Abkhazia and Lazica in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Mikhail Gunba tests the long-standing claim that the Abasgi and Apsilae were vassals of the Lazic kings against Procopius, the Georgian chronicles of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher, and the excavations at Sebastopolis and Pityus. His finding is that Abkhazia was held by Rome and Byzantium, while Lazica answered to Kartli and, through Kartli, to Persia.

4.2. Abkhazia and Lazica in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

A number of historians currently hold that Abkhazia was subordinate to the Lazic kingdom. This view does not seem to us beyond dispute, so we shall set the evidence of all the written sources and the archaeological material against the conclusions of the scholars who have addressed the question.

Ivane Javakhishvili wrote that the Lazic king ruled over the Abkhaz, the Abshils, the Misimians and the Svans.[74]

Simon Janashia, citing Procopius of Caesarea, held that the Abasgi, Apsilae and Sanigae fell into vassal dependence on the Lazi in the 380s and 390s. He explained this so-called Lazic success by the serious difficulties Rome faced in the second half of the fourth century, which kept it from intervening.[75] Oleg Kudryavtsev wrote: 'In the fourth century the petty king of the Lazi subdues the surrounding tribes. In the second half of the fourth century his authority was recognised by the Apsilae and Abasgi, who lived on the territory of Abkhazia.'[76]

Giorgi Melikishvili notes that 'as early as the second century the Lazi drove back northwards the highlanders who had pushed south (the Apsilae, the Abasgi and possibly some Svan tribes as well). In later authors the northern ethnographic border of the Lazi reached the area of Dioscurias and Sebastopolis.'[77] This assertion does not accord with the sources. Arrian, as is well known, regarded Sebastopolis as a city of the Sanigae, who lived north-west of the Abasgi.[78] Procopius of Caesarea likewise stated that Sebastopolis and Pityus lay in the land of the Sanigae.[79] As for later times, far from advancing northwards, the Lazi, as is known, lost their independence even on their own territory.

From Arrian's time onwards, then, Sebastopolis did not belong to the Lazi. As for the supposed date at which the Abasgi broke away from Egrisi (Lazica), Simon Janashia and Giorgi Melikishvili point to the end of the fifth century, while Mariam Lordkipanidze places it at the close of the sixth.[80]

A number of scholars have thus formed the view that the Abasgi and Apsilae were subject to the Lazic (Egrisian) kingdom over a long period, from the end of the fourth century through the fifth.

Zurab Anchabadze maintains that 'towards the end of the ancient era, on the territory of western Georgia and under the hegemony of the Lazic principality, a new major political formation took shape: the Lazic kingdom, which proclaimed itself heir to the ancient Colchian kingdom'.[81] Only authors of the sixth century, Procopius of Caesarea and Agathias, speak of the rise of the Lazi, and even they give no specific date ('long-standing subjects of the Lazi'). Giorgi Melikishvili notes that it is not known when exactly the Apsilae and Abasgi were subordinated to Lazica. Zurab Anchabadze does not settle the question either. 'The dependence of the Abasgi, however,' he writes, 'at any rate in the sixth century, was somewhat different from the form of subordination of the Apsilae. The Abasgi had two princes, one in the western part of their country and the other in the eastern. The territory of Apsilia, on the other hand, was, as Giorgi Melikishvili supposes, incorporated into the Lazic kingdom; Lazic garrisons were evidently stationed there, and it was the most closely bound to Lazica.'[82]

Some scholars extend the influence of the Lazic kingdom to the Sanigae as well. Zurab Anchabadze, for example, writing of the Sanigae, quotes the following passage from Procopius: 'The people living here are subjects neither of the Roman emperor nor of the king of the Lazi... Only because they are Christians do the bishops of the Lazi appoint priests for them.'[83] Yet when Procopius describes the Sanigae (Sagini), he says not a word about their dependence on the Lazi or about their faith. Earlier, however, in describing the places and tribes from Rhizaeum to Apsarus (Apsyrtus), he writes of a territory bordering on Armenia and Persarmenia, and of its inhabitants. The expression 'the people living here' deserves attention. Let us examine Procopius' account more closely:

> *'So that one may well wonder at those who say that the Colchians are neighbours of the inhabitants of Trapezus,' he writes. 'For it is clear*

> *that Jason, having carried off the [golden] fleece together with Medea, could have fled by this road not to Hellas or to his native land, but back to the River Phasis and to the barbarians living in the interior. It is said that in the time of the Roman emperor Trajan, Roman legions were encamped here as far as the land of the Lazi and the Sagini. The people now living here are subjects neither of the Roman emperor nor of the king of the Lazi; only because they are Christians do the bishops of the Lazi appoint priests for them. These tribes, of their own free will and by virtue of a treaty, are friends of both sides, and they have agreed always to serve without fail as guides for those whom the two sides send to each other. They seem to have done so down to my own time. Those whom the two rulers send to each other as messengers they carry in their light boats. To the right of these places rise very sheer mountains, and a desert country stretches over a vast area. Beyond it live the so-called Persarmenians, and the Armenians subject to the Romans, who occupy the land as far as the very borders of Iberia."*[84]

