

VOLUME **ONE**

HISTORY OF THE
CAUCASUS

At the Crossroads of Empires

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Along the European–Asian Border: An Introduction

‘The Caucasus is a jabal al-alsun, a mountain of tongues.’

Attributed to the Arab historian AL-MASUDI (896–956)
or the Kurdish chronicler and geographer ABU’L-FIDA (1273–1331).¹



1. Satellite image of the Caucasus region. The mountain range of the Greater Caucasus extends from north-west to east; parallel to it are the Lesser Caucasus and the eastern Pontus Mountains. On the left of the image is the Black Sea, on the right the Caspian Sea. The inland water in the centre of the picture is Lake Sevan; below it on the left is Lake Van and on the right Lake Urmia. Photo from 2001, MODIS Land Rapid Response; courtesy NASA.

1. A conflict-ridden present age

With its dozens of peoples and a territory of around 480,000 km², the Caucasus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was part of the Russian Empire. This final era of foreign rule, which began in 1801 with the gradual military conquest by the Tsarist Empire, seemingly ended in 1918 with the dissolution of the Russian army after its defeat in the First World War. But following a brief, chaotic period of independence for some Caucasian nation-states, which also suffered Turkish, British and White Russian military interventions, Soviet Russia reoccupied the entire Caucasian region between 1920 and 1921, with the exception of some areas in the south-west which it ceded to Turkey. It viewed itself as the territorial successor state to the Tsarist Empire, and ownership of the Caucasian oil deposits was critical. Their great strategic importance was apparent in late autumn of 1942, when Soviet troops managed to stave off the German attacks on the oilfields of Grozny (Chechnya) and Baku (Azerbaijan). The failure of the Wehrmacht in the northern foothills of the Greater Caucasus Mountains marked the prelude to the Soviet triumph at Stalingrad.

While the self-dissolution of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and Central Asia was surprisingly peaceful (except for the Tajik Civil War of 1992–6 and complications due to mutual exclaves and enclaves between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), ancient dormant conflicts broke out again in the Caucasus as early as 1988, killing more than 100,000 people. Two million more people lost their homes or became internally displaced persons.² North of the mountain range of the Greater Caucasus, republics fought for territorial claims, while Chechnya wanted to force its independence from Moscow, or at least achieve a far-reaching autonomy. This resulted in internal Caucasian conflicts and combats and two Chechen wars, which were brutally waged on both sides, as well as terrorist attacks from the Caucasus to Moscow. The violence of the fighting and the terror directed against civilians were not least the result of an internationalization of the crisis through a Salafist radicalization of the Muslim fighters in Chechnya and the ‘import’ of battle-hardened international Afghanistan veterans, who had previously fought against the Russian-Soviet troops.³ Today, a fragile peace prevails in Chechnya and Dagestan, which in some places resembles more of a ceasefire.

In the South Caucasus, formerly known as Transcaucasia,⁴ Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independence under international law. At the same time, however, they became

involved in several wars: between 1991 and 1993, Georgia tried in vain to regain control of its breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by military means and waged a brief war against Russia in 2008. Moreover, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the skirmishes since 1988 over Nagorno-Karabakh (called Artsakh by the Armenians) escalated to a real war at the beginning of 1992 with massacres, people fleeing, and reciprocal mass expulsions. The ceasefire brokered by Russia in May 1994 has remained shaky and was repeatedly violated. On 27 September 2020, large-scale combat operations resumed between the attacking Azerbaijani armed forces and the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh supported by Armenia. This six-week war ended with a Russian-sponsored ceasefire after substantial Azerbaijani territorial gains.

Azerbaijan and NATO member Turkey have furthermore closed their borders with Armenia, making the landlocked country dependent on Russian military and economic assistance as well as good relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran, for its part, sees Armenia as a counterweight to Azerbaijan, whose pan-Turkish circles dream of a Greater Azerbaijan that would include the north-western Iranian province of Azerbaijan. The Republic of Azerbaijan consists of two territories separated by Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, the motherland and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Since direct connections by land are interrupted, the two parts of the country are connected only by air, or by a long detour overland via Iran. The border established in 1921 between Nakhchivan and Armenia was at the time an internal Soviet border. Since 1991, however, it has been a state border between two hostile states, and Nakhchivan became an exclave. In general, the three South Caucasian states have little in common, apart from a shared Soviet past and, as far as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey are concerned, the 1,760 km-long Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline.

2. A unique geography

The recent turbulent years in the Caucasus reflect the troubled history of the region ever since it becomes historically traceable from the beginning of the first millennium BCE. This historical progression appears almost chaotic to outsiders, but is ultimately a consequence of the unique geography. The region lies between 39 degrees of latitude in the south and 47 in the north-west (45 degrees in the north-east). It measures some 700 to 900 km in a north-south direction and between 550 and 900 km from east to west. The northern geographical boundary runs approximately

along the Kuma–Manych Depression; to the east the region is bordered by the Caspian Sea; the southern boundary runs along a line connecting Lankaran (Lənkəran) in south-east Azerbaijan, via Lake Van, to the eastern Anatolian city of Muş; and the western runs along the eastern shore of the Azov Sea and the Black Sea south to the province of Muş.

The region is crossed by two parallel mountain ranges running from north-west to south-east. The Greater Caucasus, which is more than 1,000 km long and up to 100 km wide, divides the region into two roughly equal halves. It boasts seven mountains over 5,000 m high, among them the dormant volcano Elbrus at 5,642 m and the extinct volcano Kazbek (5,047 m). According to Georgian tradition, the Titan Prometheus is said to have been forged on the latter's flank as punishment for the sacrilege of stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans.⁵ The mountain range forms not only a watershed, but also a climatological sheath, since it prevents the cold Arctic air masses from advancing further to the south. The mountains are also a

physical barrier that can only be crossed over mountain passes, except beside the Caspian coast. While two dozen rather difficult mountain trails connect the two halves of the Caucasus, only three are of strategic importance. Each of the three connects the Russian Republic of North Ossetia–Alania with Georgia: the 2,911-metre-high Mamison Pass, also called the Ossetian Military Road, leading to Kutaisi in West Georgia, the 2,995-metre-high Roki Pass to Tskhinvali,⁶ and the 2,379-metre-high Cross Pass, which was developed into the Georgian Military Road in 1779, which leads from the Georgian capital Tbilisi over the Darial Gorge to Vladikavkaz. The narrow gorge was known to the Romans as *Porta Sarmatica*, *Porta Caucasica* or *Porta Hiberiae*; its present name Darial Pass is derived from the New Persian *Dar-e Alan*, which means 'Gate of the Alans'. Since the narrow Darial Gorge was the preferred gateway for North Caucasian tribal warriors such as the Alans to Iberia (Central and Eastern Georgia),⁷ it was fortified by Romans and Persian Sassanids. According to Pliny the Elder (*ca.* 23–79 CE), Emperor Nero planned



2. The north-eastern face of the 4,454 m-high ice-covered peak Donguzorun, also called Babis Mta. It stands at the border of Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia, with Georgia. Photo 2013.



3. Traditional Balkar dancers related to the Karachays. They live in the North Caucasian highlands of Mount Elbrus. Photo 2018.

a military expedition to *Porta Caucasica* to halt the threatening Sarmatians.⁸ However, Tacitus (ca. 56–120 CE) wrote that Nero wanted to send his new Legion I Italica to *Portae Caspiae*, also called *Porta Albanica*, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea, in order to pacify the Caucasian Albanians⁹ (in today's Azerbaijan).¹⁰

The only route between the North and South Caucasus that used to be open all year round is the narrow passage of Derbent, situated between the Tabasaran Mountains, south-eastern foothills of the Greater Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea. The name derived from the New Persian *Darband*, which loosely means 'locked gate'. The Arabs called the fortified passage *Bāb al-Abwāb*, 'Gate of Gates'.¹¹ The road leading today from Dagestan to Azerbaijan once served as a gateway for Cimmericians, Scythians, Huns, Khazars, Arabs, Mongols and Russians. The Romans usually called this two-to-three-kilometre bottleneck *Portae Caspiae*, as a result of which certain authors such as Tacitus and later Procopius used this toponym to refer to the Darial Pass. This led to confusion, as Pliny complained.¹² Moreover, Ptolemy

and Arrian in his *Anabasis* located the *Portae Caspiae* east of Rhagae (Ray, south of Tehran) on the road to Hecatompylos (south of Damghan).¹³ In 1907 the philologist A.V. Williams Jackson identified this third Caspian gate with the Tang-e Sar-e Darra Pass.¹⁴ In contrast to the west coast of the Caspian Sea, the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea did not offer an easily passable transit route until the early nineteenth century, since individual mountain ranges reach right to the coast.

Approximately 100 km south of the Greater Caucasus stretches the 550 km-long Lesser Caucasus, which is connected by the Likhi Mountains, also called Surami Mountains, with its great namesake to the north. The easiest pass over the Likhi Mountains is the mere 949-metre-high Surami Pass, which the Roman general Pompey most probably crossed in 65 BCE after his victory over the Iberian king Artoces on his march back to Colchis (today's West Georgia).¹⁵

In today's political geography, the three independent states, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and its associated

Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, the two republics, Abkhazia and South Ossetia that have separated from Georgia, as well as the ‘Republic’ of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), which is also not recognized under international law, are all located south of the Greater Caucasus Ridge. The latter is closely linked to Armenia, but considered by the UN to belong to Azerbaijan. North-eastern Anatolia can also be classified as part of the Caucasus geographically, historically and culturally, as the southern part of this mountainous region around Lake Van was, before the massacres and expulsions of 1915–1920, part of the habitat of the Armenians and once formed, together with the Ararat plain, the Armenian heartland. To the north of this was the medieval Bagratid Kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti, most of whose territory Soviet Russia ceded to Turkey in the Treaty of Kars of 23 October 1921. North of the Caucasian mountain range lie the republics of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia–Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan, which belong to the Russian Federation. Also located there are the regions (in Russian, krais) of Stavropol and Krasnodar, as well as small parts of the Rostov Oblast and the Republic of Kalmykia. If the latter two are included approximately 36.6 million people live in the extended Caucasus region; excluding them, some 32 million.¹⁶

A question that is still much discussed today is the definition of the border between Europe and Asia – and thus the location of the Caucasus. In contrast to the Americas, Africa, Australia and Antarctica, which are surrounded by oceans, there is no geographically fixed border within the Eurasian continent. Each borderline remains a convention; even the Greeks and Romans struggled to come up with a definition. Herodotus (ca. 484–425 BCE) was himself uncertain. As the border between Europe and Asia he cited the Phasis river, today’s Rioni, which flows from Svaneti in the Greater Caucasus to the Black Sea, and the Tanais river, now the Don.¹⁷ Half a millennium later under the Roman Empire, the geographers Strabo¹⁸ (ca. 64 BCE–24 CE) and Ptolemy¹⁹ (ca. 100–170 CE) and the historian and military commander Arrian (ca. 86/90–146/160 CE) described the Tanais as the dividing line. Arrian personally circumnavigated the Black Sea around the year 131 and reported in his *Periplus Ponti Euxini*: ‘From the Bosporan city Pantikapaion [today’s Kerch] to the river Tanaïs, which is said to divide Europe from Asia, [it is] 60 [stadia].’²⁰

One of the conventions still recognized today was formulated by the Swedish officer and geographer Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg (1676–1747) in 1730, after he had conducted geographical and anthropological research into Siberia during

his thirteen years as a prisoner of war. For Strahlenberg, the border ran along the Ural Mountains, the Emba (Yembi) river, which flows into the Caspian Sea, and, finally, the Kuma–Manych Depression north of the Caucasus.²¹ According to Strahlenberg’s definition, the Caucasus would lie entirely in Asia. In 1869, the mountaineer Douglas Freshfield proposed the ridge of the Greater Caucasus, which forms a watershed, as the dividing line between Europe and Asia.²² In adopting this definition, the North Caucasus would belong to Europe and the South Caucasus to Asia. This convention is plausible insofar as the Greater Caucasus forms an actual geographical demarcation line.²³ The Greater Caucasus, however, does not form the tectonic interface between Eurasia and the fragments of Gondwana, where about 40 million years ago the western Tethys Ocean was located: in fact the Lesser Caucasus does. The latter mountain range is a continuation of the Alpidic mountain fold stretching from the Pyrenees in the west over the Alps and the Pontic Mountains to the Himalayas.²⁴

Historically, the demarcation along the Greater Caucasus appears to make sense insofar as the South Caucasus was, up to the Middle Bronze Age Trialeti culture, primarily oriented towards the Near Eastern and Mesopotamian agricultural civilizations, while the North Caucasus was mostly part of the Eurasian steppe cultural realm. The Caucasus, bordered on two sides by seas, was and remains at the same time a borderland and transit route for neighbouring, often rival power blocs such as Romans and Persians, Byzantines and Arabs, Arabs and Turkic peoples, Ottomans and Safavids, Russia and Persia, the Soviet Union and NATO, as well as Russia, Iran and Turkey today. Only rarely were states of the South Caucasus in charge of their own destiny for any length of time, the most notable exception being the Kingdom of Georgia between 1008 and 1220. Another particularity was the ‘exile state’ of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, which flourished from 1198/9 to 1375 in the south of present-day Turkey, 800 km from the Armenian heartland.

Different religions also came together in the Caucasus. Mostly, they coexisted peacefully, but sometimes there was violent conflict. Christianity, pre-Zoroastrian Iranian religious beliefs and Sassanid Zoroastrianism collided first, against the background of pagan-animistic beliefs. Afterwards, it was Sunni or Shiite Islam and various Christian churches such as the Greek Orthodox Church, the Georgian Church, the Armenian Church, the now-marginalized Caucasian-Albanian Church, the Assyrian Church of the East and, from the eighteenth century onwards, the Russian Orthodox Church. The Christian



churches also competed among themselves for power and influence. There were mutual excommunications, and they were not afraid to make use of secular rulers to their advantage. In the Caucasus there also lived Jewish communities and, again from the eighteenth century onwards, other Christian denominations including Catholics, various Protestant groups, and Russian splinter groups such as the Old Believers, pacifist Doukhobors,²⁵ Molokans,²⁶ and Judaizing Subbotniks.²⁷ Finally, there are Kurdish Yazidis living in Armenia and Mongolian Buddhists in the Republic of Kalmykia.

