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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus. Iberica Caucasica I by Tamila Mgaloblishvili

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Source: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Nov., 2001), pp. 377-379

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland

Reviews of Books

ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY IN THE CAUCASUS. IBERICA CAUCASICA I. Edited by TAMILA MGALOBISHVILI. pp. xvi, 272. Richmond, Curzon, 1998.

The majority of articles in this volume were written for presentation at a conference entitled “Early Christianity and Georgia” which was to be held in Tbilisi in October of 1991. It never took place because of civil strife. The submitted talks were simply gathered together here for publication without “significant”(?) alteration, this core being supplemented by three “classic papers” and a bibliography of recent works (mostly in Georgian) that is thematically divided into: i. art-history, ii. history (from which I would recommend excising Zurab Ratiani’s brochure – by definition, any work from a Kartvelian source with “Apswa” = “Abkhazian” in the title is designed merely to insult the Abkhazians rather than as a contribution to serious scholarship), and iii. language and literature. For unexplained reasons the notes and references to Ernst Bammel’s “Die Ausbreitung des Christentums in Georgien” could not be incorporated, though the book does yield a fair harvest of typos with occasional peculiarities in translated material (K’onst’ant’ine Ts’ereteli’s paper being especially badly served in both regards). As is regularly the case with conference-collections, the individual chapters vary considerably in content and interest without gelling into a coherent whole – indeed, some sections here have hardly any relevance to the Caucasus (let alone Georgia).

V. Licheli (pp. 25–37) considers the archaeological evidence in support of the description in the ancient chronicles *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (“Life of Kartli [= Georgia]”) for St Andrew’s visit to Atskuri in the S.W. province of Samtskhe. The archaeological theme continues in T. Mgaloblishvili & I. Gagoshidze’s neat examination (pp. 39–58) of burial-evidence for the presence of Jews in Urnisi and Mtskheta, Georgia’s old capital, who might have adopted Christian doctrines. Jewish relevance for the spread of Christianity to Georgia is also investigated by E. Bammel (pp. 15–23). Jewish influence on early Christianity equally attracts J. van Oort (pp. 97–105), who deals largely with N. Africa but draws parallels with Georgia. Relations between Christians and Jews at the time of Julian’s project to rebuild the Temple are examined by R. Brändle (pp. 107–123); though the Jerusalem-connections of Georgia’s 337 enlightener, St Nino, are mentioned on the first page, the author proceeds to acknowledge his poor acquaintance with the history of Jews in Georgia, which perhaps explains why Georgia figures no further. P. N. Egender (pp. 125–140) discusses the role of early Palestinian monasticism particularly in relation to the defence of the Chalcedonian doctrine of the dual nature of Christ – Georgian monks were at least present in the Holy Land at this period. A. M. Ritter (pp. 141–154) argues that John Chrysostom’s fourth-century tirades against the Jews should be viewed as classical rhetorical exercises targeted at “Judaizing Christians” rather than Jews in general, and, as we have seen, it is proposed elsewhere that such might have been the first Georgian Christians. M. van Esbroeck (pp. 59–74) endeavours to unwrap different layers in the version of the *moktsevey kartlisay* “Conversion of Kartli” preserved in the Shat’berd Codex that seem to have been interpolated to affirm St Nino’s links with Jerusalem. C. P. Bammel (pp. 75–81) starts by arguing that the fragment

of a manuscript of Rufinus mentioning Georgia's conversion that was claimed in its 1985 auctioneers' catalogue to have possibly derived from the oldest ms. written in England did in fact most likely hail from an Irish hand working in Italy; she proceeds to point up the importance of Rufinus for Ireland and Georgia, extremities of the Christian world. K. Machabeli looks at the themes of early Georgian stelae and their relevance for Eastern Christian imagery. From the actual conference-papers this leaves K'. Ts'ereteli's short excursus (pp. 155–162) on some differences characterising the few surviving inscriptions of the so-called "Armazian" script for Aramaic that have been discovered in Georgia and Armenia.

The "Classic Papers" include two in French by Ekvtime Taq'aishvili (1863–1953), written but unpublished after the author's emigration to France, and one by Giorgi Ch'ubinashvili, "On the initial forms of Christian churches" (pp. 185–195), in which he maintains that the domed churches of Georgia and Armenia simply arose from the shape of native domiciles. Taq'aishvili's second paper (pp. 175–184) describes an icon of St George from the Zugdidi Museum, which, he argues, was commissioned by K'virile Zhvanidze for the Mingrelian prince Giorgi Dadiani III; it depicts the slaying of a cow, which means that the icon must once have belonged to the church of Ilori in Abkhazia, where a festival of St George and the cow was celebrated in November; the icon was not among Ilori's artefacts during Carla Serena's 1881 visit. The legend of the cow is translated from Italian missionary Lamberti's seventeenth century account. Taq'aishvili's first contribution (pp. 165–173) is a description of the cover (with inscription) of one of the Gospel manuscripts from Svaneti(a), the binding's ornamentation having been purloined between the earlier nineteenth century visit of Davit Bakradze and that of Countess Uvarova; the preparation of the ms, Taq'aishvili argues, should be attributed to Epiphanos, Catholicos in Mtskheta. Taq'aishvili's travels in search of Georgia's glorious cultural heritage came towards the end of a series of such nineteenth century discoveries that led eventually to the establishment of the Institute of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, home now to many of these priceless objects.