When Procopius says 'by this road', he means the road from the city of Rhizaeum to Apsarus. One can indeed reach Armenia by this road. 'Those living in the interior' are those living between the Phasis and Armenia, where the desert country lies. The inhabitants of these parts served as guides 'for both sides'. Which sides are meant? If Procopius had the Sanigae in mind, whom would they have been guiding? As the text shows, the guides lived between the two countries named. The reference is to the Romans and the Lazi, between whom the people that concerns us lived.

In *The Gothic War* Procopius describes the country north of Rhizaeum. He then names Archabis and Apsarus (Apsyrtus). Immediately afterwards he remarks that Jason, having seized the golden fleece, could have gone 'by this road', that is, through Apsarus, 'not to Hellas or to his native land, but to the River Phasis and to the barbarians living in the interior'. Here Procopius notes in passing how these places had stood towards the Roman Empire in earlier times: 'It is said that in the time of the Roman emperor Trajan, Roman legions were encamped here as far as the land of the Lazi and the Sagini.' Procopius makes it clear enough that the area he is describing is being set against Lazica and Sanigia. He means that in his own

day the Romans had lost the fortresses on the territory of Lazica. He then returns to his description of southern Colchis and Apsarus. 'From the city of Apsarus to the city of Petra and the borders of the Lazi, where the Euxine Pontus ends,' Procopius notes, 'is one day's journey.'[85] He goes on to describe in turn the bend of the sea, the land of the Lazi, Scymnia, Suania and, last, Sanigia. Of Sanigia the source says only that its coastal part had been occupied by the Romans since ancient times.

The principal argument advanced by the authors cited above for the dependence of the Abasgi on the Lazi is Procopius' well-known statement that the Abasgi 'had been subjects of the Lazi from of old'. They also invoke certain events of the period of the Iranian and Byzantine wars, which will be discussed below. In doing so, they ignore entirely both Procopius' other accounts and the mediaeval Georgian sources, whose authors are no less well informed on this question than the Byzantine ones. We have in mind, above all, the accounts of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher.

Procopius of Caesarea all but contradicts his own statement when he speaks of the Abasgi breaking away from the Romans. Yet if one follows the substance of this account carefully, his purpose becomes clear. Byzantium, as is known, won the war against Iran and appropriated Lazica. The Byzantines had to expend great effort to extend their influence over Svania, and succeeded only because Svania was regarded as subordinate to Lazica. Once they had legitimised their own authority over Lazica, the Byzantines began to promote the idea that other tribes were subject to the Lazi. So it was with Abasgia.

When Procopius discusses the causes of the Abasgian revolt of 550, he does not so much as hint at the Lazi. 'Why the Abasgi resolved to revolt, I shall now relate,'[86] he writes, and then gives a detailed account of the battle of Trachea. The account says only that the Abasgi had come to feel their slavish dependence on the Romans, and rose up for that reason. It is also worth noting that after the revolt was crushed, the Abasgi again became dependent on the Romans alone, not on the Lazi. Matters stood differently in Apsilia. After the revolt was crushed, Apsilia was made subject to the Lazi, since it had been subject to them before the revolt as well.

The principal source for the history of Georgia in late antiquity is the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. One of the authors of this compilation, Leonti Mroveli, describes the history of both eastern and western Georgia from the earliest times to Vakhtang Gorgasali, king of Kartli. His account gives serious grounds for doubting the political might of the Lazic kingdom and its dominion over neighbouring peoples.

Leonti Mroveli reports, for example, that under Amazasp, the eighteenth king of Kartli (end of the third century AD), the rulers of Egrisi were no longer called kings but *eristavs*. The source says: 'and they came to the eristavs of Egrisi'.[87]

Perhaps under later kings Egrisi was able to grow stronger and, in the fourth century, to build a powerful kingdom by subjugating its neighbours? Here too the Georgian sources answer in the negative.[88] Leonti Mroveli reports that Mirian (fourth century) reigned over Kartli, Somkhiti, Rani, Ereti, Movakani and Egri.[89] More interesting still is his statement that Mirian, king of Kartli, 'held Egrisi too, as far as the River Egri'.[90] The River Egri, as is known, was at that time the southern border of Abkhazia. It follows that Egrisi, being part of Mirian's dominions, was not an independent state.