3. Peoples and languages

In many ways, the Caucasus region is a puzzle. Geologically, it consists of multiple terranes (microcontinents); topographically, it comprises a highly jagged mountain landscape whose narrow valleys are connected only by difficult-to-master mountain paths. Exceptions are the Armenian highlands, the Colchis lowlands and the Transcaucasian Depression, which stretches from the Surami Mountains in the south-west eastwards to the Caspian Sea. Armenia, in particular, is characterized by its mountainous topography, which is allegorically expressed in a widespread modified history of Creation, according to which on the Sixth Day, God still possessed a huge heap of unused stones, which he let aimlessly fall to the ground, thus creating the Armenian highland. This mountainous topography and the immigration of non-Caucasian ethnic groups resulted in a colourful mosaic of languages that have survived to this day, though some are seriously threatened with extinction. This ethnolinguistic diversity is a veritable Tower of Babel and was already a challenge for Greek and Roman traders. Strabo mentions that in the Greek colony town of Dioscurias, now Sukhumi on the north-east coast of the Black Sea, seventy different peoples converged with their own languages.²⁸ Pliny speaks of 130 tribes, which is why the Roman merchants conducted their business ‘with the help of 130 interpreters’.²⁹ Today, the Caucasus region is home to some 60 long-established languages from six language families: the South Caucasian, North-West Caucasian, North-East Caucasian, Indo-European, Altaic and Semitic language families. The approximately 40 autochthonous Caucasian languages and dozens of dialects do not represent a homogeneous unit, but form three independent language families.³⁰ Of the approximately 36.6 million inhabitants of the region, around a quarter (approx. 8.5–9

million³¹) are native speakers of an Old Caucasian language.³² A total of about 23 or 24 million people are native speakers of a long-established language of the Caucasus; the rest are mostly Slavic speakers, whose ancestors immigrated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The myriad secluded mountain regions and associated ethnolinguistic groups prevented both the formation of a regional Caucasian identity and the emergence of strong central states. Apart from the Colchian and Albanian (Azerbaijani) coastal areas, only a few urban structures developed in the southern Caucasus in antiquity and the Middle Ages, especially in the Armenian highlands. The societies were dominated by hereditary feudal aristocracies, and their representatives pursued their own interests. This fragmentation made it easier for the bordering major powers to transform the nearby South Caucasian regions into their own protectorates. The Armenian, Iberian and Albanian kings were often weak, and their nobles had no qualms about intriguing against them with foreign rulers even to the point of having them deposed. Over the course of Armenian and Georgian history, it is apparent time and again that the national consciousness and feeling of national cohesion celebrated today was a myth. Church hierarchies and nobles frequently undermined the authority of their kings, who were the embodiment of national consensus.³³ Centrifugal forces continued to dominate in the North Caucasus as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the north-west, hierarchically organized social systems led by aristocrats prevailed; in the north-east, free tribal communities divided into clans predominated, where important decisions were made by the respective council of elders.

The Caucasus region is characterized not only by great ethnolinguistic diversity in a particularly small area, but also by other distinctive features. Fossils were discovered in Dmanisi, Georgia, of the oldest early humans outside Africa; they are about 1.79–1.77 million years old. It was also in Georgia that wild grapevines were first processed into wine 8,000 years ago (figs 4, 21). Around the same time, the Caucasus region played a leading role in the development of metallurgy, especially in the use of moulds to make arsenic bronze objects, and more than 5,000 years ago the world’s first gold mine was in operation at Sakdrisi, Georgia. Somewhat earlier, 5,500–5,200 years ago, early forms of wheels and carts were created and oxen were used as draught animals in the region of Maikop, in today’s Adygea. Finally, Armenia and Iberia can boast that around the years 314 and 334, respectively, they were the first states in the world to introduce Christianity as the state religion.



4. Medieval gravestone for a member of the Gharaghan family from the 11th century in Vorotnavank Monastery, Armenia. On the right, a man operates a wine press and a woman holds an inscription plate with the name of the deceased; on the left, a man is holding a horse and a wine amphora, and next to it is a pair of grape scissors. Photo 2015.

4. Objectives and sources

The aim of this two-volume work is to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of the Caucasus region, from the Dmanisi prehistoric people to the modern era. At the same time, the work is intended to address the entire region, not just the South Caucasus. In this way, it stands apart from several contemporary works, which have ‘the Caucasus’ in their titles, yet make clear in the preface that they are limited to the southern part. At a personal level, the present author modestly endeavours to follow the guidance of the pre-eminent historian Sir Steven Runciman as he defined it in the preface to his monumental *A History of the Crusades*: ‘I believe that the supreme duty of the historian is to write history, that is to say, to attempt to record in one sweeping sequence the greater events and movements that have swayed the destinies of man.’³⁴

The quality of a reconstruction of Caucasian history ultimately relies on existing sources. With the exception of the Kingdom of Urartu (before 858–ca. last quarter of seventh century BCE), which used a modified version of the New Assyrian cuneiform script for royal proclamations, the earliest local writing systems in the Caucasus were not introduced in Armenia, Georgia and Albania until the beginning of the 5th century CE.

For this reason, we are dependent for the preceding historical period on Greek and Roman authors as well as on Assyrian clay tablets and Achaemenid stone inscriptions. Compared to the written cultures, the historiography of non-written cultures tends to be *ipso facto* less extensive. This limitation is all the more true in view of the fact that non-written cultures were mostly only mentioned in documents of written cultures in connection with foreign policy or military events. For prehistoric times, therefore, archaeological findings serve as preferred sources; these are supplemented by ecological and linguistic data as well as interpretations of works of art, myths and legends. Even after the invention of the South Caucasian scripts, Byzantine and Arabic sources remained of indispensable value; these were combined later with Mongolian–Il Khanid, Persian, Ottoman and Russian sources and travelogues. There is a particularly rich collection of data available for the reconstruction of the history of Armenian Cilicia, since the Armenians living in the south of present-day Turkey at that time were in close contact with the Crusaders and their small Levantine states, the trading republics of Italy, and the Vatican, whose history was recorded in detail by Western European chroniclers.

It should be noted that modern historical works from the South Caucasian republics which are at times at odds with each other are occasionally of dubious academic value. Some of these



5. The 5,642-m and 5,621-m-high double peak of Elbrus, seen from the north, Kabardino-Balkaria. Photo 2017.

tend towards ethnocentric or nationalist bias or even advocate nationalist propaganda. Such partisanship is especially evident when an issue is related to a current conflict, such as in the question of whether and when Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh belonged to Armenia or Caucasian Albania two thousand years ago. Great care must also be taken when dealing with ancient and early medieval Armenian and Iberian sources, as their authors often lived centuries after the described events. Often, princes were the patrons of historians, who made sure to show

their benefactors in a favourable light and satisfied their claims to legitimacy by dating their dynasties back centuries – sometimes linking them to stories from the Old Testament. In order to enhance their own authority, a few medieval historians even dated their own oeuvre back centuries to the early fifth century CE, the time when the first South Caucasian manuscripts were written. Modern historians sometimes took these early chronicles at face value as it suited their purposes, so that historiography became nothing more than hagiography.

II

The Formation of the Landscape and the Early Humans of the Palaeolithic

*'Emigration from the African continent occurred earlier than we thought.
It was at least 1.8 million years ago. It was undertaken by a group close to
Homo habilis, i.e. Homo georgicus.'*

Palaeoanthropologists MARIE-ANTOINETTE DE LUMLEY
and DAVID LORDKIPANIDZE.¹



6. The mountain range of the Great Caucasus, seen from Elbrus at an altitude of 4,800 m. Photo 2014.

1. The formation of the Caucasus Mountains and the history of the neighbouring seas – The Black Sea and Caspian Sea

Where today the mountains of the Greater Caucasus reach a height of more than 5,000 m, 34 million years ago there was only a sea. The high mountains did not begin to rise out of the water until the middle of the Tertiary period (66 to 2,588 mya²). After the supercontinent Pangaea began to cleave in the second half of the Triassic (252.2 to 201.3 mya) in the southern area, the Tethys Ocean, also called Neotethys, started to expand to the west. Pangaea then subdivided into two major continents, Gondwana

in the south and Laurasia in the north. Subsequently, in the early Cretaceous period (145 to 66 mya), Gondwana gradually disintegrated into today's continents of Africa, South America, India, Australia and Antarctica. During the Cretaceous period the North American Craton (Laurentia) also broke away from Laurasia.³ Towards the end of the Cretaceous Period, the Indian continental plate began to drift north-east and collided with the Eurasian plate at the beginning of the Eocene (56 to 33.9 mya) around 55 mya. This resulted in the Alpide mountain range belt, while the eastern half of the Tethys Ocean disappeared and only the western half remained. The Indian Ocean formed south of the Indian subcontinent. Already during the Triassic period, the Iranian plate had collided with the Eurasian one, whereupon layers of claystone filled with organic substances, mostly algae, settled on a newly formed sea crust. This led to the formation



of today's fossil fuel deposits in the Caspian Sea over millions of years. In the late Cretaceous period, the Armenian terrane (micro-continent) collided with an island arc south of the Transcaucasian terrane, creating the Lesser Caucasus at the northern edge of the Armenian highlands. Shortly thereafter, the Lesser Caucasus moved north, where it reached the Transcaucasian terrane.⁴

The collision of the Arabian Plate with the Iranian Plate and Anatolia was of much greater impact, leading to the uplifting of the Zagros Mountains.⁵ Even today, the Arabian Plate continues to slide further and further under the Eurasian Plate, which contributes to the high susceptibility to earthquakes in the Caucasus and Iran. During the transition from the Eocene to the Oligocene (33.9 to 23.03 mya), the Greater Caucasus, which rose out of the western Tethys Ocean, was formed by the pressure of the Arabian Plate pushing north. As a result of

the Alpidic orogeny, the growing mountain ranges divided the western Tethys Ocean into a southern half, from which the eastern Mediterranean Sea emerged, and into a northern half, the **Paratethys**. This long and relatively narrow body of water lay north of the newly formed mountain ranges and stretched from today's Rhone Valley all the way to Central Asia. In the course of the progressive folding of the Alps, the western and central parts of the Paratethys dried up, and only the eastern Paratethys remained. It later gave rise to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, although not the Aral Sea, which has a different origin.⁶ The formation of the two seas from the original Tethys is proven by the evidence of an oceanic base layer from the Cretaceous period.

The rapidly changing **Caspian Sea**, whose surface area today is approximately 372,000 km² and which has hardly any tides, became an inland body of water at the end of the



7. The Gumbashi Pass in Karachay-Cherkessia; in the background the Greater Caucasus. Photo 2014.

Miocene (23.03 to 5,333 mya) about 5.5 million years ago. It was thus separated from the Black Sea, which covers an area of 436,400 km², and from the shallow Sea of Azov, which covers 37,555 km².⁷ Despite the persistent trend of the Greater Caucasus uplift, there were relatively short phases in the Pliocene (5,333 to 2,588 mya) and Pleistocene (2,588 mya to 11.7 ka BP⁸) during three large marine transgressions,⁹ in which both seas were connected. At the time of the Cimmerian phase 4 mya, the Caspian Sea had shrunk to the southern, deeper third, and the northern, shallow two thirds had dried up. During the subsequent Akchagylian Transgression which occurred about 3.2–3.0 mya due to tectonic processes, the Caspian Sea, which today is 1,160 km long in the north–south axis, expanded to a length of more than 2,200 km to the north to roughly the present-day city of Kazan on the Volga. The sea expanded eastwards as far as the Aral Sea and was connected by the Manych Depression to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which, in turn, were joined to the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁰ Based on animal specimens of maritime-arctic origin, marine

geologists such as Chris van Baak assume that there was also a similar connection to the Arctic basin during this period.¹¹ The next major transgression, the Absheronian, is variously dated between 2.0 mya (van Baak) and 1.1 mya (Boomer). The area of the four interconnected waters was almost as extensive as during the Akchagylian Transgression, with only the Caspian Sea stretching a little less far northward.¹² The third, the Early Khazarian Transgression (0.3 mya), was less extensive and failed to reach the Aral basin.¹³ In the context of the last two transgressions, the prehistorian Robin Dennell hypothesized that this vast expanse of water consisting of the Caspian and Black Sea might have been an obstacle to early humans coming from the south, such as *Homo georgicus* of Dmanisi.¹⁴

Today, the Caspian Sea is only connected to the Azov and Black Seas via the 101-km-long Volga–Don Canal, completed in 1952, and thus to the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Shipping in the canal, however, is limited to 5,000 tonnes. The Caspian Sea is notorious for its rapid swings in water

levels. Over the last fifty years, the world’s oceans have fluctuated by an average of 1.8 +/- 0.3 mm per year, while the Caspian Sea in the 1980s fluctuated on a number of occasions by 38 cm per year, almost two hundred times as fast. At present, the Caspian Sea’s water level is *ca.* 26.9 m below the mean sea level of the world’s oceans.¹⁵ Long-term factors for the fluctuations of the sea, 80–85% of whose freshwater supply comes from the Volga, are tectonic processes and large-scale climate changes. ‘Climate is the main pacemaker of long-term Caspian Sea level changes.’¹⁶

The Late Khazarian Transgression (*ca.* 114–75 ka BP) occurred during the Marine Isotope Stage (MIS) 5 (130–72 ka BP), causing the Caspian’s level to rise to 20 or 10 m below sea level.¹⁷ In the subsequent Atel Regression (75–35/32 ka BP) during the Valday glaciation (MIS 4–2: 71–29 ka BP), the water level dropped by more than 100 m to 120 m and even 140 m below sea level, and the sea retreated into its southern third.¹⁸

Medium and short-term factors influencing sea-level fluctuations are regional climate oscillations, earthquakes, solar activity and sunshine intensity, which influence the degree of evaporation, precipitation in the Volga catchment area, and water intake through the Uzboy, a course of the Amu Darya on the eastern edge of the Caspian Sea that dried up around 1580 CE.¹⁹

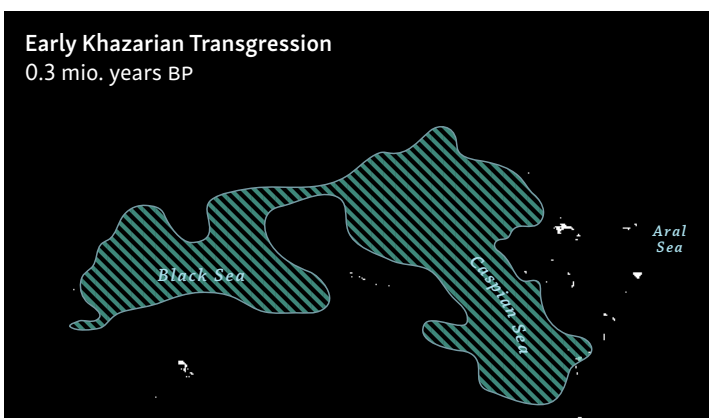
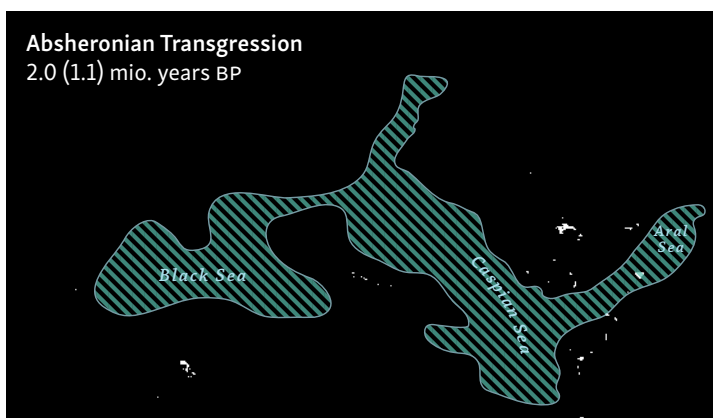
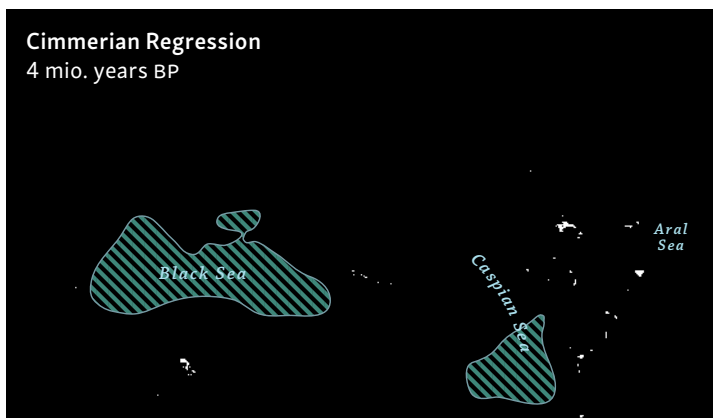
In the present age, the sea level sank during the warm medieval climate anomaly (950–1250 CE) to -28 m due to evaporation, and rose again to -21 m during the Little Ice Age (1300–1850 CE).²⁰ The effects of these sea-level fluctuations can be seen in the prehistoric petroglyphs of Gobustan, south of Baku and in archaeological relics in Baku and Derbent.²¹ Finally, in more recent times, the sea level dropped by 3.1 m between 1929 and 1977 to -29.02 m, with the water level falling by 176 cm between 1930 and 1941 alone as a result of intensive water use and the filling of water reservoirs on the Volga. The water rose again from 1978 and reached a level of -26.95 m in January 1994.²² These strong and unpredictable fluctuations in sea level pose major challenges to urban and infrastructure planners, especially those along the heavily populated coast of Azerbaijan. Today’s oceanographers assume that the water-level benchmark in the coming decades will be -28 +/- 2 m and will hardly rise above -25 m. Moreover, a drop to -32 m or even -34 m cannot be ruled out.²³ These scenarios are intended as guidelines for the development of the coastal zone.

