noblemen of King Vakhtang, and not with the epoch of their children in the figurative sense, i.e., descendants. Vakhtang Gorgasali is mentioned again, as it is noted that Varazman – the husband of the so-called fifth daughter of Mihr – was the relative of Vakhtang's uncle (his mother's brother), the ruler of Bardav, the *eristavi* of Persians (meaning Varaz-Bakur – Sagdukht's brother). Nerse Nersian is directly mentioned as "a nobleman of King Vakhtang." Juansher's emotions are obvious here – he believes that the other principals were jealous of him (Juansher), as he received more during this division: the fortress-city of Tbilisi, which had become the central city of Kartli by this time, and hence, the possession of which meant superiority over the others. It is another matter that he was appointed as the ruler of Tbilisi by Persia and not the king of Kartli, who, at that time (589), was either Darchil's son Bakur or, more likely, Darchil's grandson Pharsman, the son of Bakur⁶. It is obvious that, in this instance as well, we are dealing with the period shortly after the death of Vakhtang Gorgasali (531) – specifically, with the situation of the 580s (the era of Vakhtang's grandchildren and great-grandchildren), when, after Gurgen, Persia appointed Juansher as the ruler of Kartli (589/90). As

⁶ Bakur the son of Darchil, Pharsman the son of Bakur, Pharsman the Other and Bakur the son of Pharsman "reigned" in Kakheti alongside the patricians of Kartli - Guaram, Stephanos the son of Guaram, Adarnase the son of Stephanos and Stephanos the son of Adarnase (Sanadze, 2016, pp. 373-430; 2019, pp. 403-409). Their reign was not recognized by Persia, but within the country, they were regarded as "kings" due to their representation of the old royal lineage and were held in high esteem.

for Guaram's son Stephanos, like his father, he is still in Mtskheta and has not yet moved to Tbilisi – this will occur later, in 591.

We are dealing with a similar situation in the following excerpts: “After that, Archil came to Kakheti and granted Kakheti to all his nobles, awarded them the rank of *Aznauri*, and built a church in Sadzmori. He married the daughter of Guaram ‘Curopalates,’ being a descendant of one of Vakhtang’s children from his Greek wife” (G. C., 1955, p. 243).

We can read the following about the activities of the same purported Archil, the son of Stephanos, in Kakheti: “He settled in Tsuketi (one of the highland regions in the easternmost part of the Kartli Kingdom) and built a castle in Kasri, and in the Lakuasti ravine, he erected a fortress. He found there the rulers to whom Tsuketi was granted by King Vakhtang” (G. C., 1955, p. 243).

Here, too, it is evident that we are dealing with a period when the principals to whom “Tsuketi was granted by King Vakhtang” were still alive. This seems quite plausible, considering the fact that this part refers to Darchil, the son of Vakhtang, and not Archil, the son of Stephanos. At the same time, it would be absurd to imagine that we are dealing with an era 200 years removed from the reign of Vakhtang.

Finally, we will cite excerpts that leave no doubt that the chronicle used by Leonti Mroveli narrated the life of Darchil, the son of Vakhtang, and not Archil, the son of Stephanos. To begin with, what does the passage taken directly out of *The Life of Darchil* tell us?

“Dachi (nickname of Darchil) proposed Christ be recognized by the mountain-dwellers of Kakheti. But they showed no desire to do this, and all the Nukhpatians moved away from him” (G. C., 1955, p. 205).

For clarity, we will now provide an excerpt from the life of the purported Archil, the son of Stephanos. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that the segment given below is a continuation of the one above, with the underlined part being an insertion made by Leonti to inform the reader:

“Archil... built a fortified town, Nukhpati, between two rivers. The Nukhpatians were heathens and of a predatory nature, but the Deaf (meaning Marwan the Deaf) killed plenty of them.⁷ and [D]archil baptized them by force” (G. C., 1955, p. 244).

Finally, here's a quote from the original work by Leonti Mroveli, *The Martyrdom of Archil*, which is based on the chronicle he used as a source. In this work, Leonti's selection of the segments of the chronicle that he leaves intact, along with the

⁷ This insertion made by Leonti relates to interpreting the narrated story as having occurred during the era of Arab rule and Marwan the Deaf.

expansion and unfolding of the story of the martyrdom of Archil (actually, Darchil) against the background of these intact segments, clarifies that the chronicle narrated the life of Darchil, the son of Vakhtang, and not Archil, the non-existent son of Stephanos:

“And Saint [D]archil made an intention in his mind, with the strength of his heart, to come and see, and to ask him for peace in the country and the inviolable protection of the churches, and to not punish him for betraying faith” (G. C., 1955, p. 245).

