

History

Review

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The Relations between Pre-Islamic Turks and Georgians from the Third to the Ninth Century: A History of Byzantine-Persian Politics in the Caucasus

Relations between Georgian and Pre-Islamic Turks are traced since the 3rd century AD. The Turkic peoples settled in the North Caucasus were in active contact with those who lived in the North as well as the South Caucasus – including Georgians. Various kinds of relations can be followed in this regard: cultural and economic interaction as well as warlike clashes, which frequently took place throughout the early Middle Ages. Since the North Caucasus was densely populated and from time to time filled up by new fertile lands was not a peaceful activity and was accompanied by invasions and onslaughts, resistance from natives, massacres or expulsion of people. In a complicated junction of interests the Turkic peoples, who created different state formations beyond the Caucasus Range, were not just invaders but also frequent allies and a reliable support for their southern neighbors. Related sources reflected not only the negative, but also the positive experience of the relations of Georgians with Turkish speaking tribes, such as Huns, Khazars and Kipchaks.

The work reveals some plausible periods of dependence of Georgians on Turkish speaking tribes: Huns, Turks and, later Khazars. However, these were short periods: the early 6th century, late 2nd decade of the 7th century (628-630), the 6th decade of the 8th century, when Kartli was in such a dependence; also the 8th decade of the 8th century, when Abkhazia shares Kartli's fate; a number of cases of alliances has been confirmed. The investigation of the time comes to defining some facts from the Georgian history.

The work of *Giuli Alasania* - "The Georgians and the Pre-Islamic Turks" is dedicated to a less studied issue in Georgian historiography – Late Antiquity and the participation of Pre-Islamic Turks in the political processes ongoing in Georgia in the Middle Ages. Under Pre-Islamic Turks, the author implies the Turkish-speaking tribes, which alternately occupied the vast plains of the East Black Sea Coast and the North Caucasus and entered the South Caucasus through the mountain passes of the Caucasus. Their strong military potential significantly defined the diplomacy of the South Caucasian countries over centuries, by which they tried to maintain opportunities for political maneuvering in relations with hostile neighbor empires (Rome, Iran, Byzantium, Arab Caliphate).

In order to neutralize the threat coming from the North Caucasus, Georgian kings used military force and sometimes took diplomatic steps as dictated by circumstances (the latter were mainly demonstrated by dynastic marriages). In all cases the rulers of Georgia tried to control the mountain passes of the Caucasus, thus becoming international political actors from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages. The political achievements of the Georgian kings were often defined by alliance with the North Caucasus. Certainly, configurations of such alliances were largely affected by interests of neighboring empires, which fatally confronted each other for peoples residing in the South Caucasus. Georgia and Albania, directly neighboring the North Turks, were particularly affected by these confrontations. These countries have often become the objects of destructive attacks from various Turkish tribes, but there have been longstanding periods of peaceful cohabitation as well, when political leaders of the Caucasian countries adeptly used their northern neighbors for resolution of their own military-political objectives. Due to the above, it is impossible to fully study the political history of the South Caucasian countries without considering the factor of the North Caucasus. These issues are primarily presented in the research paper.

The objective set by the author predetermines the original structure of the work– the issues reviewed in it address separate events and episodes from the historic past of Georgia, often chronologically distant from each other, but they are united by one basic issue – Pre-Islamic Turk relations with Georgia, their military-political cooperation and confrontations. That is why the book has a large chronological range – from Antiquity until nearly the end of the Middle Centuries.

When considering each issue, the author follows the same scientific standard: raising a problematic issue, critically overviewing the sources and scholarly literature connected with it, and then offering us her own original reconstruction of the historic picture. Even when the author agrees with previous researchers, she always provides a new argument to support the existing views. The author often covers issues in a new way and they should not be seen as ambiguous, but the juxtaposition of data from Georgian and foreign sources, their understanding in the context of the regional politics, allows her to find “weak spots”, detect “blank pages” of historiography and offer new, clearly substantiated versions of a number of known historic events.