For the end of the fourth century we have Leonti Mroveli's statement that when his father's domains were divided, Varaz-Bakar received Egrisi together with other provinces.[91] Juansher further reports that when the Ossetians invaded in the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali, certain parts of his state, Egrisi among them, escaped plunder.[92]

Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, then, Egrisi formed part of the Kartlian kingdom, and was consequently restricted in its conduct of foreign affairs. The thesis that the Lazic kings peacefully extended their authority into Abasgia and Apsilia, with Rome's consent, in order to defend the mountain passes therefore seems to us unfounded.

It should be noted that the mediaeval Georgian authors, who knew Abasgia and Apsilia well, did not include these regions in the Kartlian kingdom. On the contrary, they repeatedly stressed the influence of the Byzantine Empire over them, stating that they were held by the Romans and did not form part of the domains of the kings of Kartli. Juansher, for instance, reports that the border between Abkhazia and Georgia at that time was the River Egri (Ingur).[93] The same follows from his statement that in the fifth century the Greeks (Byzantines),

coming out of Abkhazia, conquered the country from the River Egri to Tsikhe-Goji.[94] Juansher emphasised that the Greeks held the territory north-west of the River Egri, that is, Abkhazia. According to him, Vakhtang Gorgasali waged war on Abkhazia for three years and took possession of its fortresses. Juansher explains this outcome by the fact that the Greeks were then at war with the Persians, which prevented them from sending Abkhazia military help.[95]

It is quite clear that the whole territory of Abkhazia was then under the protectorate of the Greeks, from whom alone the Abkhaz could expect help.

Describing the terms of the peace between Vakhtang Gorgasali and the Byzantine emperor, Juansher gives the emperor's words: the territory 'from the River Egri to the Small River of Khazaria has been the border of Greece since the time of Alexander (of Macedon? M. G.)... and when you take your wife, my daughter, I shall give you part of it'.[96] The emperor gave his daughter as her dowry the territory from the River Egri to Klisura, and kept the rest of Abkhazia for himself.

These sources show that before Vakhtang Gorgasali the territory from the River Egri to Klisura was an integral part of Abkhazia. When did it pass into Vakhtang's possession? The source says that Leo the Great was occupied with war against the Persians and could not send an army to Abkhazia.[97] The author stresses that the emperor Leo was bound to defend Abkhazia, since it was regarded as his possession.

Juansher's account of Gorgasali's campaign deserves attention. It says: 'He seized all the fortresses of Abkhazia as far as Tsikhe-Goji.'[98] Here Juansher does not even mention Lazica. Scholars have suggested that the weakening of the Lazic kingdom was connected with the rise of Iberia in the time of Vakhtang Gorgasali.[99] As before, Lazica (Egrisi), together with Svaneti, Margvi and Takveri, was subject to Vakhtang. All these facts show that before Vakhtang Gorgasali the territory from the River Egri to Klisura[100] (that is, Apsilia) had always been an integral part of Abkhazia.

Apsilia's separation from Abkhazia must have taken place at the end of the fifth century. This is borne out by the fact that Vakhtang Gorgasali's first wife, the daughter of the Persian king, died in 482. Vakhtang's second marriage, with which the annexation of Apsilia to his domains was bound up, can only have taken place after 482.

According to the testimony of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, therefore, Abkhazia even by the middle of the fifth century, from its furthest northern borders to its southern border on the River Egri, was subject to the Byzantine emperor, apart from the period when Vakhtang Gorgasali, king of Kartli, ruled Apsilia. Of any subjection of Abkhazia to Lazica there is no mention. On the contrary, Juansher reports that Vakhtang brought forward his son, named Darchil in Persian and Dachi in Georgian. The boy was five years old when his father made him king and left him seven nobles, among them Samnagir, eristav of inner Egrisi and Svaneti, and Bakur, eristav of Margvi and Takveri.[101]

These sources are usually ignored by Georgian scholars of the history of Abkhazia and Lazica in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Can the accounts of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher of the events of the fourth and fifth centuries be set aside because they are eleventh-century authors?

In our view such treatment of these sources is unjustified. No other Georgian sources contradicting Mroveli and Juansher are known. It should be observed that Leonti Mroveli's information on the second century AD is accepted by Georgian historiography. The accounts of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher of events in the fourth to sixth centuries AD are likewise accepted by Georgian historiography.[102] The detailed picture they give of the relations between eastern and western Georgia on the one hand, and between Abkhazia and Byzantium on the other, shows that Leonti Mroveli and Juansher drew on reliable primary sources.

Can these sources be ignored on the grounds that Leonti Mroveli and Juansher lived in the age of the unification of all Georgia, and included Egrisi in the domains of the kings of eastern Georgia for that reason alone?