In this case as well, while copying the text of the old chronicle without alteration, Leonti overlooked the following circumstance: as clarified in the excerpt above, the so-called Archil decided to appear before the commander who had entered Kakheti and ask him “to not punish him for betraying faith,” which could be interpreted as a plea to avoid punishment for renouncing one’s faith. It is interesting to consider which faith Archil would have had to betray, given that he had never been a Muslim. It becomes apparent that the old text, used by Leonti as a source for his hagiographic writing, recounted the martyrdom of Darchil, the son of Vakhtang Gorgasali, and not Archil, the son whom Stephanos never had. It was Darchil and his Khosrowid (Sassanian) ancestors who had changed their faith: originally Mazdean, they abandoned their ancestral religion and embraced Christianity. This is the instance of faith conversion, for which Darchil (whose name had mistakenly been turned by copyists into Archil) asked forgiveness from the Persian commander. Moreover, the plea was addressed to the Persian commander, not to the Muslim Asim Chichnaum, whom Leonti, much like Marwan the Deaf, inappropriately inserted into this narrative.⁰

Finally, we would like to add the latest information: in the spring-summer of 2024, under the VI floor of the Notkora temple near Telavi, archaeologists from the University of Georgia and Telavi University excavated the grave of a decapitated man. His body and head parts were sent to America for the C₁₄ research, which confirmed the date of death previously guessed by us as 558-564. We received a response from the US laboratory on 11.11.2024.

The Story of Juansher and his Sister Shushana

Now let us consider another chronicle, the narrative of which also unfolds against the backdrop of Arab rule in *The Georgian Chronicles* and is positioned at the turn of the 8th–9th centuries, just before the reign of Ashot Curopalates, bridging a historical gap before the ascension of the Bagrationi dynasty (represented by Ashot Curopalates) to the throne of Kartli. As previously shown, Stephanos’s sons named Archil and Mihr did not actually exist. Therefore, Archil could not have had a son named Juansher and Ioane, simply because Archil himself was, in reality, Darchil,

who had been renamed Archil by scribes, and Darchil had a son named Bakur. Indeed, Juansher is a name typical among the Revian branch of Mihrian's descendants, not among the Bakurians. Simply mentioning Juansher Juansheriani suffices as an example. According to the testament preserved in *The Georgian Chronicles*, Juansher Juansheriani belonged to the Revian branch. Hence, Juansher could not have been the son of Archil Bakuriani, especially considering that Darchil, who later became Archil, lived not in the 8th century but in the first half of the 6th century.

Firstly, let's see what *The Georgian Chronicles* recounts about the activities of Heraclius Caesar in Kartli and the officials he appointed there:

Heraclius Caesar "brought the Western Turks" (*G. C.*, 1955, p. 223).

Heraclius "summoned the son of Bakur... the King of Georgians... who was the *eristavi* of Kakheti and was called Adarnase and granted him Tpilisi and rule over Kartli and left an *eristavi* with him, called Jibgha, and ordered him to fight for the Kala fortress... and in a few days they took Kala and captured the chief of the fortress. This *Eristavi*... removed the skin from his body and sent it to the Caesar in Gardabani" (*G. C.*, 1955, p. 225).

When discussing "the Western Turks," we must remember that during that period, the Turkic Khaganate was divided into two parts: the Eastern Turkic Khaganate and the Western Turkic Khaganate, with the Khazars forming the westernmost part of the Western Turkic Khaganate. The chronicler recounts the bringing of the Turks from this very Western Turkic Khaganate. The same people are referred to as Khazars in other sources, such as Movses Kaghankatvatsi. Regarding Jibgha, as demonstrated early on by V. Goiladze, the correct form of this name is Yabghu. Furthermore, Yabghu is not a proper name but a term denoting *deputy khagan*, the second person after the khagan (Goiladze, 1977, pp. 90–102).

Regarding the narrative on Juansher and his sister Shushana in *The Georgian Chronicles*, it's essential to note that once again, Arab rule is used as the historical backdrop of the story. Therefore, we are replacing the relevant terms used in the narrative to give it the flavor of Arab rule (there are only two instances), with the term *Persian*, while also indicating the original terms. After this adjustment, the text reads as follows:

"After this, when he - the holy martyr [D]archil⁸ passed away, he left two sons: Iovane and Juansher. Iovane went to Egrisi, taking his mother and two sisters with him, while Juansher and his two sisters stayed in the country of Kartli and Kakheti. His younger sister was beautiful in face. Rumors of her beauty reached the king

⁸ Archil in *The Georgian Chronicles*.

of the Khazars – the khagan. He sent an envoy to ask for the hand of Shushan, promising aid against the [Persians]⁹. When the khagan’s envoy arrived, Juansher informed his brother and mother. But they expressed reluctance and said to him: ‘If our situation becomes unbearable, we had better retreat into Greece and appeal to Christians rather than have our daughter defiled by heathens.’ And Shushan too spurned the King of the Khazars” (G. C., 1955, p. 249).