Like the Caspian Sea, the **Black Sea** and the **Sea of Azov** are remnants of the Paratethys. The Black Sea consists of a western and an eastern basin with two chains of underwater volcanoes of the Late Cretaceous period on their southern edges.²⁴

Greater sea-level fluctuations of the Caspian Sea in the Late Pleistocene and Holocene²⁵

OCEANIC PERIOD	TIME PERIOD	SEA LEVEL
Late Khazarian Transgression	114–75 ka BP	-20 to -10 m
Atel Regression	75–35/32 ka BP	-120 to -140 m
Early Khvalynian Transgression	32–25/24 ka BP	-5 m to 0 m (Mamedov) +48 to +50 m as short-term peak (Yanina)
Yenotavian Regression	24–17 ka BP	-51 m or lower
Late Khvalynian Transgression	16–9/8 ka BP	-12 m (Mamedov); 0 m (Yanina); + 50 m high-stand (Kakroodi, Chepalyga) ²⁶
Mangyshlak Regression	8–4 ka BP	-41 m or even -113 m extreme regression ²⁷ (Kakroodi) -21.5 m (Mamedov)
Neocaspian Period: Eight cycles of 450 to 500 years each	4 ka BP – present	-20 m to -32 m

Map 3. Major sea-level fluctuations of the Caspian Sea from the Cimmerian Regression to the Holocene Neocaspian Period



Key: ● City ■ Current sea level ▨ Sea level expansion — River



8. Mud volcanoes near Gobustan, Azerbaijan, where compressed gas pushes muddy, clayey sedimentary rock from underground to the surface. Photo 2016.

The two basins began to form in the Cenomanian stage of the Late Cretaceous period (100.5 to 93.9 mya), and both basins and the two submarine mountain ridges Andrusov and Shatsky were flooded until the Oligocene (33.9 to 23.03 mya). During the Sarmatian stage of the Miocene (13.82 to 11.63 mya), the water level dropped by up to 1 km.²⁸ Several scientists, such as the marine geologist Anatoly Nishikin, consider it probable that a Palaeo-Bosporus already existed in the Oligocene, i.e. there was a close nexus between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and that this continued with interruptions into a relatively modern period.²⁹ During the Last Glacial Maximum (22 to 19 ka BP), when global temperatures were about 4–7 °C lower than today, global sea levels were also about 135 m lower than at present.³⁰ Since the depth of the Bosporus in its middle is 36.8 m, with some long underwater gorges up to 110 m deep, this means

that the Black Sea was separated from the Mediterranean Sea at that time and no salty sea water could flow into the Black Sea. The latter turned to fresh water because, as today, it was fed by numerous large rivers such as the Kuban, Don, Dnieper, Dniester, Danube and Rioni. Currently, the salt content of the Black Sea is only half as high, at 1.75%, as that of the Mediterranean Sea (3.5%), although there is a mutual exchange of water. The heavier, more saline water flows from the Sea of Marmara through the lower parts of the Bosporus into the Black Sea, while the lighter, less saline water of the Black Sea flows at the surface of the Bosporus south into the Marmara and then into the Mediterranean Sea.³¹ In the year 2008 the existence of an undersea river flowing through the Bosporus and carrying salty water from the Mediterranean Sea into the Black Sea was verified.³²

Did the Great Flood take place on the Black Sea?

Shortly before the turn of the millennium, the marine geologists William Ryan and Walker Pitman hypothesized that at the beginning of the Holocene the Black Sea was a freshwater lake, up to 140 m below sea level. A rapid rise in the world sea level in the post-glacial epoch may have caused the Mediterranean to rise above the threshold of the Bosphorus, so that around 6.0/5.6 ka BCE salty Mediterranean water suddenly and with great force poured into the lower-lying Black Sea. The water level of the Black Sea is said to have risen by approximately 15 cm per day, i.e. 100 m in two years, which left more than 100,000 km² of land under water.³³ As a result, the sedentary farmers living on the shores of the Black Sea are said to have been compelled to leave their settlements and emigrate, primarily to Central and Western Europe. This Neolithic diaspora of crop farmers from the Black Sea region, who presumably spoke a proto-Indo-European language, is said to have brought both the agricultural economy and the origins of early Indo-European languages to Central and Western Europe. Ultimately, the people emigrating to the south-east are believed

to have recounted this event in the myth of a mighty flood. This ur-myth supposedly formed the kernel of the later flood-myths of Gilgamesh, the deified, semi-historical king of Uruk from the first half of the third millennium BCE, and of the subsequent book of Genesis.³⁴ Ryan and Pitman modified their hypothesis a few years later. They now proposed that there were two floods, a minor one around 11–10 ka BP and the major one around 7.4 ka cal³⁵ BCE. Likewise, in 2003, Andrei L. Chepalyga put forward an alternative hypothesis according to which the 'Great Flood' occurred during the Late Khvalynian Transgression of the Caspian Sea around 16000–14500 BP, with water flowing from the Caspian Sea via the Manych Valley into the Black Sea and from there into the Mediterranean Sea.³⁶

Because of the alleged connection with the biblical narrative of the Flood and the Gilgamesh epic, these hypotheses met with considerable media interest. They were also hotly debated in scientific circles. In the process, the opinion emerged that although there had been an influx of salty Mediterranean water



9. The acropolis of Nymphaion on the Kerch Peninsula, south-east Crimea, dating from the Bosphoran Kingdom, 6th–4th century BCE. In the background around twenty cargo ships can be seen passing through the Cimmerian Strait linking the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov. About half of the ruins of Nymphaion are today submerged by the Black Sea. Photo 2011.

and corresponding organisms into the Black Sea since about 9.8/9.3 ka BP, the extent of this event was never as dramatic as postulated by Ryan and Pitman. The level of the Black Sea before the influx of Mediterranean water was in fact not -140 m but at most -30 to -50 m and it did not rise by 50 m but by an average of 3 cm per year. Such a slow water rise would have gone unnoticed by a generation of coastal dwellers and would never have forced them to emigrate.³⁷

Archaeology does not confirm the presumed consequences of a rapid rise in the Black Sea level. First of all, the rumoured underwater find of a 7,600-year-old flooded farmhouse on the south coast of the Black Sea near the northern Turkish town of Sinop did not actually come to fruition in the summer of 2003.³⁸ Second, it is highly unlikely that the proto-Indo-European language was already fully established before 5600 BCE and remained unchanged for more than two millennia, until the point at which this proto-language can be reconstructed.³⁹ Third, there are no discernible links between a 'Great Flood' and significant developments in the areas of economy, material culture or innovation. At the time of the Late Khvalynian Transgression of

the Caspian Sea, hunter-gatherers living in the Black Sea region were familiar with neither settlements nor agriculture and could easily have avoided a rise in the water level. During the flood, which Ryan and Pitman assumed in 2003 to have occurred around 7400 cal BCE, there was no agriculture in the region. At the later date suggested in 1997, that of around 6.0–5.6 ka BCE, agriculture had long since been introduced to the Balkans from Western Asia.⁴⁰ Nor would a hypothetical temporal proximity between a large-scale flooding in the Black Sea region and the emergence of new technologies and forms of economy in Central and Western Europe be proof of a causal connection. Ryan and Pitman's hypothesis can only be substantiated by the archaeological discovery of several sunken settlements that were flooded about 7,600 years ago. Lastly, it should be noted that the Gilgamesh epic was composed at the beginning of the third millennium BCE at the earliest and that the oldest preserved transcript was written 1,000 years later in the eighteenth century BCE, almost four millennia after the postulated Great Flood. Most likely, the Gilgamesh epic and the later biblical Flood were inspired by another violent deluge that occurred in Mesopotamia.

2. *Homo georgicus* – The first early humans outside Africa

In the volcanic region of Kvemo Kartli (south-eastern Georgia), 65 km south-west of Tbilisi, the medieval castle of Dmanisi (fig. 10) is perched atop an 80-m-high headland of basalt which rises between the rivers Mashavera and Pinezauri. About 1.85 million years ago, eruptions in the nearby Javakheti volcanic mountain range produced lava flows that travelled eastward, one of which formed the headland of Dmanisi.⁴¹ Over the course of time, the two rivers Mashavera and Pinezauri passed through the basalt layer and carved out two deep and narrow valleys. Since the two rivers flow together 600 m east of the castle, the medieval town was impregnable on the northern, eastern and southern sides, and the fortress rose on the western side of the basalt spur. Archaeological excavations carried out since 1963 discovered very simple, man-made Palaeolithic pebble tools of the Early Oldowan type in 1984, which are dated in Africa from approximately 2.5 to 2.0 mya.⁴² While most experts doubted the diagnostics of these simple stone artefacts, there was a breakthrough in 1991 with the discovery of an archaic-looking hominin lower jaw,⁴³ which lay underneath the skeleton of a sabre-toothed cat. However, the

dating from 1.8 to 1.6 mya as well as its belonging to *Homo erectus* were again questioned. Nevertheless, by 2005 the ongoing excavations had uncovered bone fossils of at least seven individuals of different ages in an area of only 20 × 20 m, including five well-preserved skulls, four corresponding upper jaws, several lower jaws and about one hundred skeletal bones (fig. 11).⁴⁴

The discoveries of the 1.79 to 1.77-mya-old early humans of Dmanisi caused a sensation in palaeoanthropology. They not only constitute the oldest fossils of the taxonomic tribe of Hominini outside Africa,⁴⁵ where the very first representatives of the genus *Homo*, called *Homo rudolfensis*,⁴⁶ had developed from 2.5 mya during a period of global cooling and the spread of the savannahs. They also refuted two scientific axioms widely accepted up to that time; namely, the assumption that *Homo erectus*, a native of Africa, was the first hominin to leave Africa around 1.2 mya and settle in the Eurasian continent, and that only a human type with a relatively large brain volume, able to produce more sophisticated stone tools than the simple pebble tools of the Early Oldowan period, could successfully cope with such an emigration over thousands of kilometres. Ensuing scientific debates fundamentally questioned the previous genus classification of early hominins. The Palaeolithic (1.8 mya–10,000 BCE) begins in the Caucasus with the Dmanisi people.



10. Fortress and cathedral of Dmanisi, Georgia. The Sioni Cathedral dates from the seventh or ninth century and the fortress from the ninth. In the Middle Ages, Dmanisi was located at a triple crossroads: to the north a road led to Tbilisi, to the south-west to Javakheti (where, among other things, the rock-hewn town of Vardzia is located) and to the south to Armenia. These roads were part of the network of 'Silk Roads' between Byzantium, Armenia and Persia. The find spot of the early human *Homo georgicus* is about 300 m behind the tower on the right-hand side of the picture. Photo 2018.

The human finds at Dmanisi revealed a population of small hominins of about 145 to 166 cm in height and 40 to 50 kg in weight, with a cranial volume of only 546 to 775 cm³. By way of comparison, the early African *Homo habilis* was about 131 cm tall, weighed 32 to 37 kg and had a cranial capacity of about 550 to 650 cm³; *Homo erectus*, 150 to 180 cm tall and weighing 50–60 kg, had a cranial volume of 650 to 1100 cm³; and today's *Homo sapiens* has a cranial volume of 1,300 to 1,450 cm³.⁴⁷ Also surprising was the finding that the Dmanisi early humans did not possess stone tools of the Classic Oldowan type, as were common in Africa between 2.0 and 1.7 mya in his time, but rather the more primitive tools of the Early Oldowan, which were used in Africa around 2.5 to 2.0 mya.

The production and use of tools by the hominin *Homo rudolfensis* and *H. habilis* marked the beginning of lithic industry and required an upright gait which ensured that the hominins

had their hands free. The palaeoanthropologist Mary Leakey (1913–1996) attributed Oldowan industry to *Homo rudolfensis* (2.5 to 1.9 mya) and *H. habilis* (2.0 to 1.5 mya), and the more highly developed Acheulean industry to the following *Homo ergaster*⁴⁸ (1.9 to 1.4 mya or later) and *H. erectus* (1.8 to approx. 0.7/0.6 mya).⁴⁹ Oldowan industry was a simple flaking technique, in which a hard stone was used to strike a fist-sized boulder, resulting in roughly worked cores with a one-sided sharp edge; these choppers and simple scrapers, also called pebble tools, were used for cutting and scraping meat. In addition, the flakes themselves, which often had sharp edges, were used as rudimentary cutting knives. The basic material for the pebble tools was cryptocrystalline stones such as chert, flint, obsidian, basalt, radiolarite or quartzite. Later, in the Classic (2.0 to 1.7 mya) and the Developed Oldowan (1.7 to 0.6 mya), so-called chopping tools were increasingly produced, in which the cutting edge was processed from both sides. For this

reason, they are regarded as forerunners of the Acheulean hand axe. In Africa, lithic tools of the Oldowan and the Acheulean were made in parallel. The possibility of using meat as a food source, thanks to the former pebble tools, contributed to the further development of the genus, since the consumption of high-calorie meat food promoted the growth of an energy-intensive brain. Moreover, the consumption of meat freed early humans from their previous dependence on the environment, especially after

Homo erectus discovered how to use and control fire in Africa about 1 million years ago.⁵⁰

The British prehistorian Sir Grahame Clark (1907–1995) extended Leakey's evolutionary classification of stone tools to define a five-step model. Each step corresponded to a particular lithic mode of production or human development.⁵¹ Clark's scheme, however, can neither be applied globally nor understood synchronously, since different lithic techniques could exist in

PRE-MODE I refers to those stones which were used as simplest tools before the appearance of *Homo rudolfensis* and *H. habilis* by representatives of the genus *Australopithecus*.

MODE I: Oldowan industry is named after the sites found in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. The simple pebble tools were developed from about 2.5 mya by the genera *Homo rudolfensis* and *H. habilis* in Africa and adopted by *Homo ergaster* and *H. erectus* and distributed throughout Eurasia and Southeast Asia.