The names of tribes settled in the North Caucasus at various times are often mixed in the sources of the Georgian history (Turks, Huns, Alan-Ossetians, Khazars, Kipchaks...), sometimes ethnonyms of Turkish origin are used collectively, generally, to denote the wandering invaders, regardless of their origin. Such mixtures of ethnic names create a specific difficulty for all researchers who ever attempted to interpret them. The oldest layer of the “Georgian Chronicles” which brings us to the origins of the statehood of Kartli of the Achaemenid period is distinguished by the complexity of identification of non-Georgian ethnic names and foreign languages related to them. This problem is addressed in the first chapter of the research paper, in which the author, considering the diverse sources and a wide historical context, similar to other authors, substantiates that Bun-Turks/Turks of the “Georgian Chronicles”, who according to the source, had settled in Kartli before Alexander of Macedonia, actually implies Scythians whose dominance in the East Georgia is confirmed by archaeological materials and linguistic data. The author also discusses the well-known episode of the “Georgian Chronicles” about the use of six languages among the population of Kartli at the same period (Armenian, Georgian, Khazar, Assyrian, Hebrew, Greek). This information had frequently become the subject of dispute and numerous interpretations in the scientific literature. Some researchers assumed that the list was incomplete and it lacked two languages – Persian and Turkish. The author of the work intentionally addresses this issue and convincingly protects the “credibility” of the source, substantiates that six and more languages correspond to the historic reality; explains why the Persian was not mentioned (it was replaced by Aramaic, which was mentioned as Assyrian in the text), while “Khazar” implied not the existence of the Turkish massive, but the Scythian-Sarmatian language.

Scarcity, fragmentation and sometimes inconsistency of information related to Pre-Islamic Turks are common for Georgian sources. For their interpretation the author fully refers to the control material – Greek, Armenian, Syrian, Arabic sources, analyzes the scientific literature related to them and tries to understand the contradictory logic of sources even when they give rise to different interpretations. Searching for the Turkish “trace” helps the author to obtain new analytical information and newly interpret the known historical facts with which the research paper is so rich.

The author confirms the appearance of the Huns in the South Caucasus in the chronicles of Movses of Khorenaztsi, who describes the episode of battle between the Armenians and the Huns in the early 3rd century and mentions the route of their invasion (Chor pass, historical Albania). It is well seen in the work that a different model of relations between Huns and South Caucasian peoples was formed in this century, which implied their unification against the common enemy. Here the author uses the data of the “Georgian Chronicles” and *Agathangelos* and it is seen by juxtaposition of these data, that the king of the Georgians opened the gate of the Caucasian mountains to the North Caucasian tribes to assist the king of the Armenians in rebelling against Persia and “Khazars” are mentioned among those tribes. Even though this is the case of mixture of ethnic names here too, but in reality, Huns are meant here which is confirmed by the Armenian source when conveying the same episode.

A number of similar episodes have been revealed from the history of the South Caucasian countries of the 4th-5th centuries as a result of analysis of the Georgian and Armenian sources. Turkish tribes permanently participated in the Caucasian politics together with other autochthonic Caucasian tribes, which, as the author notes, certifies a certain level of integration of Turkish-speaking tribes, however, the fact of mentioning them in each separate case requires an independent research and evaluation. Certainly, relations with Turks could not have been stable for a long time. This research paper pays particular attention to the fact when the kings of Kartli (sometimes the same king) replace hostility with Turkish tribes with military-political alliances with them it is due to political circumstances. Identification of such alliances helps the author to detect or clarify other historical facts. For example, it is established in the research paper that Georgians also participated in the Anti-Persian rebellion of the Armenian-Albanians with the assistance of Huns (Egishe) in the mid-5th century, which had been denied in the special literature