In this case, the chronicler considers Iovane and Juansher to be the sons of Archil, in the same way as he identifies Darchil, transformed into Archil, and his brother Mihr as the sons of Stephanos. We cannot conclusively determine Iovane’s identity; further research is needed. As for Juansher, as we will see below, he is indeed a figure from the first half of the 7th century, and we cannot exclude the possibility that he was the grandson of Juansher Juansheriani (the ruler of Tbilisi and Kartli on the right bank of the Mtkvari River around 589–590). The text continues with the following: “Three years later, the khagan sent his *spasalar* Bluchan. Passing the road of Leketi, he entered Kakheti, arrived at the fortress in which Juansher and his sister Shushan resided. And after a few days, he seized the fortress, captured them, annihilated the city of Tpilisi, devastating Kartli and the entire country” (ibid., p. 249).

As we can see, here we are dealing with the Khazar invasion, during which they “annihilated the city of Tpilisi,” which occurred in the year 628. Regarding the Khazar commander being referred to as *Bulchan*¹⁰, this does not contradict the previously provided information but rather supplements it. In the first instance, the commander’s name is missing, and he is referred to only by the title “Jibgha” (Yabghu). As this case, however, the source provides the commander’s name. Concerning *Bulchan*’s title, the chronicle calls him “*Spasalar*,” which is an attempt to translate the Khazar title “Jibgha” (Yabghu) into Georgian. The chronicler continues:

As Bluchan “was marching through the Dariali Gorge, one day Shushan said to her brother: ‘I’d rather die to be granted by the Lord a place among the holy women rather than be defiled by the heathens.’ And she had a ring. She plucked the gem out of the ring, sucked the deadly poison that was under the gem, and died instantly. Bluchan arrived at the khagan’s residence, bringing Juansher with him and telling the story of the death of his sister, whom the khagan had longed to see. Bluchan was

⁹ Persians] The Saracens in the lists of *The Georgian Chronicles*. It is conceivable that in the chronicle *Sparsta/Sparzta* (“of Persians”, in Georgian) was acronymized as “*S-rzta*”, and a later chronicler interpreted it as *Sarkinozta* (the Saracens). The interchangeable use of ‘s’ and ‘z’ is common in the lists of *The Georgian Chronicles*, as evidenced by cases like *Episkoposi//Episkopozi*, *Stephanos//Stephanoz*, etc.
¹⁰ In the lists of the Mtskhertian edition of *The Georgian Chronicles*, we find *Bulchan*, whereas in the lists of Ann’s edition, we have *Bluchan*. The latter spelling is favored by both the 1955 and 2008 editions. In general, variability in letter placement is common in the manuscripts of *The Georgian Chronicles*.

captured, a rope was thrown around his neck, and two riders were ordered to pull him in opposite directions and beheaded him mercilessly. After keeping Juansher for seven years, the khagan released him and sent him back home with many gifts” (G. C., 1955, p. 250).

These seven years are not accidental at all. Tbilisi was captured by the Khazars in 628. In the same year, Juansher was taken hostage. Adding seven years to 628 brings us to the years 635/636, which is already the period of Caliph Omar’s campaigns in Persia and Byzantium. During this period, Arabs achieved successive victories over the Byzantines, conquering Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. We believe these significant political and geopolitical changes prompted the Khazar khagan to permit Juansher to return to his homeland.

Afterward, the chronicler inserts a special passage in the text where he merges the Khazars’ capture of Tbilisi (628) with the Arabs’ capture of Tbilisi already in the second half of the 8th century and their subsequent settlement in Kartli, presenting them as a cohesive narrative. In the same place, he offers his interpretation regarding the reasons behind the decline of the Khosrowid dynasty (the Sassanians of Kartli), which serves as a kind of introduction to the narrative of the reign of the Bagratuniani (Bagrationi) dynasty, beginning with Ashot Curopalates, in Kartli:

“Henceforth, the sway of the great Khosrowid kings began to decline. First, the power of the Saracens grew, and the whole of this country was, from that time, periodically subject to incursions and depredation. Then, there arose many principals in the land of Kartli, resulting in mutual enmity and strife. And if anybody worthy of being king emerged from among Vakhtang’s children, he would be diminished by the Saracens. As the city of Tbilisi was captured by the Agarenes and turned into their place of residence. They received tribute called *kharaj*. Thus, by Divine providence, because of the multiplicity of our sins, the nation of the Agarenes became glorious” (ibid.).