In that case they could equally have projected the reality of their own time onto the Abkhazia of the fourth and fifth centuries and included it in the Kartlian kingdom. They do not do so, however, but follow the sources available to them.

The interest of the kings of Kartli in possessing Egrisi is evident not only in the fourth and fifth centuries but earlier still. On this question Giorgi Melikishvili writes:

> *'We have seen above that the position of the Kartlian kingdom in western Georgia in the first half of the second century AD was fairly*

> *strong. Part of the territory of western Georgia, Argveti (the region adjoining eastern Georgia in the area of the Surami range), formed part of it directly, as a separate saeristavo. At the same time Kartli also took possession of a certain part of the coastal strip south of the mouth of the Chorokhi. Kartli's advance encroached on Rome's position, and the result was the strained relations between them under Hadrian. This may explain why in the 130s, at the time of Arrian's tour of inspection, there was an incomparably stronger contingent of Roman troops at Apsarus, on the border of the Iberian domains (five cohorts, half a legion), than in the other coastal towns of Colchis (at Phasis, for example, there were only 400 soldiers). Just as it had subjugated the confederation of the Zydritae, Kartli undoubtedly sought to subjugate the Lazic kingdom as well. In this situation the rulers of the Lazi and the Romans became natural allies. This alliance probably played a significant part, first in resisting the attempts of a strong Kartli to subjugate western Georgia entirely, and then, after Kartli had weakened, in ending the power of the rulers of Kartli over the eastern districts of Colchis and incorporating those districts into the Lazic kingdom.'*[103]

It must be supposed that the aims of the rulers of eastern Georgia in the second century AD were gradually realised in the third, fourth and fifth centuries. Many scholars note this, Giorgi Melikishvili among them. He writes:

> *'True, the Byzantine authors of the sixth century maintain a deathly silence about Kartli's possessions in western Georgia. They seem to know nothing of them, while being exceptionally well informed about the dominion of the Lazic kingdom over the tribes of western Georgia (the Apshils, the Abasgi, the Sanigae) and even over the Iberians. But this is understandable: they based their right to dominion in western Georgia precisely on the rights of their subject, the Lazic king, whereas facts attesting to possessions in western Georgia of Kartli, which was subject to Iran, were most unwelcome to them, since they would have supported the Persians' claims to western Georgia. Besides, in Byzantine eyes Kartli's penetration of western Georgia in*

> *the fourth and fifth centuries may genuinely have looked like Iranian penetration, since Kartli for the most part acted as Iran's ally.'*[104]

Varlam Dondua also discusses the relations between eastern Georgia and Egrisi. He writes: 'The rest of Kartli, on the other hand, now drew still closer to Egrisi and to the Graeco-Roman world, which was more progressive than Iran. From then on the trade routes running through the gorges of the Rioni, the Kvirila and the Chorokhi to the Black Sea acquired still greater importance for this part of Kartli.'[105] This view of Dondua's accords with Leonti Mroveli's report that Egrisi formed part of the domains of Varaz-Bakar.

Western Georgia (Egrisi) often formed a single political whole with eastern Georgia (Iberia, or Kartli), which gave Graeco-Roman authors grounds for including western Georgia under the name of Iberia. In this connection Simon Kaukhchishvili writes: 'The sources indicated in point 5 (Pliny and Epiphanius. M. G.) understand by Iberia and the Iberians the region and inhabitants (of one coastal part) of western Georgia.'[106]

It may be supposed that in later times, too, Egrisi was regarded as part of the domains of the kings of eastern Georgia. We do not know the origin of Sergius, the ruler of Egrisi, but the events of the following period go some way towards persuading us that Egrisi was part of Iberia. At the beginning of the eighth century, for example, the Arabs held sway in Egrisi, and after the campaign of Marwan ibn Muhammad the rulers of Egrisi were the Kartlian rulers Mir and Archil, and then Archil's son Ioane.

The question arises why the kings of Kartli became the rulers of Egrisi. Why do the sources not mention representatives of Egrisi, who ought to have taken part in the struggle against the Arabs? Why, once the Arabs had been driven out of Egrisi, is it precisely its rulers, the kings of eastern Georgia, who are expelled from their own domain, and not members of an Egrisian royal house? And why, after Archil's death, was Egrisi regarded as the domain of Ioane, Archil's son?

All this shows that Egrisi was not a self-governing country; it depended on Kartli.

As for the view that 'the rulers of the Lazi and the Romans became natural allies', it finds no support in the sources. The fifth-century Spanish chronicler Hydatius writes not of the might of the Lazic kingdom but of a Byzantine expedition into

Lazica and the destruction of the Lazi by the army of Marcian (450 to 457).[107] The curbing of 'the power of the rulers of Kartli over the eastern districts of Colchis' is therefore explained by the Byzantine conquest of the coastal fortresses of Lazica.