MODE II: Acheulean industry, named after the French archaeological site of Saint-Acheul, is defined by the presence of multi-purpose hand axes. They begin to appear at around 1.6/1.5 mya and are attributed to *Homo erectus*, but are also used by his successors regionally up to around 50 ka BP. The basic material for these two-sided, almond, or pear-shaped stone tools – also referred to as biface or two-sided – were stones made of quartzite, flint and volcanic rocks such as obsidian or phonolite. The rather flat hand axes have a rounded base which rests well in the hand, their long sides are sharply honed in the lower half and end in a point. The symmetrically manufactured hand axes were approximately 8 to 30 cm long. The hand axes were made by chipping off smaller flat flakes on both sides with the help of a striking stone and then carefully reworking them with a hammer made of bone or wood. Acheulean industry thus comprised a reductive shaping technique.

MODE III: Mousterian industry, named after the French archaeological site Le Moustier in the Dordogne, is associated in Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia with *Homo neanderthalensis*, and also with early forms of *Homo sapiens* in North Africa and the Levant.⁵² Because of this disparity, it is not possible to automatically deduce the existence of Neanderthals when finding a Mousterian instrument. The Mousterian is defined negatively by the absence of large and coarse hand axes and positively by the variety of different scrapers, serrated and concave blades, arrowheads and small and narrow hand axes. The majority of Mousterian stone tools were made using the Levallois technique, in which the core was first carefully prepared with the help of a striking stone or hammer and a chisel by removing the edges along the outline of the intended flake. The flake was then obtained in a second step with a single final strike. In this respect, the Mousterian can be understood as a flaking industry. While the Levallois technique appears at the beginning of

the European Middle Palaeolithic around 300 ka BP, the Mousterian in the narrower sense is limited to the period from about 200 ka to 40 ka BP. The discovery of allegedly 325,000-year-old stone tools at Nor Geghi 1 in the central Armenian province of Kotayk – some of which were made according to the Levallois technique, some according to the Acheulean – may refute the existing hypothesis that the Levallois technique had been developed in Africa and spread from there to Eurasia. The age and juxtaposition of the Acheulean and Levallois tools of Nor Geghi 1 suggest that the Levallois technique was developed in several places by local populations from older processing methods. However, the dating of Nor Geghi 1 is still debated.⁵³

MODE IV: Aurignacian industry is named after the cave of Aurignac, France, which was explored in 1860. Characteristic of this lithic industry from the Late Palaeolithic are long and narrow flint blades, which were often concave in shape, as well as burins, keeled scrapers and arrowheads. The blades were knocked out of a prismatic flintstone core with the help of a hammer and a bone chisel. The Aurignacian culture (ca. 45 ka–28/26 ka BP) was widespread in Europe, the Levant and Southern Siberia; it is associated with Ice Age *Homo sapiens* called Cro-Magnon,⁵⁴ who also made sharp projectile tips for spears and flutes from bone and ivory. A new and revolutionary cultural development of *Homo sapiens* in the Aurignacian was the first unambiguous creation of works of art in the form of small animal and human figures made of ivory and bone, large figurative cave paintings and petroglyphs. It should be noted that the widely publicized article from February 2018, which dated cave paintings at three sites in Spain to a period of 'at least 64.8 ka BP', assigned the authorship to Neanderthals, and thus attributed to them an ability to produce works of art,⁵⁵ is not scientifically tenable. In the case of two of the caves, the dating turned out to be wrong; in the case of the third, a date of 47 ka BP is valid, but the corresponding red patch does not actually show any depiction and is rather the result of a natural deposit.⁵⁶

MODE V: Microlithic industry used flint or obsidian to produce small, sharp points and blades that were used in skewers, arrows and composite tools such as sickles, knives and saws. The globally pervasive industry first appeared from approximately 45/40 ka BP.



11. A replica of a *Homo georgicus* skull from Dmanisi. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

parallel. The classification can largely be applied in the context of Eurasia and the Caucasus.

The shape of the small Dmanisi human with a small cranial volume but almost modern body proportions made classification difficult.⁵⁷ The first four individuals discovered before 2005 have clear affinities to the African *Homo habilis* and *H. ergaster*, but also to the Asian *Homo erectus*, especially with regard to body proportions. On the other hand, a lower jaw has similarities with the older *Homo rudolfensis*.⁵⁸ For this reason, the Dmanisi man was defined as a kind of intermediate stage and link between the hominins *habilis* and *erectus*, or to be more precise, as a kind of *Homo ergaster* with a very small brain, which developed for a long time outside Africa – and thus in isolation from related hominin populations – into *Homo georgicus*. However, the authors of the new taxon *Homo georgicus*, de Lumley and Lordkipanidze, who attributed an age of 1.81 million years to the finds, doubted that the Asian *Homo erectus* had developed from *Homo georgicus*, since they were separated from each other by a temporal gap of 800,000 years.⁵⁹ This gap of 800,000 years assumed by de Lumley and

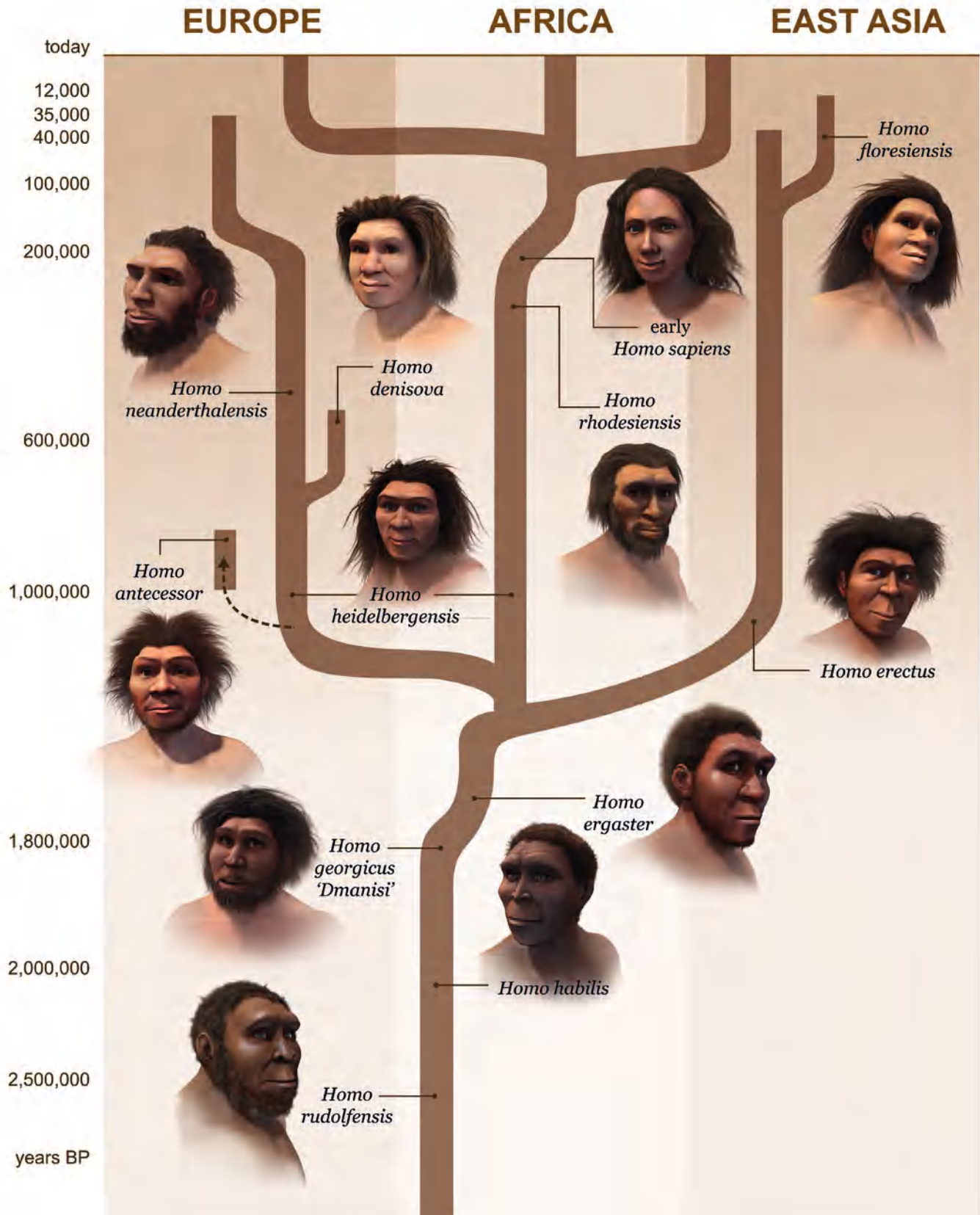
Lordkipanidze is based on the supposition that the oldest *Homo erectus* fossils in East Asia cannot be dated before 1.0 mya. On the other hand, evidence exists of *Homo erectus* fossils at least 1.1 to 1.2 million years old, and perhaps even older.⁶⁰ In any case, the ancestors of the Dmanisi people seem to have left Africa long before the first appearance of *Homo erectus* and advanced to Eurasia via the Levant. Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that the Dmanisi people knew only stone tools of the very early Oldowan, which were in use in Africa 200,000 to 700,000 years earlier. Since the site of Dmanisi has been in use with interruptions for about 80,000 years, we can assume that the region was continuously inhabited.⁶¹ These two factors suggest the following three alternative hypotheses: the first is that there were two dispersions of early hominins from Africa; the second is that *Homo erectus* developed from an ancestor in Eurasia and returned from there to Africa; and the third and final hypothesis is that the hominins *habilis*, *ergaster*, *erectus* and *georgicus* are combined to form a single *erectus* genus, which supposedly had a very high potential for variation. According to this theory, the Dmanisi man would have been an early form of *Homo erectus*.⁶²

The latter hypothesis was put forward in 2013 by the Georgian palaeoanthropologist and excavator at Dmanisi, David Lordkipanidze, following the discovery of a fifth skull with mandible and other bone material. The adult *Homo* Dmanisi 5 had almost modern body proportions, but had a very small cranial volume of 546 cm³ and a very prognathic face with long, snout-like protruding cheekbones and large teeth. From this unusual configuration, Lordkipanidze drew the following conclusion:

When seen from the Dmanisi perspective, morphological diversity in the African fossil record around 1.8 Ma probably reflects variation between demes⁶³ of a single lineage, which is appropriately named H. erectus. [...] Specimens previously attributed to H. ergaster are thus sensibly classified as a chronosubspecies, H. erectus ergaster. The Dmanisi population probably originated from an Early Pleistocene expansion of H. erectus lineage from Africa, so it is sensibly placed within H. ergaster and formally designated as Homo erectus ergaster georgicus.⁶⁴

Lordkipanidze's view of an extraordinarily large phenotypic variability among early hominids prompted him to radically question the entire human taxonomy to date: 'It remains to be tested whether all of the fossils currently allocated to the taxa *H. habilis* and *H. rudolfensis* belong to a single evolving *Homo* lineage.'⁶⁵ This fundamental departure from the previous human

The Genealogical Tree of *Homo sapiens* (according to a 'splitter' classification)



taxonomy aroused opposition. For example, Jeffrey H. Schwartz not only defends the previous taxonomy but, in view of the great morphological differences between the five Dmanisi individuals, postulates that these early humans consist of representatives of at least two different genera. In particular, Dmanisi individual 5 possesses distinctive characteristics and should therefore be understood as a representative of *Homo georgicus*.⁶⁶

Apart from Dmanisi, conclusive scientific evidence for a very early settlement in Europe or Asia is scarce. One either finds stone tools or hominin fossils. Claims about a find of stone tools

from the earlier Pleistocene in Nagorno-Karabakh are highly questionable, since it is neither known whether they are actually handmade objects nor whether the stratigraphic connection to the find layers is correct. Other reports about finds in the Caucasus which are older than those of Dmanisi, such as in Dagestan or near Amiranis Gora in southern Georgia, are also problematic, because they are either surface finds without stratigraphic analysis or because the stratigraphy is faulty due to deficient excavation methods.⁶⁷ The earliest reliably analysed and stratigraphic finds of *Homo erectus* fossils in China and Southeast Asia (Indonesia)



12. The medieval fortified village of Targim in the Assa Valley, Ingushetia. Photo 2017.

are dated around 1.2/1.1 mya; older datings of fossils in China and Indonesia are by no means uniformly accepted.⁶⁸ Doubts are also warranted about the dating of stone artefacts from China or Pakistan up to 1.9 mya.⁶⁹ A fossil find from Sima del Elefante in the Sierra de Atapuerca in Spain suggests the earliest settlement in Southern Europe to have been around 1.2/1.1 mya.⁷⁰ The earliest fossil finds from Europe and Asia indicate that the two regions were first settled during approximately the same period.

The oldest unanimously recognized hominin finds outside Africa after the Dmanisi man are the 1.5/1.4-million-year-old

human fossils from Ubeidiya in the Jordan Valley, which show affinities to *Homo ergaster*. In contrast to the Dmanisi people, those in the Jordan Valley used Acheulean hand axes.⁷¹ It has not yet been determined whether the population of Ubeidiya belonged to the same group as those from Dmanisi. There is no evidence that the Dmanisi population ever crossed the Greater Caucasus to the north to inhabit the Manych plain. Presumably it died out as the climate cooled in the South Caucasus.⁷² Seen from this perspective, the first migration of the ancestors of the Dmanisi population was a failure.





3. Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* in the North and South Caucasus

There is a gap of more than one million years between the flawlessly dated population of Dmanisi and the next closest chronologically undisputed finds.⁷³ In the Caucasus, there are approximately six to eight more-or-less incontrovertible sites from the Lower Palaeolithic (1.8 mya–300 ka BP). These are: Dmanisi, Treugolnaya in the Russian Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia, Darvagchai in Dagestan, Azykh in Nagorno-Karabakh, Nor Geghi 1 in Armenia, Kudaro I in South Ossetia and Yashtukh in Abkhazia.

The cave of **Treugolnaya** was used by humans in the Early Palaeolithic for more than 300,000 years. In the four relevant archaeological layers the archaeologists found pebble and chopping tools from the time of 580–315 ka or 650–350 ka BP, but no hand axes of the Acheulean. The latter remained, with few exceptions, unknown during the Early Palaeolithic in the North Caucasus.⁷⁴ The cave of Treugolnaya is the second oldest site of the Lower Palaeolithic of the Caucasus and the oldest in the European part of Russia. Situated at an altitude of 1,500 m above sea level, the cave was probably only used by gatherers of plants during the warm summer months, as hardly any evidence of hunting was found.⁷⁵ The settlement of the region along the upper Kuban Basin took place towards the end of the Donian Glacial period (MIS 16: 676–621 ka BP). The early humans, though, did not come from the South Caucasus, but from Central Europe. A larger settlement of Eastern Europe, including the North Caucasus, did not occur until about 200 ka BP (MIS 6).⁷⁶ The site of **Darvagchai-1**, 22 km north of Derbent, Dagestan, which was explored from 2004 to 2006, uncovered small pebble tools of the Oldowan type. They were located in layers with maritime deposits from the time of the Baku Transgression (500–400 ka BP), which is why the archaeologist Anatoly Derevianko dates them to the time of about 800–600/550 ka BP.⁷⁷ However, it is possible that many of the pebble tools excavated in Darvagchai-1 are not man-made artefacts, but naturally formed stones.⁷⁸ Given the rarity of Early Palaeolithic sites in the Caucasus, it can be assumed that the area was sparsely populated at the time. After all, early humans had not yet adapted to the prevailing cold or at least lacked long-term strategies for surviving it. Major settlement first came from Central Europe by

the Neanderthals, whose physique was better suited to the cold and who were capable hunters.