My own suggestion for a first volume in a series dedicated to Caucasian (?Georgian) Christianity would have been the publication in English translation of Zurab Ch'umburidze's engrossing 1983 account of manuscript-discovery "On the Track of Georgian Manuscripts", which I believe would have made a more appealing introductory volume than the present assortment.

Georgia's contribution to world-culture is impressive but is diminished when its champions refuse to acknowledge the role of others. I wish, therefore, to conclude by correcting some rather tendentious statements in the editor's Introduction (pp. 3–14).

The ancient Greeks referred to the whole eastern seaboard of the Pontic Euxine (Black Sea) as Colchis, without clearly defining its limits. Attested in later Roman times were a province of Colchis and a kingdom of Lazica, which latter one may reasonably assign to the ancestors of today's Laz/(Mingrelians); the Laz became largely confined to what is now Turkey after Georgian speakers separated them from their Mingrelian brethren, who occupy the flatlands of W. Georgia, forming a buffer between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. In the Georgian chronicles "Egrisi", based on the root *egr- (cf. "Mingrelian/Megrelian"), either signified "(part of) Mingrelia" or subsumed, at its most inclusive, Mingrelia and the W. Georgian province of Imereti(a) – it seems not to have included Abkhazia, Svaneti(a) and (to the south) Guria. So, the simplistic equation "Colchis = Lazika = Egrisi = W. Georgia" is surely spurious. Since the modern Laz do not think of themselves as Georgians, the assertion that Lazika was a "Georgian" state requires argumentation. As for the map (pp. x–xi) indicating the inclusion of today's Abkhazia in first–fourth century Lazika, here is the reaction of the late historian Prof. Yuri Voronov to an earlier parallel claim: "[I]n reality there exists no source earlier than 554 AD that gives concrete information either about the placement of borders between Lazika, Apsilia, Missimiania and Abazgia [three constituent-parts of today's Abkhazia – Reviewer], or about

the dependence of the whole of this territory on the Laz”, adding that “the short-lived ‘dependence’ (in the second quarter of the VIth century) of the Apsilians and Abazgians on Lazika was organised by Byzantium in its own interests, and that this design quickly flopped” (see “Caucasian Perspectives”, edited by G. Hewitt for *Lincom Europa*, 1992, pp. 261). In the 780s Leon II, potentate of Abkhazia, “seized Abkhazia and Egrisi [= Mingrelia and Imereti(a) – Reviewer] as far as the Likhi Mountains” (“Kartlis Tskhovreba”), the whole area, incorporating most of modern W. Georgia, becoming known as Abkhazia (in Georgian “apxazeti”). In 975 the accession of Bagrat’ III united, through dynastic inheritance, this Kingdom of Abkhazia and the Iberian Kingdom of Kartli in the united mediaeval Kingdom of Georgia (“apxazeti” remaining as a synonym for “sakartvelo” = “Georgia” until this state fell apart in the wake of the Mongol incursions).

As for the suggestion (p. 7) that Abkhazia was subordinated to the Mtskheta See from the ninth century, here again is Voronov: “[T]here is no concrete source of any kind to support the supposition that the Abkhazian Church abandoned its subservience to Constantinople either in the IXth or Xth century . . . The period under discussion [IXth–XIth centuries] on the Black Sea coast is characterised by the strengthening of the ideological and political expansion of the Byzantine empire in the direction of the Bulgarians, Russians and North Caucasian Alans. At the start of the Xth century in the West Caucasus is formed the Alan Mitropolate, itself subordinate to Constantinople, and it is merger with this which is certainly more logical for the Abkhazian Church. At the end of the Xth and beginning of the XIth centuries the Alan Mitropolate pretended to dominion over the ecclesiastical centres even on the south coast of the Black Sea (Kerasunt), which would hardly have been possible under conditions whereby the intervening ecclesiastical centres in Abkhazia proper were not themselves subordinate to it. The Mitropolate of Alania retains its place in the lists of the Constantinople Patriarchate until the end of the XIIth century when the archbishoprics in the environs of Trebizond (Sotiriupolis) were again formally subordinated to the Alan archbishop. The gradual expulsion of Byzantine clerics from Alania and the parallel weakening (under the influence of the Mongol invasion) of the Catholicosate in Mtskheta led to the appearance of the Abkhazian Autocephalous Catholicosate (with its centre in Pitsunda), which continued its existence from the middle of the XIIIth to the middle of the XVIIth century” (*ibid.*, pp. 262–3).

Finally, Georgia did not exist as a single entity in 1801 when only the central and eastern kingdoms were annexed by Tsarist Russia (p. 14) – the western provinces (along with Abkhazia) fell under Russian “protection” at various dates later in the century.

It is sad that a more objective history could not have been composed as introduction to volume and series.

GEORGE HEWITT

DICTIONARY OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST. Edited by PIOTR BIENKOWSKI and ALAN MILLARD. pp. x, 342. London, British Museum Press, 2000.

A plethora of encyclopaedias and dictionaries of the ancient Near East have appeared in recent years. Generally they fall into three categories: first, there are the monumentally large library encyclopaedias such as *Civilizations of the ancient Near East*,¹ the *Oxford encyclopaedia of archaeology in the Near East*,² and the *Anchor Bible dictionary*.³ At the other extreme of affordability are websites such *History Today's*

¹ J. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East*, 4 vols. (New York, 1995).

² E. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford encyclopaedia of archaeology in the Near East*, 5 vols. (Oxford and New York, 1997).

³ J. N. Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York and London, 1992).