Some scholars regard the 'subjection' of the Svans as one of the signs of the supposed might of the Lazic kingdom.[108] Yet the report of Priscus of Panium that 'the Romans and the Lazi had the fiercest enmity with the tribe of the Svans',[109] which relates to the reign of Marcian, does not bear out their view. It means that Byzantium, having subjugated Lazica, resolved to subdue the Svans as well. From Priscus' account it follows that the Lazi could not cope with the Svans alone, and that even with Roman help they found it hard to fight them.

The subjection of the Svans to the Lazi should not be understood in simplistic terms. It rested on contractual arrangements. There is, for example, an interesting report by the sixth-century author Menander Protector:

> *'After some enmity arose between the king of the Lazi and Martin, the Roman then in command there (in Svaneti. M. G.), the Colchian did not send the Svans the customary provisions: the king of the Colchians usually sent them grain. Aggrieved, therefore, that the established help had been stopped, they informed the Persians that if they came there, they would hand Svaneti over to them.'*[110]

The Svans evidently received grain under a definite agreement. Such relations between the Svans and the Lazi had become customary, and can hardly be described as Lazic political dominion over the Svans. It may be supposed that in the fourth and fifth centuries, too, the Svans were subject to the Lazi only by virtue of a definite agreement; had the Lazi broken it, the Svans could have renounced their subjection, as they did in the sixth century. It seems to us that precisely this situation is reflected in the report of Priscus of Panium quoted above.

In speaking of the subjection of the Svans to the Lazi, Giorgi Melikishvili refers to Menander, who reports that the Svans had been subject to the Lazi from the reigns of Theodosius at Rome and Varahran in Iran down to those of Leo and Peroz.[111] Two emperors named Theodosius are known, the first reigning from 379 to 395 and the second from 408 to 450. Two Varahrans are known as well: Varahran IV reigned from 389 to 399 and Varahran V from 420 to 439. Simon

Kaukhchishvili connects the subjection of the Svans to the Lazi with the reign of Varahran V. We too consider that the Byzantine envoy Peter meant the second Theodosius and Varahran V. Otherwise he would have had to specify under which Theodosius or which Varahran the event took place.

The subjection of the Svans to the Lazi must therefore be confined within the chronological limits of 420 to 474, since Leo reigned until 474. Moreover, the dependence of the Svans on the Lazi did not necessarily begin in the first year of Varahran V's reign, and may not have lasted until the very end of Leo's (474).

The so-called subjection of the Svans to the Lazi, then, was short-lived and cannot serve as evidence of any special might on the part of the Lazi.

Some scholars stress that the Lazi and the Egrisians (the Lazi being the highland population and the Egrisians the people of the plain) occupied extensive fertile districts of Colchis.[112] The sources, however, give no specific indication of Lazica's borders in the fourth and fifth centuries. On Lazica's economic condition in the sixth century Procopius writes: 'The Lazi have neither salt nor grain nor other produce of the earth; they sell hides, furs and slaves to other peoples, and by this means obtain all they need.'[113] He returns several times to Lazica's economic position. Of the Lazic district of Mocheresis he wrote, as we have already quoted: 'In this district there are many populous villages. Of all the lands of Colchis it is the best. Wine is made here and many good fruits grow, which is not the case in the rest of Lazica.'[114]

Procopius' words show that only one part of Lazica (Mocheresis) was rich, while the rest was poor and almost uninhabited. The population of Lazica was in fact concentrated on the right bank of the River Phasis. Procopius reports: 'All the villages of the Lazi are here, on this side of the river,'[115] and adds: 'The left side of the Phasis, from that river to the limits of Lazica, extends for one day's journey for a good walker. But this land is entirely uninhabited.'[116]

There are, therefore, no grounds for regarding Lazica as an 'extensive fertile' territory conducive to any special strengthening of the Lazi.

Giorgi Melikishvili plays down Kartli's influence in Lazica, arguing that Rome, fearing Kartli's growing strength, supported the Lazi, and that 'in this situation the rulers of the Lazi and the Romans became natural allies'. 'This alliance,' he

continues, 'probably played a significant part, first in resisting the attempts of a strong Kartli to subjugate western Georgia entirely, and then, after Kartli had weakened, in ending the power of the rulers of Kartli over the eastern districts of Colchis and incorporating those districts into the Lazic kingdom.'[117] There is every reason, however, to suppose that the territory of Lazica was not divided in the fourth and fifth centuries. Rather the reverse: the rulers of Lazica were subject to the rulers of Kartli. The weakening of Kartli brought about by the strengthening of Persian rule did not prevent its rulers from extending their influence over Lazica; the Persian government had an interest in spreading its own influence to Lazica through Kartli. The reports in the Georgian sources that Egrisi formed part of the domains of the kings of Kartli show that the Persians did not stand in the way of the Kartlian kings' efforts to subjugate Egrisi.