until now. The King of Kartli, Vakhtang Gorgasali had non-homogenous relations with Huns in the second half of the 5th century. At the beginning of his rule, he conducted successful campaigns against Ossetians and Huns (Kipchaks are mentioned in the source) in the North Caucasus and strengthened the Darial Gorge with fortresses. Political circumstances of confrontation between Vakhtang and Huns and afterwards, their alliance are reviewed in the research paper in detail; the connection of such facts with the regional politics of Byzantine Empire and Persia are explained; a number of facts regarding the involvement of the Huns in the struggle of the Caucasian people against Persia are detected. The displacement routes of Huns towards the South are reviewed and identification of ambiguous toponyms associated with these routes are provided. The author specially discusses the attempts of Vakhtang Gorgasali to arrange troops of Georgians, Armenians and Huns against Persia and the reasons for failure of this plan. Two battle episodes of the war between Byzantium in Persia in the early 6th century are rather interestingly connected with each other in the research paper. The first battle took place in Byzantium Armenia in which the Persians took edge over the opponents and the other battle was conducted in Georgia, "Over Iori" (The "Georgian Chronicles"). Vakhtang Gorgasali was deadly wounded in this battle. The logical connection between these two battles is evident. Therefore, the author's arguments that Huns, as allies of Byzantium, came to Georgia through Darial Gorge with the permission of the king of Kartli seems totally acceptable. As the date of the first battle is specified in the special literature, the author can specify the date of death of Vakhtang Gorgasali (not earlier than 503), which is a disputable issue for historians.

Juxtaposition of a wide range of sources (historiographic, literary, folkloristic, linguistic) encouraged the author to revise some statements of the long-standing historiographic tradition from the historic past of Georgia. These include dating a significant event such as abolition of the kingship in Kartli and introduction of institution of Erismtavari (princedom) in the 6th century. Even though doubts had been previously expressed by researchers regarding the accepted dates (523/532), they always lacked substantiation. The study of anti-Persian rebellions of the South Caucasian peoples and the detection of Turkish elements in them allowed the author of this research paper to separate the ambiguous and undifferentiated data of sources, make the insignificant details objects of observation, clarify the chronology of events, which eventually provided the basis for the totally new reconstruction of the political life of the

6th century Georgia. It can be said that the issue of power in the 6th century Kartli is not provided with such clear details in any research other than this one. The author consistently substantiates that the royal power continued existing during the entire 6th century, even though with certain discontinuities. It was abolished only as a result of Byzantine - Persian treaty concluded in 591 and the first presiding prince of Kartli was Stephanos I.

The majority of experts of Caucasian studies share the opinion that Albania was left to the Khazars after the end of campaigns of the Caesar Heracles and the Eastern Kartli was under the influence of Byzantine Empire until appearance of Arabs; however, it enjoyed actual independence. We see a similar assumption in works of V. Minorsky that before invasion of Arabs, the entire eastern part of the South Caucasus was in the hands of Khazars. The author of this research paper, who is studying the military and political aspects of relations of Caesar Heracles and Khazars in details, arrives at the conclusion that the Caesar ceded eastern Kartli in line with Albania to Khazars. In this case the author of the research paper refers to the historic-geographic data of Arab geographers (Ibn Khordadbeh, al-Baladhuri, Ibn al-Athir), who consider Kartli together with Albania within the domains of Khazars.

The role of the Khazars in the political life of Georgia particularly increased during Arab Rule, from 660s to 770s. The nature of military expeditions of Khazars in the South Caucasian countries, their devastating results, connection with the Caucasian policy of Byzantium, participation in anti-Arab rebellions and diplomatic links with local dynastic families, are studied in the research paper.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the political role of the Western Georgia in the process of the formation of the Georgian Kingdom, the so-called "Kingdom of Abkhazia". The identity of the first king of the Kingdom of Abkhazia, Leon, remains disputable until now. We know exactly that maternally, Leon was the grandson of the Khaqan of Khazars. At the same time, there was an opinion in the Georgian historiography that there had been two different Leons on the Abkhazian throne during the 8th century. This opinion is denied in the chapter and the source of this mistake is revealed. The existence of only one Leon who formed the Kingdom of Abkhazia on the ruins of the Kingdom of Egrisi with the assistance of Khazars is substantiated. Genealogical links between Leon and the Byzantine Emperor family (nephew of Leo the Isaurian) are defined. The entire

chain of dynastic marriages is interestingly outlined in this part of the article - the Byzantine Emperor's house - Khazar Khaganate – Kingdom of Abkhazia – Presiding Prince of Kartli. These links are fairly evaluated as the expression of a powerful anti-Arab coalition.