Two sites from the South Caucasus date from the transition from the Early Palaeolithic to the Middle Palaeolithic (300 ka BP–40 ka BP). In the lowest layer VI of the **Azykh** (Azikh or Azokh) cave as well as in layer 5b of the **Kudaro I** cave there were small, simple hand axes, whereas the stone tools from Kudaro I are dated around 300–250 ka BP and those from Azykh around 330–300 ka BP. The archaeological layers of the Acheulean in **Kudaro III** and in **Tsona**, 2,100 metres above sea level, originate somewhat later in the Middle Palaeolithic and date back to 250–200 ka BP. The simply made, not entirely symmetrical hand axes of Azykh are the oldest stratigraphic finds from the time of the Upper Acheulean in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the stratigraphic work in Azykh was rather deficient.⁷⁹ A third find site of the Old Palaeolithic Acheulean lies east of the Black Sea near **Yashtukh** in Abkhazia, whose hand axes are dated around 358–330 ka BP.⁸⁰ Assuming the dating is correct, the site of **Nor Geghi 1** in Armenia bears further witness to the Old Palaeolithic Acheulean. Based on the fact that the stone tools of the Acheulean were widespread in the South Caucasus, but only scarce in the North, Doronichev and Golovanova conclude that the two regions were inhabited by different cultural groups.⁸¹

The next major settlement of the Caucasus was by *Homo neanderthalensis*, who was not an ancestor of the African, anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*, but a type of human evolving in Europe that died out shortly after 40 ka BP. It thus formed an evolutionary cul-de-sac, though today's non-Africans carry between 1 and 4 per cent Neanderthal genetic inheritance. *Homo neanderthalensis*, also known as Neanderthals, developed from *Homo heidelbergensis*, which emigrated 1 million to 800,000 years ago from Africa to Southern Europe. *Homo heidelbergensis* lived in Africa as well as in Europe for about 100,000 years. However, when hominin fossils were discovered in a karst landscape east of Burgos, Spain in 1994, the new taxon *Homo antecessor* was postulated, which is said to be an ancestor of *Homo heidelbergensis*. Since this alleged new species was essentially determined from the facial bones of a juvenile and could only be loosely dated, the *Homo antecessor* was regarded as later *Homo erectus* or as an early form of *Homo heidelbergensis*.⁸² Since the new analysis of dental enamel from a molar of a *Homo antecessor* published in early 2020 we know that *Homo antecessor* represents 'a closely related sister taxon of the last common ancestor of *H. sapiens*, Neanderthals and Denisovians', but not a common ancestor of *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals and Denisovians.⁸³ The molar was

13. (previous page) Illustration of Neanderthals hunting mountain goats by causing the frightened animals to fall into a gorge.

dated 949–772 ka BP. *Homo heidelbergensis* originally lived mainly on plants, and his habitat was characterized by a warm, humid climate. When the European climate suffered significant cooling, which reached its first peak in the Elster Glacial (MIS 12, 478–424 ka BP or MIS 11, 424–374 ka BP), the morphology of the Neanderthal adapted to the colder environment where fewer plants thrived. He fed increasingly on meat and developed hunting strategies for killing large game.⁸⁴ In this respect, he used wooden skewers and javelins with sharp flint tips on their front ends. The Neanderthal was thus able to survive in a colder environment and advance into regions north of 50° latitude.⁸⁵ The evolution from *Homo heidelbergensis* to early Neanderthal was complete by 300–250 ka BP; in the same period, early forms of the anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* developed in Africa.⁸⁶ The Neanderthal and his relative *Homo denisova*,⁸⁷ whose fossils were discovered in the Russian Altai and who is closer to the Neanderthal than to the anatomically modern human, were a northern human type, the pre-sapiens in Africa a southern one. Based on DNA analysis, it can be assumed that the lines of development of the future anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* and those of the archaic hominins *neanderthalensis* and *denisova* began to separate around 765–550 ka BP, while the Neanderthal and Denisovan lines diverged around 473–381 ka BP. Both groups interbred as the genomic analysis of a bone belonging to a girl excavated in the Denisova cave indicated. The girl's mother was a Neanderthal and her father a Denisovan, who possessed some Neanderthal ancestry.⁸⁸

During the Saale cold period (approx. 300–130 ka BP) the heartland of the Neanderthals lay in southern and central Europe, south of a line extending from Liverpool in the west to Odessa in the east. North of this line permafrost prevailed. During the subsequent Eemian warm period (MIS 5e, 126–115 ka BP), i.e. before the beginning of the last glacial period, the Weichselian or Vistulian glacial period of 115–11.7 ka BP, the Neanderthals extended their habitat far east, to the northern and southern Caucasus, to the Middle East, to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Central Asia, and to the Altai. Today, more than 200 sites from the Mousterian period (Mode III), many of them caves and rock shelters, are known in the Caucasus. Most are associated with the Neanderthals.⁸⁹ The highest concentrations of Middle Palaeolithic sites, most of which contain Mousterian artefacts, are found in the basin of the Kuban river and in western Georgia. Nonetheless, the stratigraphy of these sites was often poor or the artefacts were surface finds.⁹⁰ The eastern regions of both the North and South Caucasus remained sparsely populated over the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic.⁹¹

In the North Caucasus archaeologists discovered Neanderthal fossils in four caves: Barakavskaya, Monasheskaya, Matzuka and Mezmaiskaya.⁹² In the Georgian South Caucasus, five caves or rock shelters provided fossils of the Neanderthal: Tsutskhvati (Bronze Cave), Ortvale Klde, Ortvala, Sakajia and Djrchula.⁹³ The mostly uncalibrated data from these sites originate from the last phase of Neanderthal existence, shortly before 40 ka BP. In addition, in 2010, a Spanish–Armenian team discovered the tooth of a Neanderthal dating around 100 ka BP in the Azykh 1 cave in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1968, the Azerbaijani archaeologist Mammadali Huseynov had discovered a small fragment of a lower jaw in the same cave, which belonged either to an archaic Neanderthal or to a representative of *Homo heidelbergensis*. But the Spanish–Armenian team did not receive permission to investigate the original find in Baku, so its age and classification remain preliminary.⁹⁴ The lithic Mousterian finds of the South Caucasian Neanderthals suggest that they remained in contact with their fellow species in the Levant and northern Zagros mountains.⁹⁵ Given the number of sites found, it may be concluded that in the Middle Palaeolithic the South Caucasus was more densely populated than the northern part, not least because Imereti, west Georgia, enjoyed a relatively mild climate during the Weichselian glacial period.⁹⁶

One much discussed topic is whether the anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* quickly displaced the Neanderthal during his expansion from the Levant, or whether the two hominins coexisted, or, finally, whether the Neanderthal had already died out when the sapiens invaded his former habitats. *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals certainly must have encountered each other, since the DNA of non-African anatomically modern humans, as mentioned above, contains 1–4% of the Neanderthal genome.⁹⁷ As can be seen from fossils from the then tree-covered Levant, such as from Misluya (approx. 194–177 ka BP), Skhul (approx. 130–100 ka BP), and Qafzeh (100–95 ka BP), the first early forms of *Homo sapiens* left Africa almost 200,000 to 100,000 years ago. The emigration of archaic *sapiens* was not limited to the Levant, but also led to the former steppe landscape of today's Nefud Desert in Arabia. In all likelihood, humans followed the migratory movements of big game.⁹⁸ When the climate in Europe became colder about 70,000 years ago, Neanderthals moved to the Middle East and the Levant, where they encountered the early *sapiens* and possibly displaced them. We can assume that the Neanderthal, who was accustomed to the cold, was superior to the archaic *Homo sapiens* in this cold period. Soon after, however, about 60,000 to 50,000 years ago, the modern *Homo sapiens* returned from Africa to the Levant, pushed out the Neanderthals living there and began his now successful expansion throughout



14. During the Late Khvalynian transgression (16–9/8 ka BP) the Caspian Sea reached the Gobustan rocks. Today, the sea visible in the background is almost 5 km away from the petroglyphs. Photo 2016.

the entire Eurasian continent, including the Caucasus.⁹⁹ The genetic exchange between the hominin Neanderthals and *sapiens* most likely took place in the Levant, when the two types of human beings met for the second time.¹⁰⁰

Homo sapiens spread rapidly throughout Eurasia, including in colder regions. The fact that modern *sapiens* established himself so quickly, even though he was morphologically adapted to a warm and humid tropical climate, suggests that his cognitive and innovative abilities had evolved considerably. This would have given him a clear competitive advantage over the Neanderthal. The carefully explored Palaeolithic cave of Mezmaiskaya (North Caucasus) and the rock shelter of Ortvale Klde (South Caucasus) provide clues as to how the transition from Neanderthal to *Homo sapiens* took place. With an age of 39,700 +/- 1,100 ka BP (42,960–44,600 cal BP),¹⁰¹ the fossils from the cave of Mezmaiskaya are the most recent reliably dated Neanderthal finds of the Caucasus, perhaps of the whole of Europe.¹⁰² At both sites, the last archaeological layer, associated with the Neanderthal, is clearly separated from the first, which is associated with *sapiens*. This suggests that a coexistence of the two hominins is unlikely.

*All Caucasian EUP [Early Upper Palaeolithic] sites lack a period of transition from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic, and instead show the abrupt appearance of the EUP in the Caucasus fully developed technological tradition, and lithic and bone-industry suggesting the arrival of a new biological population (i.e. Homo sapiens) and population replacement of local Neanderthals.*¹⁰³

The stratigraphy at Ortvale Klde even revealed an intermediate layer between that of the Neanderthals and that of *sapiens*, which ruled out the coexistence of the two human types.¹⁰⁴ It appears that the North and South Caucasus were populated by *Homo sapiens* contemporaneously, which would suggest that the mountain passes were easily accessible at that time.¹⁰⁵

It can thus be inferred that the anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* rapidly pushed out and replaced the local Neanderthal population in the entire Caucasus by 42–39 ka cal BP.¹⁰⁶ ‘These data suggest that Neanderthal extinction across Western Eurasia, including the Caucasus, was probably a rapid process, and that coexistence with AMHs [Anatomic Modern Humans], when it occurred, may have been of limited duration.’¹⁰⁷ Other researchers



15. The 2,415-m-high mountain Ilandagh, the 'Snake Mountain', in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.

interpret the archaeological and palaeoanthropological findings to mean that in the Caucasus the anatomically modern human did not occupy Neanderthal shelters until after the latter's extinction.¹⁰⁸ While it remains uncertain as to why the cold-hardened and rugged Neanderthal quickly died out, various factors can be identified that contributed to a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis *sapiens*. The limitations of Neanderthals included a lower birth rate, longer intervals between births, as well as probably a higher mortality rate and a very low population density. At the same time, the total population of Neanderthals on the Eurasian continent was scarcely more than 70,000 individuals.¹⁰⁹ They lived in small groups of about 25 to 30 individuals and maintained little contact between the groups. As the very low genetic diversity among Neanderthals shows, this led to inbreeding.¹¹⁰ Just the same, they were able to procure raw materials such as obsidian over a distance of 150 km, which required a sufficient network.¹¹¹

In contrast, modern humans were much more mobile and maintained larger networks between themselves, which facilitated a more diverse flow of genes. The greatest advantage of *Homo sapiens* was their ability to innovate. Although the Neanderthals

were good stone workers, their scope for innovation beyond stone processing was limited. *Sapiens*, on the other hand, made use of symbols and signs underlying languages, which enabled precise planning and coordination when hunting in groups.¹¹² In addition, they used traps and snares for hunting, had a significantly greater radius of action for hunting and the extraction of raw materials, made clothes out of hide and built heated shelters.¹¹³ Where the Neanderthals had adapted to the cold mainly by an evolution of their morphology, *sapiens* overcame it thanks to new technologies. Archaeologists found a revealing example of the innovative power of the earlier *sapiens* in the Dzudzuana cave in Georgia, where they discovered approximately 32,000-year-old wild flax fibres. The flax fibres, the oldest in the world, were spun or twisted and dyed in various colours. They were most likely used together with the similarly spun and twisted hair of the Caucasian ibex to make clothes or to sew hides together.¹¹⁴ The ability to process wild flax and goat hair into clothing was a key prerequisite for survival in colder climates. Nevertheless, during the late phase of the Würm ice age, which lasted from about 34,000 to 15,000 years BP, higher regions of the Caucasus were depopulated.

III

Prehistoric Cultures: From the Neolithic to the Iron Age

'Altogether 23 kings of the lands of Nairi combined their chariotry and army [...] and advanced to wage war and combat. [...] I approached them (and) I destroyed their extensive army like a storm of the god Adad. [...] I captured all of the kings of the lands of Nairi alive. [...] I took their natural, royal sons as hostages (and) imposed on them a tribute [...] and allowed them to return to their lands.'

The Assyrian king TIGLATH-PILESER I (r. 1115/14–1077/6 BCE).¹

After the last extreme cold period (22–19 ka BP) had subsided, a continuous warming of the climate began, which lasted until about 14.7 ka BP and produced annual mean temperatures that almost corresponded to today's conditions. After some temperature fluctuations, the warmer climate stabilized, fixing the end of the Pleistocene and the beginning of the Holocene to around 11,700 BP. From a geochronological point of view, the beginning of the Mesolithic is identified with the start of the Holocene. The end of the Mesolithic, however, depending on the region, is associated with the beginning of the so-called Neolithic Revolution. For this reason, developments in the North and South Caucasus are discussed separately in this chapter. The Neolithic Revolution marks the transition from an economy of hunting and gathering to an economy of food production, be it arable or livestock, and the storage of the produced goods. By breeding certain plants suitable

for growing grain, vegetables and fruit, and by domesticating animals into farm animals, man intervened for the first time in natural evolution and species selection. The new agriculture economy resulted in a sedentary life among part of the population.

Nonetheless, recent discoveries in Göbekli Tepe, south-east Turkey, have revealed a Neolithic culture which, while possessing a monumental sacral complex with correspondingly settled temple servants, was based on a hunter-gatherer economy. The above definition of the Neolithic Revolution, as formulated by V. Gordon Childe and Vadim Masson, must therefore be qualified.² The transition to the Neolithic was not so much a revolution in the way that the Industrial Revolution was, but rather a process that took place over several centuries. As Göbekli Tepe shows, stationary settlements and monumental buildings appeared before the transition to agriculture.



16. In the centre of the picture, two human figures, and above them a 150-centimetre-long boat with at least 21 passengers. On the left, one small and two large human figures are superimposed on a zigzag motif that probably depicts water. The two larger figures on the left are carrying bows on their back. Petroglyphs from the upper terrace of Boyukdash, Gobustan, Azerbaijan; Mesolithic, ca. 9000–7000 BCE. Photo 2016.



17. Two boats with a sun symbol at the bow. Petroglyphs from the lower terrace of Boyukdash, Gobustan, Azerbaijan. Transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic, about 7000–6000 BCE. Photo 2016.