If we remove the chronicler’s reasoning that divided the text into two sections – one ending with the words: “the khagan released him and sent him back home” and the other, provided below, starting with the words “This Juansher married” – we will see that they are inherently connected to each other. This would have been the case before the chronicler separated the text by inserting his reasoning.

“This Juansher married Adarnase’s daughter, Latavri by name, a descendant of the Bagrationi. Juansher’s mother rebuked him for marrying Latavri, for she was not well aware that the Bagrationi were the descendants of David the Prophet, who was called the Father of God in the flesh. But when she saw her son’s wife, she liked and blessed her” (G. C., 1955, p. 251).

Firstly, let’s address the issue of Latavri. She is likely the granddaughter through the

maternal line of another Latavri, who was the daughter of Stephanos, information about whom can be found in the inscription on the Sinai manuscript of *The Conversion of Kartli* (N/Sin-50):

“When the blessed and majestic Mampali Adarnase, the son of Stephanos, the brother’s son of Demetre and the grandson of great Guaram, died after twenty years on December 2, his blessed spouse Guaramavri died. And the blessed queen Latavri, the daughter of Stephanos, the sister of Adarnase, the **mother of the Bagratuniani and of Curopalates** died on January 20, and was buried in Jvari, St. Mary Church, with her son and her daughter’s son” (Aleksidze, 2011, p. 121).

The mentioned inscription provides information that at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries, i.e., nearly a century after the establishment of the Bivritiani prince in Kartli during the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali, a new branch of Baghadads/Bagratunis established itself in Kartli. A representative of this branch marries Latavri, the daughter of Stephanos, thereby laying the foundation for the new Bagratuniani dynasty. This family later becomes the Curopalates of Kartli.

Z. Aleksidze compared the information of the above-mentioned inscription of N/Sin-50 with the following information about the Bagrationi preserved in *The Georgian Chronicles*:

“Then there came to him (meaning Darchil, who had turned into Archil) one principal, who was the descendant of Prophet David, by name Adarnase. He was the son of the son of Adarnase, the Blind (whose father [being Bagratoniani] became the father-in-law of Bagratonians as well, and he was appointed by Greeks as ruler in some areas of Armenia. At the time of the seizure by **the Deaf**, he went to the sons of Guaram Curopalates in Klarjeti and stayed there with them). He asked Archil: ‘If you desire to make me your subject, give me the land.’ And Archil gave him Shulaveri and Artani” (G. C., 1955, p. 243).

After the comparison, Z. Aleksidze concluded that they must be recounting the same story, namely that one branch of the Bagrationi – the family of Guaram and his son Stephanos – became relatives with another branch of the Bagrationi dynasty through the marriage of its representative, a certain Adarnase, to their family member (Z. Aleksidze, 2011, p. 126). As for “the Deaf,” marked in black, this term is an insertion by a chronicler who expanded *The Georgian Chronicles*. It is the result of the chronicler’s misinterpretation of historical information, attributing it to events occurring during the Arab rule.

Here, we will clarify that the inscription of the Sinai manuscript (N/Sin-50) was either composed or edited at a time when Ashot had not only been granted the title of Curopalates but had also already passed away. This is the period when the author of

the inscription could have said that Latavari is “the mother of the Bagratuniani and of Curopalates,” indicating that “the Bagratuniani and Curopalates [of Kartli] originate from Latavari.” This statement could not have been written before Ashot was granted the title of Curopalates because he is recognized as the first Curopalates in Georgian history. Furthermore, Ashot is also the first Bagratuni among the rulers of Kartli to be referred to by this name.

Finally, we have reached the last section of the chronicle concerning Juansher and his sister Shushana, which clarifies the period during which the narrated stories occurred:

“And as many years passed by, there arrived... the one who ruled Armenia, Kartli and Hereti, named Khuasrow. He rebuilt Tpilisi annihilated by Khazars” (*G. C.*, 1955, p. 251).

In the text, instead of an ellipsis, we find “emir of the Agarenes,” which is an insertion made by the chronicler. As for the chronicle, it informed us that after the end of the Khazar “annihilation” around the mid-630s (when Juansher returned from his seven-year captivity), it was not the “emir of the Agarenes” who arrived, but Khosrow, i.e., a Sassanian ruler “who ruled Armenia, Kartli and Hereti.” Khosrow undertook the reconstruction of Tbilisi, which had been destroyed by the Khazars. Naturally, all these events occurred before the Arabs appeared in Kartli (early 650s).

Considering the above, we must conclude that after returning all three chronicles discussed here to their correct historical time, light is shed on several crucial issues in the history of Georgia.

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