A separate chapter of the research is dedicated to the political changes triggered by the confrontation between Arabs and Khazars on the territory of the Eastern Georgia in the 8th century. It reviews the nature of the Arab Rule until the first Abbasids when local governance in the form of institution of principedom was still maintained, strong anti-Arab rebellions of Georgian mountain residents in 760s, who were supported by Khazars, and Arabs had to mobilize large forces to suppress these rebellions. Despite the fact that this period is interesting for many historians, ambiguity of sources, caused by the narration style or lack of chronological data, leaves a number of questions unanswered. The research paper offers many novelties in this regard. Several Khazar campaigns in the South Caucasus and particularly in Kartli are chronologically separated from each other, hiding the links of the presiding princes of Kartli with the rebelling mountain people are identified, which was followed by repressions of Abbasid Caliphs and formation of the Emirate of Tbilisi. Dating this event by mid-8th century in Georgian historiography has such a long tradition that it seemed not to be subject to revision any more. Observation of the “logic of movement” of Khazars in the East Caucasus allowed the author to perceive the fragmented data of sources more fully and connect them to the Georgian reality. It was discovered that Arabs were forced to establish the Emirate of Tbilisi after a strong rebellion of 760s, in 771, to be able to control Georgian mountain residents and local government which was found to be allied with Khazars against Arabs. Shattering of the institution of presiding princes of Kartli and its final abolishment are connected with this phenomenon. In the author's opinion, which is based on the data of the Armenian chronicler Ghevond regarding the repressions in Armenia and Kartli by Caliph Musa, the last presiding prince of Kartli was Stephanos who was executed by Arabs in 786 (Stephanos becoming a presiding prince is known from the Georgian hagiographic composition “The Martyrdom of St. Abo”). This opinion is contradicted by the 11th century Georgian source which refers to Ashot Curopalates as the presiding prince of Kartli at the turn of the 8th and the 9th centuries. To overcome this contradiction, the author overviews all sources related to Ashot Curopalates at the end of this chapter in detail, studies the titles of Ashot Curopalates (King, Curopalates) and confirms that Ashot Bagrationi,

the founder of Tao-Klarjeti principality, had never been the presiding prince of Kartli.

The issue of cooperation with Pre-Islamic Turks became important in the historic life of Georgia once again. Kipchaks had been active in that period and one of their large tribes settled north to Georgia in the late 11th century. During this period the Georgian king, David IV the Builder released the country from the Turk-Seljuks. Despite the achieved success, military forces of the country were not sufficient to protect the south borders, from which new waves of Turk-Seljuks were permanently inflowing. To avoid this threat, king David married the daughter of a Kipchak chief and afterwards resettled Kipchaks were known as good fighters in Georgia. Many historians have addressed the issue of the resettlement of Kipchaks. However, the issues of their number, accommodation and integration with the Georgian population remain disputable. These issues are highlighted in the research paper. According to the common opinion which is also shared by the author, Kipchaks were settled in the borderline of the South-East Georgia, along Mtkvari and Iori rivers, where the main route of Turk-Seljuks passed. As informed by the historian of King David, he resettled 40,000 Kipchak families. A large part of historians accepted this information without criticism and they estimated the total amount of Kipchaks at about 225,000. In the works published during the recent years, substantiated doubts were expressed regarding settlement of this amount of wanderers. There is an opinion that David settled about 5,000 warriors, about 25,000 with families (Margishvili); however, some authors, on the contrary, increase the possible amount of Kipchaks (Murgulia, Shusharin). The author of the research also leans towards the view that the number of Kipchaks was less than specified by the historian of David. In this case he relies on the data of Matthew of Edessa who noted that there were 15.000 Kipchaks in David's army. The author supports this opinion by the mystification of numbers common in the Middle Ages, which were also reflected in the Georgian sources. According to her observation, the number 40 thousands and 4 hundreds of thousand derived from it in the Georgian sources never express the actual number of troops (mysticism of numbers is studied by G. Alasania in a separate research paper "Number and Mystique in the ancient Georgian Historiography"- "Proceedings, Series of History, 4, 1984, pp. 28-45).