1. The southern Caucasus

From the Late Palaeolithic and Early Mesolithic, only few archaeological traces can be found in the South Caucasus. They have been discovered mostly in the coastal regions.³ In the west, karst caves in Abkhazia⁴ and in Colchis (western Georgia) contained microlithic stone tools, which were replaced in the Mesolithic by obsidian tools.⁵ In the east, the petroglyphs of **Gobustan**, Azerbaijan represent unique works of art from the Late Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. In total, the three main, large petroglyph complexes of Gobustan – Boyukdash, Kichikdash and Jinghindagh – contain more than 6,000 rock carvings. They extend over a period of about 13–15,000 years to the Middle Ages and also include the inscription of a Roman centurion of the Legio XII Fulminata, a centuria of which was stationed here under Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96) (fig 109). Most of the older stone carvings are found in

rock shelters and caves; investigations of the surrounding layers of earth and debris revealed that people at that time lived by fishing and hunting. Neither traces of agricultural activity nor advanced stone tools were found. The pre-Bronze Age petroglyphs represent the first early hunter-gatherers without bow and arrows, then hunters armed with bows and arrows, pastoralists, people dancing, pregnant or obese women with large breasts and buttocks but small or missing heads, and aurochs and buffalos. Based on the dating of the earlier petroglyphs one may assume that the bow and arrow was introduced in the Gobustan region at the turn of the Upper Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic about 12,000 years ago.

The petroglyphs of the women with large legs somehow resemble the unfired clay figurines from the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture found at places such as Khramis Didi Gora, Georgia, and dating from the sixth millennium BCE.⁶ Particularly striking are the more than sixty depictions of boats, which were probably built and used during the Late Khvalynian transgression,



18. Two aurochs facing each other; transition from Mesolithic to Neolithic, about 7000–6000 BCE. A small horse was engraved much later. Petroglyphs from the lower terrace of Boyukdash, Gobustan, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.

when the Caspian Sea lay much closer to the petroglyphs than it does today, being now about five kilometres distant (fig. 14). The largest ship carving is 150 cm long and there are about twenty people on board. On several ships, the raised bow ends at its stem in a sun symbol (fig. 17). Some of these petroglyphs featuring ships might well be among the oldest representations of boats known so far. They may represent a mythic journey over the Caspian Sea. Some rocks located in the south-east of the Gobustan petroglyph complex at and near Kichikdash have a sand layer about 20 to 30 cm thick that separates the pre-Bronze Age petroglyphs from the later stone carvings. This sand layer suggests that the Caspian Sea reached as far as Gobustan about 11,000 to 9,000 years ago.⁷

Near Gobustan, there is the world's largest collection of small mud volcanoes; there are more than 320 of them in Azerbaijan alone (fig. 8). In fact, mud volcanoes have nothing to do with conventional volcanism, i.e. with the rise of magma

from the earth's mantle, but are compressed gas that is pressed from the subsoil to the earth's surface with water and muddy, clay-rich sedimentary rock. The gas consists of 90 per cent highly flammable methane and is part of Azerbaijan's large, deep natural gas reserves. Cold mud containing iodine, bromine and calcium bubbles up from the cones, which are only a few decimetres or metres high.

1.1 The Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture

The course of the early Holocene global warming between the tenth and eighth millennium BCE saw, in the upper Euphrates valley and the Levant, the beginning of the transition from the hunting, fishing and gathering economy to the domestication of animals as pets and breeding animals as well as the cultivation of plants. The Neolithic economic model of animal husbandry and agriculture was established in this area of the Fertile Crescent. Agriculture, in particular, necessitated permanent local ties and

the establishment of lasting settlements. It was from there that these new ways of life spread in all directions and reached the adjacent South Caucasus, which was geographically open to the south, in the course of the seventh millennium BCE. (It should be noted that such Neolithic evolutions developed independently at different times, as for example in China and Central America.) In the southern Caucasus, the earliest Neolithic economic cells formed in the western Georgian Colchis near the Black Sea, where slash-and-burn agriculture was practised. They went on to appear in the following areas: near Aratashen in the Armenian plain of Ararat, where small pre-Pottery Neolithic settlements emerged; near Darkveti in central Georgia, where bones of domesticated animals were discovered; in Nakhchivan; and also near Chokh in central Dagestan.⁸ It is very likely that there were influences from West Asia, although local breeding of individual plant species cannot be ruled out.⁹ Located on a mountain slope between 1,600 and 1,800 metres above sea level, the site of Chokh, from the first half of the sixth millennium BCE, is probably the oldest known Neolithic mountain settlement of the Caucasus. Here, millet, wheat, oats and barley were cultivated and sheep and horned cattle were kept. This is also where the inhabitants built the oldest stone houses in the Caucasus, semicircular buildings that nestled against the rocks. The cultivation area was later enlarged in the fourth millennium BCE by the formation of terraces.¹⁰ Neolithic agriculture also spread rapidly in the western Caucasus and northwards along the eastern Black Sea coast, reaching the



19. The settlement of Aruchlo in the basin of the Kura river from the culture of Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen. The Neolithic settlement of Aruchlo, built between 5800 and 5500 BCE, is one of the oldest in the South Caucasus. The interconnected circular buildings of Aruchlo had no ovens and were too small for living purposes; they were used to store supplies. Photo 2010.

fertile Taman Peninsula in the north-western tip of the Caucasus 6,900 years ago.¹¹

Towards the end of the seventh millennium BCE, a Neolithic way of life developed in large parts of the central South Caucasus, which was based on agriculture and livestock farming. Village settlements arose accordingly. Called the **Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen** culture – based on respective excavation sites in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia – it endured from the end of the seventh millennium to the beginning of the fifth millennium BCE.¹² The visible remains of these settlements are small hills called ‘tepe’ in Azerbaijani, ‘gora’ in Georgian, and ‘blur’ in Armenian. Village settlements were concentrated in the middle basin of the Kura river, the Ararat valley, and the plain of Nakhchivan. A characteristic feature of this culture was the construction of small ‘villages’, such as Aruchlo I, 50 km south-west of Tbilisi. These settlements consisted of one-storey and one-room mud buildings with dome-shaped roofs. The buildings, which were often sunken and built close to each other, had a round or oval ground plan and an area of 3 to 19 m². If a hearth was present, the houses were residential, with the smoke outlet probably in the roof dome; if the hearth was missing, the buildings served as storerooms. Some settlements such as Aruchlo and Kamiltepe were surrounded by two to four trenches which had either a defensive or ritual function. Most tools consisted of obsidian, scree, horn and bone. The first generations of the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture featured hardly any ceramic vessels, the few exceptions being Mesopotamian imports. Local handmade production began at 5800 BCE, the first to appear in the South Caucasus.¹³ Typical for this South Caucasian culture are small human, mostly female figures made of unfired clay. The figurines are depicted sitting with their knees pulled up or their legs spread; many are highly stylized. The largest collection of such female figures was discovered in Khramis Didi Gora, Georgia. Archaeologists found here more than 60 figurines, 17 of which were grouped around a single hearth. They may have been the artefacts of a fertility cult. Only relatively few burials of this culture were found, and most of them were under house floors or courtyards.¹⁴

20. (over) The mountain village of Gunib, Dagestan, located near Chokh. The construction of terraces made it possible to grow grain on the lower slopes of the mountain early on. In the nineteenth century, the natural fortress of Gunib served the Avar Imam Shamil (1797–1871) as the last bastion in the war of resistance against the Russian conquest of the northern Caucasus. Shamil surrendered to the Russian besiegers on 6 September 1859. Photo 2019.





In the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture, rainland farming was the predominant type of farming, with irrigation canals also being constructed at certain points. In the relatively densely populated region of the Kura basin near the Neolithic settlements of Aruchlo and Shulaveri Gora stood the village of Gadachrili, where many buildings were used to store grain. Around 5900 cal BCE, the villagers attempted to divert the Shulaveri river flowing west of the settlement to the fields in the immediate vicinity of the village by means of a complex system of canals.¹⁵ This represents the oldest case of water management in the Caucasus. An older, dried-out bed of the Shulaveri river located close to the village formed part of the new canal system. The hydrological intervention seems to have been successful at first, although the water slowly flowing through the channels deposited a lot of debris, which required frequent maintenance work. But between 5750 and 5430 cal BCE, the Shulaveri river

twice inundated its old bed, flooding the village and severely damaging the canals. After the second flooding, the people abandoned their village.¹⁶

The two villages of Gadachrili and Shulaveri Gora also provided evidence of early Neolithic wine production, as traces of the salts of tartaric acid could be found on shards of very large ceramic vessels. These salts can be interpreted as residues of fermented wine, making it highly likely that these shards constitute the oldest evidence of a wine culture in the world. While the finds from Gadachrili and Shulaveri Gora originate from the first half of the sixth millennium BCE, similar evidence from Areni 1 in Armenia and Hajji Firuz Tepe in north-western Iran are based on findings from the second half of the same millennium. It is debated whether the wild or domesticated subspecies of the vine *Vitis vinifera* was used for wine production.¹⁷ Towards the end of the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture, the



21. Wine cellar in the bishop's palace of Nekresi, Kakheti, Georgia, eighth/ninth century CE. Wine was already being stored in prehistoric times in large ceramic vessels called *kveri* that were buried in the ground. Photo 2013.

first copper objects appeared in the South Caucasus, marking the beginning of the Copper Age or Chalcolithic. The few simple copper objects, which were made by means of cold hammering and occasionally contained 0.5 to 1.5 per cent arsenic, were awls, knives, rings and pearl-like pieces of jewellery, which consisted of rolled-up, thin copper sheets.¹⁸ While agriculture flourished in the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen region, the favourable climate in the coastal regions allowed hunters, fishermen and gatherers to maintain the majority of their traditional economic activities. Nevertheless, cattle breeding began to develop in western Georgia and ceramic production in Gobustan.¹⁹ In the Nakhchivan region and in the Mughan steppe in south-eastern Azerbaijan, a variant of the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture developed that was more oriented towards the northern Mesopotamian culture of Tell Halaf. In its first phase, houses with a round ground plan were likewise built, followed later by small buildings with a rectangular ground plan.²⁰

1.2 The Chalcolithic cultures of Sioni and Leila Tepe

Towards the beginning of the fifth millennium BCE a climatic dry period began in the Near East, especially in the north of Mesopotamia and in the southern Caucasus. The depleted soil dried out from intensive use. As a result, the villages were abandoned and the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture came to an end around the middle of the millennium. The aridization of the climate and soils led to an adaptation of economic activities. Two new cultures resulted: that of Sioni in the middle basin of the Kura and, a little later, that of Leila Tepe in the lowlands of Karabakh. The **Sioni culture** in the middle catchment area of the Kura river existed from *ca.* 4600 to 3200 BCE.²¹ Apart from certain peculiar features of the mica-containing Sioni ceramics, i.e. ornamental patterns such as transverse grooves incised or pressed into the vessel margins, this culture is difficult to define and sometimes poorly distinguished from the later Leila Tepe culture. The people of Sioni left the alluvial plains and settled in the foothills where they primarily raised livestock and secondarily cultivated crops. Hunting again played a greater role than in the previous culture. The communities led a more nomadic way of life than their predecessors and left behind few permanent buildings. There are nonetheless stone foundations upon which they placed wattle and daub huts and possibly also tents, as can be surmised from the numerous postholes.²²

As Hermann Parzinger pointed out, ‘in the final phase of the Sioni culture, one finds elements of both the North Caucasian Maikop culture and the Amuq F stage of the



22. Jug burial with an adult in foetal position and grave goods from the region of Mingachevir, Azerbaijan, *ca.* second century BCE. The oldest known jug burials date from the fifth/fourth millennium BCE. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

northwestern Levant’.²³ The similarities between the pottery of the Maikop culture in the North Caucasus and that of the Late Sioni phase, as well as that of the pottery type of layer F of Amuq (3700–3300 BCE) spread throughout Syria and North Mesopotamia, are interpreted in fundamentally different ways. Until recently, the dominant view, especially among Soviet and Russian archaeologists, was that the Chalcolithic South Caucasus was decisively influenced by the Late Ubaid/Early Uruk period of Southern Mesopotamia (*ca.* 4000–3500 BCE), particularly as regards the abundant unpolished grass-tempered ware and the rectangular house floor plan prevailing in the Leila Tepe culture.²⁴ This influence allegedly occurred in the course of the so-called ‘Uruk expansion’. At this time, the economically strong city-states of southern Mesopotamia conducted brisk international trade with Syria in the west, Iran in the east, and the Caucasus in the north, and purportedly founded trading colonies, similar to the later Greek trading settlements along the eastern Black Sea coast. This trade network and the migration of people from Mesopotamia and Syria supposedly affected the ceramics and architecture of the South and North Caucasus, which is why the cultures of Sioni and Leila Tepe are regarded as a kind of bridge between Mesopotamia and Maikop.

Except for the Khojakhn settlements, all of the Eneolithic sites [excavated along the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Pipeline] are associated with the Leilatepe archaeological culture, which emerged during the

*first half of the fourth millennium BCE as a result of the migration of near-eastern tribes from Mesopotamia to the South Caucasus, especially to Azerbaijan. [...] Moving farther to the north, and having settled in the North Caucasus, the bearers of the Leiletepe culture contributed largely to the formation of the Maikop archaeological culture.*²⁵

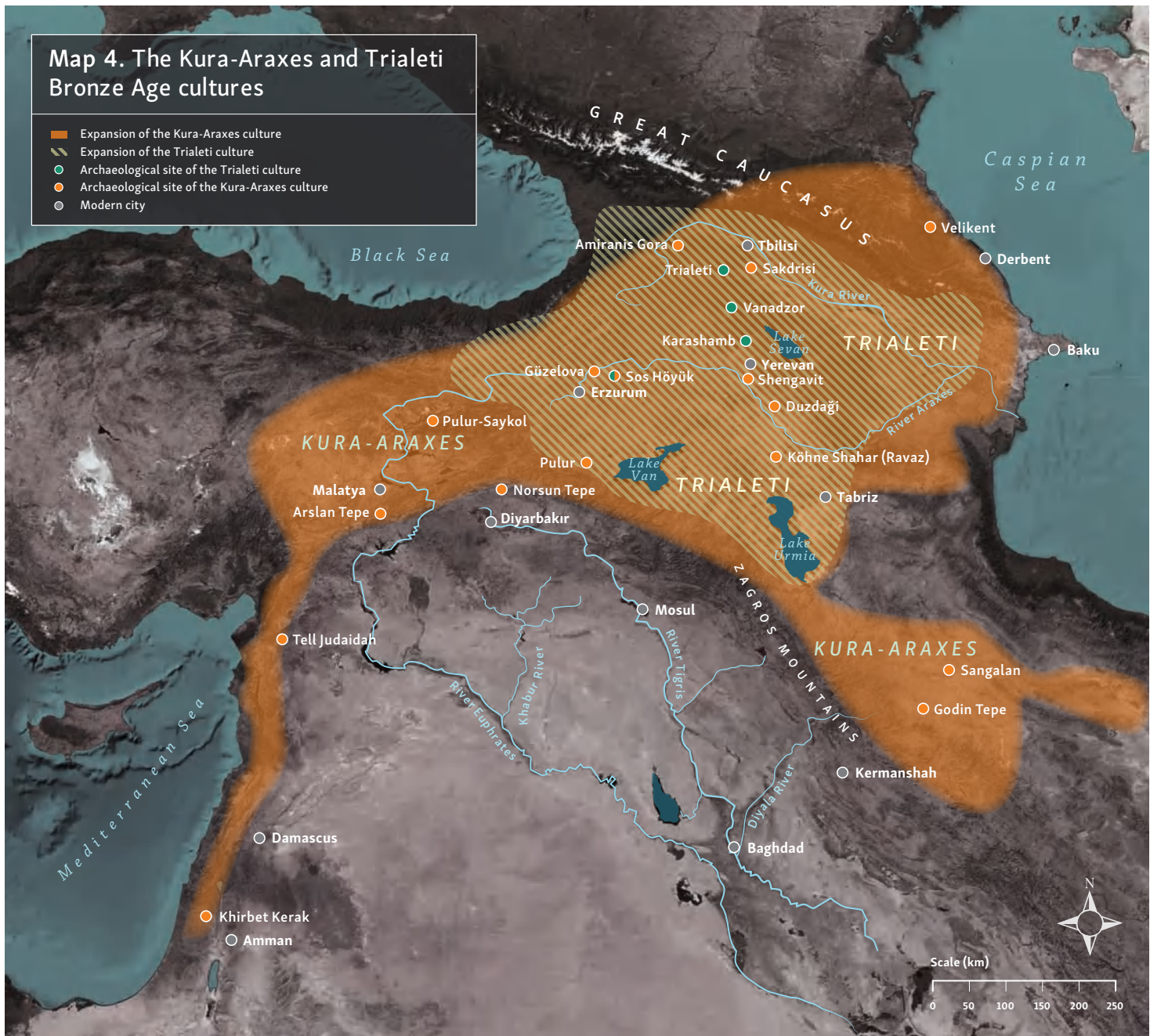
Conversely, a more recent opinion shared by the present author assumes that the northern steppe cultures had a decisive influence on the Chalcolithic South Caucasus.²⁶