Not only the Georgian but also the Byzantine sources speak of Persian influence (exercised through Kartli) on the Lazic kings. Priscus of Panium, for example, reports: 'After the fire in the city under the emperor Leo, Gubazes came with Dionysius to Constantinople, dressed in Persian clothing and surrounded by bodyguards in the Median fashion.'[118] This fact plainly attests Persian influence in Lazica in the second half of the fifth century, an influence that spread through Kartli.

Persian influence in Lazica is also recorded at the beginning of the sixth century. Malalas reports that in the reign of Justin the Persians argued that Tzath, king of the Lazi, was subject to Kavad, king of the Persians. According to him, the Persians maintained that in the past, too, the king of Persia had confirmed and crowned the kings of the Lazi.[119] He further reports that Tzath's footwear was decorated in the Persian manner.[120] The Romans did not even attempt to deny the Persian claims to Lazica, and were obliged to break off the negotiations on the Lazic question. After Tzath had adopted Christianity, the Persian king Kavad reproached Justin for having unlawfully drawn Tzath, a Persian subject, over to his side. Justin replied that a certain man 'by the name of Tzath' had come to him 'asking to be freed from the pagan faith'. Justin, evidently having no grounds for doing so, made no attempt to prove that the Lazi had ever been subject to him.

This report of Malalas is repeated, with some abridgement, by other authors (George Cedrenus, Theophanes the Confessor and the *Chronicon Paschale*).[121]

Persian influence over the Lazi before the sixth century is also confirmed by Procopius of Caesarea, who was well informed on Lazic affairs. 'Seoses asserted, among other things,' Procopius writes, 'that the Romans held by force and without any right Colchis, which is now called Lazica and which had been subject to the Persians from ancient times.'[122] Here too the Byzantines made no attempt to deny that Colchis had been subject to the Persians; had they done so, Procopius would have noted it. On the contrary, he states that the Lazi and the Persians were old friends, as written documents surviving into the sixth century bore witness. In the words of the Lazic envoys, for example, we read: 'The Colchians and the Persians, having been allies from ancient times, rendered each other mutual services, as is attested by written records which we possess and which are preserved to this day in your royal court.'[123]

These statements of Procopius are not refuted by another of his reports, namely that 'the Lazi, the people who formerly inhabited Colchis, were considered subject to the Romans only because, on the death of their king, the Roman emperor sent his successor the insignia of supreme power. They paid the Romans no tribute, however, and were not in obedience to them. The king of the Lazi was obliged to guard the frontiers with his own subjects and not to allow the hostile Huns of the Caucasus, which adjoins their region, to break through Lazica into Roman territory. They guarded the frontiers without receiving from the Romans either money or troops.'[124] It seems to us that here Procopius contradicts himself with his unfounded assertion that the Lazi were subject to the Romans.

The fact that 'the Lazi guarded the frontiers without receiving from the Romans either money or troops' indicates that in such cases the Romans paid frontier peoples to guard the frontiers, which cannot be regarded as a sign of the latter's subordination. Since the Lazi received no money and paid no tribute, it may be concluded that they were independent of the Romans.

The part of Procopius' report concerning the dispatch of the insignia of power by the Roman emperor to the Lazic king may be assigned to the reign of Tzath. It is from this time, the end of the first quarter of the sixth century, that the subordination of Lazica to the Byzantines begins. 'After what befell Gurgenes, king of the Iberians...', Procopius states, 'the Roman army began to be stationed in Lazica.'[125]

The information in the Georgian written sources that Egrisi (Lazica) formed part of the domains of the kings of Kartli is thus supported by the Graeco-Roman written sources.

The reports of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher that Abkhazia was independent of Egrisi and subject to the Byzantines are reinforced by the fact that Egrisi was subject to the kings of Kartli, who in turn depended on the Persians. Abkhazia's subjection to the Byzantines is also confirmed by other Graeco-Roman authors. The fifth-century Byzantine author Zosimus writes that the resistance to the Goths who attacked Great Pityus in the third century AD was led by one Successianus, a Roman commander.[126] Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, a fifth-century author, writing of John Chrysostom's exile to Pityus, says: 'And then they led him out from there too and moved him to Pityus; this is the furthest limit of the Pontus and of Roman power.'[127] The same author lists many tribes subject to Roman rule, the Abasgi among them.[128]

Abasgia's subjection to the Byzantines is further confirmed by the excavations of ancient Sebastopolis carried out in 1958 to 1959 and 1980 to 1988 by archaeologists of the Ivane Javakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography and the Dmitry Gulia Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. They showed that this fortress, founded by the Romans in the first century AD to consolidate their rule in the north-western Caucasus, had by the fourth century become a major political and economic centre of Abkhazia. In the fourth century its walls were further strengthened. There is no evidence of any break in the cultural deposits of the fortress across five centuries, nor of its abandonment by the Romans during that time.[129] The same can be said of Pityus, another Byzantine stronghold on the eastern Black Sea coast of the Caucasus.