It is known that the process of Kipchak assimilation in Georgia was difficult and their main part returned soon after the death of David the Builder, but Kipchaks

are still mentioned in the Georgian sources of the following period here and there. The author studied all data where Kipchaks are mentioned – direct certifications of sources and lexical material, separate words and expressions related to the military system, which confirm the doubtless trace of Kipchaks in the Georgian reality. Such material allows the author to conclude that the Georgian kings used to invite Kipchaks as assistance forces and placed them in the vanguard. The author clarifies the expression “New Kipchaks” which some historians consider to be a concept different from the “old” Kipchaks settled earlier (during the reign of David). This view implies a continuous arrival of new flows of Kipchaks to Georgia which the author considers to be inconsistent with the historic reality. She claims that “New Kipchaks” mean newly converted Kipchaks who have accepted Christianity, and it is difficult not to agree with her about it, as the epithet “new” in old Georgian texts is really used to denominate a newly converted person, who has accepted Christianity. Despite this, based on the sources and linguistic facts the author also claims that Kipchaks used to arrive in the 12-13th cc. Georgia, but only temporarily, as hired warriors. The last time their trace appeared was at the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries, during the Mongol rule. There was a double kingdom system in East Georgia in this period – Mongols confronted the King David VIII (1292-1311) undesirable for them with his brother, Vakhtang III (1293-138). In one episode, David sheltered in the mountain regions was attacked by Kipchaks. The author sees in this episode the reflection of the oppression of Kipchaks (as well as Ossetians) by the Golden Horde. Because of this, Kipchaks were ready to start in the service of Ilhans.

Finally, the research paper reviews the connection of the Orbeli feudal family, which has a distinguished importance in the history of Georgia with the Turkish world. The Orbeli family was exiled from Georgia in 1177 because of organizing the conspiracy against George III. One of them laid the foundation for the Armenian branch of the Orbeli family whose representative is the 14th century well-known historian, Stephanos Orbelyan. In the 15th century the vast Orbeli estates in Kvemo (Lowee) Kartli were transferred to the Baratishvili feudal house founded by the royal official Barata Kachibas-dze, according to the historical documents which have reached us. The opinion of S. Janashia about the origin of Baratashvili, which was based upon the phonetic system of Abkhazian language has been shared in the Georgian historiography for a long time. He believed that the ancestor of Baratashvili must have been a certain “Kachiba”, an Abkhaz who had moved to Kartli from West Georgia. This opinion

is denied in the research paper and it is substantiated that Baratashvilis were descendants of Orbeli and had initially appropriated the estates of their ancestors in Kvemo Kartli. Interesting material is presented in the research paper in favor of this opinion – The Baratashvili family legends and sagas strongly resemble the myths on the origin of Orbeli described by Stephanos Orbelyan. Common historical layers and plots are outlined which confirm the common origin of these two temporally distant families. The author dedicates particular attention to topo-ethnicons saved in the sagas (Chin/Chen, Bun-Turks) which are explained only on a Turkish language basis and had a generally meant the wandering forces (Scythians, Khazars) moved from the outside in the Georgian and Armenian world. Understanding of the unity of historiographic and epigraphic data, family sagas and proofs of ownership of Orbeli and Baratashvili families helps the author to restore the broken genealogical line between these two families. The author associates the etymology of their connective link – “Kachiba” to the Turkish root (Cürcü Kaçık/Kaçuk...) which means “Escaped Georgian” (other Georgian surnames of analogous etymology have also been referred to). The author assumes that “Kachiba” must have been the Turkish additional rank of the junior member of Orbeli House, Kavtar Orbeli who had returned to Georgia (sources refer to him as the younger brother or nephew of Ivane Orbeli). Apart from the assumed etymology of the additional rank, the author’s claim is based on the logic of development of events, according to which the feudal lord who had escaped from his homeland, an owner of large estates, returned back when given the opportunity. Kavtar began to gather the old estates of Orbeli family and his descendants became rulers of Kvemo Kartli with different names.

These are the main issues studied in the research. Certainly, the work in the paper is much richer contextually, as the author fully uses the existing historiographic database and scholarly literature, clarifies facts and finds explanation of each historic event in terms of regional politics, when reviewing each problematic issue. The research paper is crafted in a highly professional manner and it can be said, with scientific confidence, undoubtedly it will be interesting for researchers of Georgian history as well as the history of the Caucasus.