In the south-east of the central Georgian region of Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli) and in the lowlands of Karabakh, the culture of **Leila Tepe** flourished from about 4300 to 3350 BCE.²⁷ One of the main features of this culture are carefully planned settlements such as Leila Tepe in Azerbaijan, which consisted of multi-room houses with a rectangular floor plan made of standardized clay bricks. The archaeologists found a total of eleven different building layers here, pointing to a long period of settlement. Such buildings and villages gave rise to comparisons with contemporaneous architecture in Mesopotamia.²⁸ A second distinctive feature is the evidence that the people of the Leila Tepe culture at this time were familiar with melting metallurgy. We can see this from excavated crucibles and casting moulds. The respective objects, such as awls and dagger blades, consisted of arsenic bronze, whereby the arsenic content was between 0.01% and 1.35%.²⁹ The admixture of 0.5% to 2% arsenic is known to increase the hardness of copper objects by 10% to 30%.³⁰ The ability to melt and alloy metals represents a technological revolution as it boosted productivity and provided new means for social and economic differentiation and facilitated the assertion of power claims. Many authors hold the view that the art of metal alloying, especially bronze production, was transmitted from Mesopotamia via the bearers of the Leila Tepe culture and, from there, to the North Caucasian Maikop culture.³¹

The most striking feature of the Leila Tepe culture is its burial types. Specifically, interments were conducted using burial mounds (kurgans) or, in the case of children's burials, ceramic vessels. In the Azerbaijani necropolis of Soyuq Bulaq alone, archaeologists identified 50 kurgans during rescue excavations in connection with the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan Pipeline between 2005 and 2009, excavating 27 of them. The burial mounds were low, rarely exceeding one metre in height, and had a diameter of five to fifteen metres. The burial pit was either on the surface or sunken. Some kurgans were encircled by a ring of scree or by a ditch. The Kavtiskhevi kurgan in Georgia, which also belonged to the Leila Tepe culture, was slightly larger, with

a height of 150 cm and a diameter of 25 m. Radiocarbon measurements from four kurgans of Soyuq Bulaq showed a date of 3950 to 3520 cal BCE,³² making the kurgans of Soyuq Bulaq the oldest in the southern Caucasus. The kurgans not only contained adults, but also children buried in ceramic vessels. Along with the four jar burials of Soyuq Bulaq, another four from Böyük Kəsik were discovered.³³ In Ovchular Tepe, Nakhchivan, however, two jar burials did not contain children, but instead three copper axes and two copper rings as well as a pearl.³⁴ From such a symbolic burial, one also surmises a concept of sacrificing precious metal.

While jar burials of children were common in Northern Mesopotamia during the Ubaid–Uruk period – whether under the floors of houses or in burial grounds, as for example in Tepe Gawra near Nineveh,³⁵ northern Iraq – there is no evidence of burial mounds from Mesopotamia at that time. As a consequence, the conventional view may no longer be supported that Mesopotamian immigrants from Ubaid or Uruk formed the Leila Tepe culture and that the bearers of the Leila Tepe culture then spread this heritage in the North Caucasus, giving rise to the Maikop culture.³⁶ Even the reference to the eleven burial mounds of Sé Girdan at the southern shore of Lake Urmia in north-western Iran is not conclusive: they are dated to the second half of the 4th millennium BCE, which makes them younger than those of Leila Tepe or the oldest kurgans of Maikop.³⁷ Architecturally, the kurgan and burial chambers of Sé Girdan correspond to the second Maikop phase of Klady-Novosvobodnaya.³⁸ Furthermore, burial mounds from the Chalcolithic were discovered in the steppes from the Volga to the North Caucasus, which are older than those of Maikop.³⁹ The origins of the kurgans are therefore not to be found in north-west Iran or Azerbaijan, but in the Russian steppes between the Volga, Don and Kuban. It appears, then, that Leila Tepe, Sé Girdan and Maikop were not part of the universe of the Ubaid–Uruk culture, but rather that the burial tradition of Leila Tepe and Sé Girdan were offshoots of the Maikop culture.⁴⁰ Of course, this finding as to the burial type does not exclude the possibility that the design of the settlement of Leila Tepe was indeed influenced by Mesopotamia. Even so, the hypothesis of migration from the cultural area of Ubaid–Uruk has not been established.



1.3 The Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes culture

The **Kura-Araxes culture** (3500–2300/2200 BCE), whose name was coined by the Soviet archaeologist Boris Kuftin in 1944, was the first to span the entire South Caucasus, with the exception of the wetlands of Colchis and the Gobustan region. In the course of its development, the culture also spread to north-eastern Anatolia, northern Mesopotamia, and north-western Iran, and even reached Lebanon and Palestine. Early conurbations of this culture developed around 3500 BCE relatively suddenly in the extended

catchment area of the rivers Kura and Araxes, i.e. in the Ararat plain as well as in south and east Georgia, in north-east Anatolia in the region of Erzurum and, somewhat later, along the Caspian coast in north-east Azerbaijan and south-east Dagestan.⁴¹ The profile of this culture is distinct and it stands out clearly from the two neighbouring ways of life. For instance, the North Caucasian Maikop culture seems to have been concerned with the world of the dead. Its cultural monuments consisted mainly of burial mounds and few traces of settlement were discovered. By contrast, evidence of the Kura-Araxes culture appears to be connected to

the world of the living: several hundred villages were identified,⁴² but only a few burial grounds, especially from the early period. Moreover, unlike their southern neighbour Mesopotamia and the city of Uruk, with their palaces and temples and economy based on irrigated agriculture and selective cattle breeding, the Kura-Araxes villages had no monumental constructions and relied primarily on rainland farming. For its part, the dominant economic form of the Maikop culture was semi-mobile livestock farming. Both neighbouring societies, Maikop and Uruk, had a manifestly vertical social hierarchy, and Uruk was subject to central authority. The Kura-Araxes society, on the other hand, was organized uniformly and the individual settlements were apparently not subject to central governance. In any event, neither architecture nor graves and burial objects provide indications of any social differentiation.

Thanks to a warmer and more humid climate, even at higher altitudes,⁴³ the second half of the fourth millennium BCE favoured rainland farming. This, in turn, triggered pronounced population growth and correspondingly dense settlement. Wheat,

barley and millet were the most planted, followed by oats and legumes; occasionally domesticated vines also flourished (fig. 4). Towards the end of the Kura-Araxes culture, farmers began to use the pulling power of cattle to plough and tow carts, as can be seen from clay models of two-wheeled carts from Samshvide, Kartli or Arich/Harich, Armenia (fig. 24).⁴⁴ Such tiny models were no children's toys, but objects of burial furniture.

The skill of wagon making was probably transmitted via the North Caucasus. The ploughshare was still made of horn, but the farmers began using bronze sickles for harvesting early on.⁴⁵ The people built their villages in valley floors or along terraces on mountain foothills, with Amiranis Gora (southern Georgia) extending over no fewer than ten terraces.⁴⁶ In the early phase, the houses still had a circular ground plan, and soon thereafter a rectangular one. In the larger villages, the houses featured a standardized layout, standing in orderly rows. They had flat roofs and consisted of a main room as well as a smaller antechamber. In the valleys, they were made of clay bricks or



23. Ploughing scene with two harnessed oxen; below stands a dog. Petroglyph of Ughtasar, Armenia, first half of third millennium BCE. Photo 2010.

wickerwork plastered with clay, whereas in the high plateaus and foothills they were made of stone.⁴⁷ The settlements were generally not fortified, with only few being surrounded by thick walls. One such exception was the six-hectare settlement of Shengavit, south of Yerevan city, which had a four-metre-thick stone wall and some circular stone buildings surrounded by rectangular rooms. The circular buildings may have had a ritual function.⁴⁸ In the Ararat plain, the smaller settlements of Ada Blur and Mokhra Blur were also protected by fortified walls.⁴⁹

By contrast, in Velikent (south-eastern Dagestan) and Mingachevir (northern Azerbaijan) people lived in large, sunken dwellings. The Early Bronze Age **Velikent** culture stretched from the approximately 20-km-wide, low-lying corridor along the western shore of the Caspian Sea to the eastern foothills of the Greater Caucasus, all the way to Ginchi, Chokh and almost Grozny. Representing a hybrid culture, its pit-houses and terraced fields had elements of the Kura-Araxes and Maikop cultures. It was also a continuation of the Neolithic mountain culture of Chokh.⁵⁰ Towards the end of the Kura-Araxes period, the density of settlements decreased, while the cultivation of sheep and goats gained in importance. The egalitarian social order remained, however, as evidenced by the mass tombs where the bones of up to one hundred people of both sexes were found.⁵¹

The self-sustaining village farming communities knew neither of political hierarchies nor public buildings such as temples or halls. Life was not centred on a public meeting place, but rather the individual family and the hearth. Of this there were two kinds: one hearth was circular on the outside and had the shape of a four-leaf clover on the inside; it was built into the centre of the main room. The second type was a movable, horse-shoe-shaped andiron, the ends of which were protomes in the shape of goats or bulls. In Armenia, the hearth was occasionally surrounded by highly stylized human clay figures. Religion seems to have been practised in the Kura-Araxes culture at the hearth within a private circle.⁵² In the first phase, the ceramic vessels were handmade in a monochrome light brown or grey-brown and a shiny polished finish. In the second phase, they were distinguished by their bichromatic colouring: the outside was black and polished, giving the objects a metallic sheen; the inside was red or reddish brown. Few cemeteries are known from the early centuries. Later, different types of graves appear, such as simple earth pits, chambers lined with stones, stone boxes, small kurgans and horseshoe-shaped chambers lined with stones. In their shape, the latter are strongly reminiscent of the horseshoe-shaped andirons and possessed special importance.⁵³



24. Clay model of a single-axle cart from the Kura-Araxes culture, Samshvilde, Kartli, Georgia. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

The Kura-Araxes culture stood on the threshold between the Late Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze Age. The Bronze Age commenced at the point where bronze objects, mainly weapons, tools and jewellery, predominated over those made of stone or bone, although this did not in any way preclude the continued intensive use of stone and bone objects. The people of the Kura-Araxes culture took over the metallurgical knowledge of their predecessors, developing it innovatively from 3200 BCE onward into an advanced arsenical bronze technology. They cast disc-butted axes, spearheads, dagger blades, sickles, bracelets, decorative needles and pearls. The Caucasus is very rich in copper and the semi-metals arsenic and antimony, but poor in tin,⁵⁴ which is why bronze production specialized in copper–arsenic or copper–antimony alloys. For larger items such as weapons, the arsenic content was restricted to a maximum of 7 per cent, as too much arsenic impairs hot forging and the alloy becomes brittle.⁵⁵ Compared with the second half of the fourth millennium BCE, the production of arsenic bronze in the southern Caucasus increased tenfold in the first centuries of the third millennium. The region exported bronze semi-finished products to the northern Caucasus, where they were further processed. In addition, various experiments were carried out with silver and lead alloys.⁵⁶

Although the South Caucasus hardly has any tin deposits, the production of tin bronze began in the second quarter of the third millennium BCE in the hybrid Kura-Araxes-Velikent culture. Nevertheless, it was initially used mainly for decorative objects.⁵⁷ It is debated where tin bronze was produced for the first time, but



25. In the salt mine of Duzdaği in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan, salt has been mined since the fifth millennium BCE. Photo 2016.

the late Kura-Araxes and Velikent cultures were at least among the pioneers of early metallurgy.⁵⁸ Both alloys, arsenic and tin bronze, are much harder and are easier to forge than pure copper. The addition of more than 10 per cent arsenic gives the object a silver sheen and the addition of tin a golden sheen.⁵⁹ Gold was mined in the Kura-Araxes culture, but apparently little appreciated, whereas in other, later, cultures it was regarded as the epitome of aspirational beauty and prestige. Tin bronze offered an inexpensive alternative for jewellery, which gave a significant boost to long-distance trade with the tin deposits of Central Asia.⁶⁰ This trade, which also included the Caucasus, flourished until the time when iron smelting from ores was mastered. By and large, not only is iron ore much more widespread and occurs in a thousand times greater density than copper and tin, but it is also better suited to the manufacture of weapons and tools.⁶¹ Iron tools and weapons are harder and yet more supple than their bronze counterparts. Since iron ore was much easier to find than copper and tin or arsenic, the production of iron

was also cheaper. Iron products were thus affordable for much larger segments of the population than bronze products, which remained a luxury commodity.

The skill of the Kura-Araxes culture in metallurgy can also be seen at the Sakdrisi gold mine, about 50 km south of Tbilisi. Gold was mined there for seven to eight centuries, starting around 3400 BCE at the latest. Elsewhere at this period only alluvial gold was used, meaning that Sakdrisi is the oldest gold mine in the world. The miners carved tunnels up to 31 m deep into the mountain by laying wooden boards on the very hard, gold-bearing rock and igniting them to disintegrate it. Once the wood started to burn, the workers had to go outside to avoid inhaling toxic gases. According to experts, 16 workers were able to extract 1 kg of pure gold in one year; the total production volume was approximately 500 to 1,000 kg of gold and 280 to 560 kg of silver. Considering that only a few gold objects were found in the tombs of the Kura-Araxes culture,⁶² it is believed that the production of gold was for export.⁶³ The mining engineering of the time is

also evidenced in the 6 km² salt mine of Duzdaği in Nakhchivan. In operation since the middle of the fifth millennium BCE, its two-million-year-old salt deposits are up to 150 m thick (fig. 25).⁶⁴

A spectacular expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture took place between 3100 and 2900 BCE, at first towards eastern Anatolia as far as Arslantepe near Malatya and into the Iranian highlands all the way to Kermanshah and Gilan.⁶⁵ However, as before, the people of the Kura-Araxes culture avoided Colchis with its subtropical climate and marshy soil. A few decades later, the expansion continued further south to western Syria and the Levant, including Palestine, where the pottery is called Khirbet Kerak ware and dates from 2750 to 2450 BCE.⁶⁶ Archaeologically, this expansion can be seen in the distribution of a corresponding set of attributes, comprising agriculture, a similar social form in villages, standardized houses with clover leaf-shaped hearths or andirons with animal protomes as well as red-and-black bichromatic and highly polished ceramics. The expansion was most likely induced by migratory movements emanating from the

South Caucasus. Probable triggers were population pressure in the homeland, exhaustion of the arable soil and overgrazing of the pastures. Subsequently, the power vacuum in the Middle East created by the collapsing Uruk economic empire opened up new trade opportunities for the South Caucasians.⁶⁷ Moreover, the emergence of the first monumental kurgans in the South Caucasus around the middle of the third millennium BCE provides clear indications of an immigration of semi-mobile cattle breeders from the North Caucasus.⁶⁸ With the arrival of these expansive new population groups, who converted arable land into pastures for livestock, the people of the Kura-Araxes culture also began to orient themselves towards the south.⁶⁹ The expansion of the Kura-Araxes culture transpired through the classical pattern of a combination of distress and internal difficulties, along with new opportunities and the promise of prosperity elsewhere. Rather than an expansion, the final phase of the Kura-Araxes culture took the form more of a displacement to the south.