Naturally, only the masters of a country could hold its principal fortresses. The view that the Lazi held Abasgia therefore has no real foundation.

Many ancient authors (Priscus of Panium, Agathangelos) mention the Lazic kingdom and its king, but not one of them indicates Lazic dominion over the Abasgi.

Did the situation change at the end of the fourth century, when the main forces of Byzantium were diverted by the struggle with the Sasanians and the empire,

lacking sufficient reserves, relied more and more on the local population to guard the routes over the passes?

The frontier fortresses of Abkhazia were still in Roman hands in the third century; Zosimus' evidence on this point was cited above.[130] In the fourth and fifth centuries Roman garrisons were still stationed in the Abasgian fortresses. Procopius of Caesarea writes on this: 'In former times... legions of Roman troops occupied all the places along the coast from Trapezus to the land of the Sagini; now only these two fortifications remained to them, in which garrisons were stationed even in my time.'[131] The archaeological excavations at Sebastopolis and Pityus point the same way.[132] Procopius' account and the archaeological material confirm that the main strongholds of Abasgia, Sebastopolis and Pityus, remained continuously in Roman hands until the sixth century. The Romans evidently handed the other fortresses over to the local population rather than garrison them, for fear of strengthening the Lazic kingdom and, through it, Kartli and Persia.

It should be noted that the Abkhaz also had fortresses of their own. The fortress of Trachea, for example, belonged to them. Procopius wrote on this: 'At the foot of this mountain the Abasgi had built in ancient times a very strong fortification, the most considerable in size. Here they always succeeded in repelling the attacks of their enemies, who can in no way overcome the inaccessibility of the place... The people here who speak Greek call it "Trachea", the rugged and flinty.'[133] According to him, the Abasgi defended themselves in this fortress in 550 as well. The fortress of Trachea, therefore, had belonged to the Abasgi from the earliest times.

As we see, not a single fortress on the territory of Abasgia was occupied by the Lazi.

The routes over the Klukhor and Marukh passes were guarded by the Apsilae and the Misimians, who held the fortresses of Tsibilium and Tzachar. This is attested by both the written sources and the archaeological material.

In the sixth century, for example, the Misimians, learning that the Byzantine general Soterichus intended to hand their frontier fortress of Bukhloon over to the Alans, told him to leave it. When Soterichus refused, the Misimians destroyed the Byzantine detachment.[134]

The striving of the Abasgi for independence altered their position somewhat in the middle of the sixth century. The Abasgian revolt showed Rome that in its struggle with Iran it could not rely on the local population. From that time, it seems to us, the Byzantine authorities began to promote the version that the Abasgi were subject to the Lazi.

Let us turn now to Procopius' assertion, quoted above, that the Abasgi had supposedly been 'subjects of the Lazi from of old'. It must not be forgotten here that Procopius was Justinian's court historian and a skilled diplomat. As for his statement on Lazic dominion over the Abasgi, it must be said that on this question he contradicts himself. Procopius wrote, for example: 'Various peoples live here, among them the Alans and the Abasgi, who have been friendly of old to the Christians and the Romans.'[135] Had the Abasgi been subject to the Lazi, there could have been no question of their friendship with the Romans.

An analysis of the accounts of Procopius of Caesarea leads to the following conclusions:

1. In the fourth and fifth centuries the Byzantines held continuous and undivided dominion over the territory of Abkhazia. In Lazica, by contrast, they had no fortresses and kept no garrisons until the sixth century, which attests Abkhazia's subjection to the Eastern Roman Empire. The excavations at Sebastopolis and Pityus likewise attest Roman dominion over the territory of Abkhazia in the period under review and, conversely, contain no evidence of Lazic dominion over the Abasgi.
2. The accounts of the Graeco-Latin authors reveal Lazica's dependence on Persia, exercised through Kartli.
3. The Lazi, being under Persian influence, could not have held dominion over the Abkhaz, who were subject to the Byzantines, since Persia and Byzantium were constantly hostile to each other.

The reports of the Georgian sources (Leonti Mroveli and Juansher) on Abkhazia's dependence on the Byzantine Empire, and Lazica's on the kings of Kartli, are thus fully confirmed.

Notes

74 Ivane Javakhishvili, *Istoriya gruzinskogo naroda* [History of the Georgian People], book 1, p. 274.

75 Simon Janashia, *Trudy* [Works], vol. 2, pp. 315 to 317.

76 *Vsemirnaya istoriya* [World History], vol. 2 (Moscow, 1956), p. 774.

77 Giorgi Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii* [On the History of Ancient Georgia], p. 383.

78 Latyshev, op. cit., vol. 1, part 1, p. 222.

79 Procopius of Caesarea, *Voina s gotami* [The Gothic War], p. 383.

80 Mariam Lordkipanidze, *Politicheskoe ob"edinenie feodal'noi Gruzii* [The Political Unification of Feudal Georgia] (Tbilisi, 1963), p. 176.

81 Anchabadze, *Istoriya i kul'tura...*, p. 208.

82 Ibid.

83 Idem, *Iz istorii srednevekovoi Abkhazii* [From the History of Mediaeval Abkhazia], p. 16.

84 Procopius of Caesarea, *The Gothic War*, p. 379.

85 Ibid., p. 380.

86 Ibid., p. 400.

87 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1, p. 57.

88 It should be noted that evidence of the might of the Lazic kingdom in the fourth and fifth centuries is absent not only from the Georgian sources but from other sources too.

89 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1, p. 65.

90 Ibid., p. 70.

91 Ibid., p. 137. In this period Kartli was divided between Iran and the Eastern Roman Empire.

92 Ibid., p. 146.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1, p. 157.

96 Ibid., p. 177.

97 Ibid., p. 157.

98 Ibid.

99 *Ocherki istorii Gruzii* [Essays on the History of Georgia], vol. 2, p. 167.

100 *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1, p. 178.

101 Ibid., p. 185.

102 *Istoriya Gruzii* [History of Georgia], vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1972), pp. 85 to 86, 111.

103 Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii*, p. 383.

104 Ibid., p. 386.

105 *Istoriya Gruzii*, vol. 1, p. 90.

106 *Georgika*, vol. 2, p. 26.

107 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 277.

108 Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii*, p. 385.

109 *Vestnik drevnei istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], no. 4 (Moscow, 1948), p. 286.

110 *Georgika*, vol. 3, p. 214.

111 Ibid.

112 Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii*, p. 374.

113 Procopius of Caesarea, *Istoriya voin rimlyan s persami* [History of the Wars of the Romans with the Persians], book 2, p. 107.

114 Procopius of Caesarea, *The Gothic War*, p. 423.

115 Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars of the Romans with the Persians*, p. 224.

116 Ibid., pp. 226 to 228.

117 Melikishvili, *K istorii drevnei Gruzii*, p. 383.

118 *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, no. 4, p. 264.

119 *Georgika*, vol. 3, pp. 263 to 264.

120 Ibid., pp. 264 to 265.

121 *Georgika*, vol. 5, pp. 13 to 14; *Georgika*, vol. 4, part 1, pp. 11, 17.

122 Procopius of Caesarea, op. cit., p. 132.

123 Ibid., p. 110.

124 Ibid., pp. 106 to 107.

125 Ibid., p. 107.

126 *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, no. 4, 1948, pp. 276 to 277.

127 *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, no. 3 (Moscow and Leningrad, 1948), p. 257.

128 Ibid., p. 300.

129 Mikhail Trapsh, *Raskopki drevnego Sebastopolisa...* [Excavations of Ancient Sebastopolis...], pp. 237 to 240; L. Shervashidze and Lev Solovyov, 'Issledovanie drevnego Sebastopolisa' [The Investigation of Ancient Sebastopolis], *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, no. 3 (Moscow, 1960), pp. 177 to 179.

130 *Vestnik drevnei istorii*, no. 4, 1948, p. 276.

131 Procopius of Caesarea, *The Gothic War*, pp. 383 to 384.

132 Andria Apakidze and Otar Lordkipanidze, op. cit., pp. 209 to 223; Mikhail Trapsh, *Trudy* [Works], vol. 2, pp. 285 to 362; *Velikii Pitiunt* [Great Pityus], vols 1, 2 and 3.

133 Procopius of Caesarea, *The Gothic War*, p. 401.

134 *Georgika*, vol. 3, pp. 86 to 89.

135 Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars of the Romans...*, p. 221.

Translated from Mikhail Gunba, *Abkhaziya v I tysyacheletii n. e.: Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie i politicheskie otnosheniya* [Abkhazia in the First Millennium AD: Socio-Economic and Political Relations] (Sukhum: Alashara, 1989), section 4.2, pp. 157 to 175.

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