26. Golden figure of a lion from Tsnori, Kakheti, Georgia. The 5.3-centimetre-long figurine is dated to around 2400 BCE and was made using the lost-wax casting technique. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

These migratory movements were hardly concentrated invasions. More likely, they occurred as armed infiltrations, which does not rule out the possibility of warfare. In the case of the fortified settlement of Arslantepe, archaeological investigations showed that the monumental architecture of stage VI A, which was influenced by Uruk, was destroyed and burnt down in the following phase VI B1. The site was then rebuilt by settled cattle breeders, who lived in clay-plastered wickerwork huts.⁷⁰ Grave finds from this period have revealed black-red pottery and Kura-Araxes-style metal jewellery, as well as metal weapons from the North Caucasian cultural area of Klady (Novosvobodnaya).⁷¹ In the middle of the third millennium BCE the larger villages in the South Caucasus, as well as the cultivated areas, were abandoned or converted into pastures. The egalitarian, agricultural and sedentary Kura-Araxes culture was slowly replaced by a radically different, vertically organized and martial culture of semi-mobile cattle breeders.⁷²

1.4 The Kurgan cultures of the Middle Bronze Age

Around the middle of the third millennium BCE climatic, demographic, economic and cultural changes had a drastic effect on the whole region of the Caucasus, which led to the emergence of the Middle Bronze Age **Kurgan cultures** in the South Caucasus (2500–1450 BCE).⁷³ These cultures are fundamentally different from the previous Kura-Araxes culture. As a result of climatic aridification during the late phase of the Kura-Araxes culture, the sedentary farmers increasingly oriented themselves to the south. At the same time, semi-mobile cattle breeders in the North Caucasus searched for new pastures, crossed the Greater Caucasus and invaded the South Caucasus, where they occupied both mountain foothills and converted former farmland into pastures.⁷⁴ In the South Caucasus, there was not only population decline, but also a population exchange. The semi-nomadic immigrants from the north, unlike the sedentary farmers who spoke a Caucasian language, presumably spoke an Indo-European language.⁷⁵ The individual Indo-European elements in the Georgian language may possibly be traced back to these immigrants.⁷⁶ The immigrant elite had already prized rich burial offerings of bronze, silver and gold objects in their old northern homeland; in the southern Caucasus an even more opulent production of sumptuous burial offerings arose thanks to the rich ore deposits and dense woodland. Objects made of tin bronze predominate among bronze burial objects.

The Kurgan cultures can be divided into three periods, whose names are derived from sites in Georgia: The **Martkopi**



27. Clay model of a single-axle wagon with a tent-like structure; semi-nomadic cattle-breeding culture of Mingachevir, thirteenth–eighth century BCE. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

period (2500–2200 BCE), the **Bedeni period** (2300–2000 BCE), and the **Trialeti period** (2000–1450 BCE).⁷⁷ All three eras shared a cluster of features that was new in the South Caucasus and that distinguished the North Caucasian Maikop–Novosvobodnaya cultures. Not farming villages, but burial mounds, which served as the last resting places for dead members of the elite, were the permanent architectural structures of the Kurgan cultures. The mobile cattle breeders lived in temporary, archaeologically hidden settlements. Farmland and permanent settlements remained only in a few particularly fertile areas. The predominant form of society was no longer egalitarian, but organized hierarchically, which was visually expressed in the kurgans. The social differences between the martial elites and the other strata becomes apparent not only in the individual or couple burials in the monumental kurgans, but also in the opulent burial objects. This stands in striking contrast to the simple burials of the preceding epoch. The new burial rites included the sacrifice of oxen, and horses in the Trialeti period;⁷⁸ the dead also no longer rested in simple pits, but in wooden chambers, which were veritable houses of the dead. In short, while the bearers of the Kurgan cultures did not build dwellings of short durability for the living, they did construct eternal homes for the dead. Among the burial objects,

there were weapons such as axes and daggers, ample gold jewellery, ceramics and, especially in the Bedeni cultural stage, human sacrifices and four-wheeled wooden carts.⁷⁹

The **Martkopi** cultural stage (2500–2200 BCE) coexisted with the final phase of the Kura-Araxes culture. Martkopi pottery is similar to that of Kura-Araxes, and the burial mounds of Martkopi, 15 km north-east of Tbilisi, were built at a time when there were still farming villages. The kurgans indicate the presence of new cultural institutions in a central area of the southern Caucasus. The pottery of the following **Bedeni** stage (2300–2000 BCE), however, can hardly be traced back to that of Kura-Araxes. The vessels had a narrow base and a wide neck, and the strong polish of their black surface gave them a metallic sheen; in a later phase, they were made with a potter's wheel. While the burial mounds increased in size and number in the Bedeni period, evidence of the Kura-Araxes culture largely disappears. During the Bedeni period, however, the cultivation of various wheat varieties and beekeeping is known to have continued. A few semi-underground houses belonging to farmers have even been found from the subsequent Trialeti period.⁸⁰

One of the most important innovations that the North Caucasian immigrants introduced to the South Caucasus was the use of large two-axle carts pulled by oxen. The heavy wooden

cart considerably increased the mobility of semi-mobile cattle breeders, as it enabled them to carry temporary dwellings, housewares and provisions. However, a four-wheeled wagon with rigid axles was not fully manoeuvrable in hilly and wooded terrain. Turning in smaller circles was only possible with a flexibly mounted front axle; the alternative was a single-axle vehicle. The four-wheeled wagon was also used as a vehicle to transport deceased clan and tribe leaders to their final resting place. The latter consisted of an underground wooden chamber, as can be seen, for example, in the large kurgan of Ananauri 3 in eastern Georgia. It was here, in 2012, that archaeologists discovered two four-wheeled wagons, 2.8 m long and 1.1–1.2 m wide, which had originally been left behind in the burial chamber in a standing position, i.e. not dismantled (fig. 35). The diameter of the three-part wheels was 1.45–1.55 m, and the shaft attached to the front of the wagon was 3.5 m long. Radiocarbon analyses revealed a date of 2370 ± 26 BCE, which marks the transition from the Martkopi to the Bedeni cultural stage.⁸¹ From the Middle Bronze Age, burial wagons or parts of them were excavated from a total of fifteen burial mounds.⁸² The four-wheeled wooden carriage from a kurgan of Mentesh Tepe, western Azerbaijan, dates from about the same time, around 2400 BCE. A man and two women were buried in the burial chamber.⁸³

The invention of the wheel and the wagon

Alongside metal, the wheel represents one of the most important industrial inventions. The wagon required the integration of three fundamental technological principles. The first is the rotation principle of axle and wheel, which was also the basis of the potter's wheel. The second is a load-bearing surface mounted on axles. The third is the use of the pulling power of animals by means of adequate harnessing. We do not know for sure which culture invented the animal-drawn wagon, as the use of wheeled vehicles seems to have begun at the same time around 3500 BCE in a wide area stretching from Central Europe to the Greater Caucasus Mountains.

Among the oldest preserved finds are wagon depictions, miniature models and individual discoveries of wooden disc wheels. Famous examples are the clay cups in the form of a four-wheeled cart from about 3500 BCE from the Baden culture,⁸⁴ a cart representation on a funnel beaker from about the same date from Bronocice, southern Poland,⁸⁵ wooden disc wheels from the Alps from the middle to the end of the fourth millennium BCE,⁸⁶ as well as moor finds from northern Europe from the end of

the same millennium.⁸⁷ Further east, terracotta vessels of the Tripolye/Tripyllia culture in the form of animals standing on two axles with four wheels are dated to the first half of the fourth millennium. While this is not specifically evidence of the use of the wagon for transport purposes, it certainly shows knowledge that objects equipped with axles and wheels can be towed.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the northern Caucasus and Pre-Caucasus as well as the Pontic Steppe north of the Black Sea boast the earliest and largest collection of archaic wagons and wagon parts in the world. Of the approximately 250 known wagon burials, almost half originate from the North Caucasian region of Kuban. They belong to the Maikop–Novosvobodnaya (4050–2500) and Novotitarovskaya (3300–2750 BCE) cultures.⁸⁹ The oldest discovered wooden wagon, from Kurgan 2 at Novokorsunskaya, is dated 3350 BCE.⁹⁰ It can therefore be presumed that the four-wheeled wagon originated in the northern Caucasus and the adjacent southern Russian steppes.

As for the much-cited evidence for the invention of the disc wheel in Mesopotamia from the later fourth millennium BCE,⁹¹ it

either concerns representations of sleighs on stone plaques and cylinder seal impressions, or clay tablet pictograms of a sleigh standing on wooden rolling logs or on four disc wheels. The earliest original finds from Mesopotamia date back to the first half of the 3rd millennium, more than half a millennium later than the first finds from the Kuban region.⁹² Based on our current state of knowledge, it can be assumed that the technology of the wagon originated in the northern Pontic region of the Tripolye/Tripyllia and Maikop cultures and quickly spread from there to Central and Southern Europe and Mesopotamia. In this case, the Greater Caucasus was not a barrier, but rather the existing trade relations between Maikop and Mesopotamia facilitated the rapid introduction of this new technology southwards via the eastern corridor along the west coast of the Caspian Sea.

Soon after the introduction of solid and three-piece wooden disc wheels, attempts were made to reduce their considerable weight by chamfering the discs. The breakthrough, however, came with the spoke wheel. The light wagon with spoke wheels was not invented in Mesopotamia, as previously thought, but most probably in the Sintashta-Petrovka culture in the southern Russian steppes east of the Urals, around 2100 BCE. The wagon wheels consisted of 8, 10 or 12 spokes. All in all, fragments of equid-drawn chariots were excavated in twenty graves in the territory

of the Sintashta-Petrovka culture.⁹³ They are about 200 years older than the earliest Anatolian seal impressions representing light chariots,⁹⁴ and 300 years older than the earliest evidence in Mesopotamia.⁹⁵ The chariots of the Sintashta-Petrovka culture are forerunners of the light military chariot, which is characterized by two spoke wheels, a light chariot body open to the rear, and the yoke harness of a horse-drawn carriage steered by bridles. Besides this, a genuine war chariot also needed to be easy to manoeuvre and to remain stable at higher speeds, which requires a low centre of gravity. Both the light chariot on spoke wheels and the combined rein, bridle and harness were inventions of the Eurasian steppe.⁹⁶

The chariot quickly spread across the steppe and developed into one of the most important weapon systems in the Near East from the eighteenth or seventeenth century BCE. If the wagon body was small, it carried only one warrior, who either steered with one hand and threw spears with the other, or tied the reins around his body and fought with a bow. Larger wagon bodies usually carried two men: a driver and an archer. Since the wheels were attached to the axle independently, the wheels could rotate at different speeds in curves, which made sharp turns possible. Chariots had the advantages of speed and the element of surprise over infantry, for they could quickly and easily attack the flanks or the rear and just as quickly flee again. Moreover, they were able to transport large



28. Replica of an Urartian light chariot. Erebuni Museum, Archaeological Preserve, Yerevan, Armenia.

29. Megalith at the Middle Bronze Age necropolis of Zorakar, Syunik province, Armenia. In the background on the left there is the central stone chamber grave, encircled by about 40 megaliths. Photo 2015.





quantities of javelins and arrows into battle. The disadvantages were that chariots were highly vulnerable to enemy arrow salvos and depended on flat and dry terrain. As we know from Assyrian inscriptions, in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age both the Assyrians and their South Caucasian opponents employed military chariot formations of several hundred units. The Urartian king Minua (r. 810–785/80 BCE) allegedly led 1,600 chariots and 9,174 cavalry warriors to war in a single campaign – such extraordinarily large numbers are most probably an exaggeration.⁹⁷ When units of mounted archers emerged in the Near East in the ninth century BCE, they quickly replaced the chariot formations, because they were less vulnerable and more operational on uneven terrain. The production effort of the chariots was also eliminated. In the South Caucasus, we have evidence dating back to the early fifteenth century BCE of the bridles required to steer a mounted horse.⁹⁸

30. (upper image) The stone kurgan of Dübəndi has a diameter of 10 m and the mound is 1 m high. In the centre, there is a rectangular stone chamber and an anthropomorphic stone stele stands on the southern part of the complex. Transition from third to second millennium BCE. Archaeological open-air museum of Gala, Absheron, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.

31. (right) Petroglyphs from the region of Agdash Duzu, Central Azerbaijan. A hunter holds a bow in his left hand and with his right hand he lifts a plate with a horse on it. Beginning of the second millennium BCE. Archaeological open-air museum of Gala, Absheron, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.



During the **Trialeti cultural stage**, also called **Trialeti-Vanadzor** (2000–1450 BCE), the burial mounds gained in size and complexity. Occasionally, the previous wooden burial chamber was replaced by a stone chamber of up to 150 m² floor area, and it was joined by a stone road. One example is Kurgan XV from Trialeti, whose stone road was 264 m long and 4.5 m wide and merged seamlessly into a 10 to 50-metre-long dromos.⁹⁹ The dromos and the processional road lay on the eastern side of the kurgans, so that the oxen pulled the wagon with the deceased or his ashes westwards towards the setting sun. Thousands of kurgans of different sizes are known from the Trialeti era in Georgia, Armenia and western Azerbaijan, with the mound graves often concentrated in regions with ore deposits, along trade routes, or on high plateaus with verdant pastures.¹⁰⁰ The social upper class was also stratified, with the grave size and contents corresponding to the hierarchical level. Usually only a single leader or a royal couple was buried in the monumental kurgans. Occasionally, their servants accompanied them in death. By contrast, there were several dead in the smaller kurgans, which were in effect family burial places. The smaller kurgans lacked rich ornaments and were dominated by ceramic vessels and weapons. Weapons were of course also part of elite burial offerings and included cast spearheads, daggers, war axes and swords with metre-long blades. The rapier, challenging to cast, was probably made for the first time in the South Caucasus, after which it spread to the Aegean and mainland Greece.¹⁰¹

The era of Kurgan cultures was marked by rivalries and struggles for control over resources. The warlike spirit in this competitive environment is illustrated on a silver cup from the great Karashamb kurgan north of Yerevan (fig. 33). The necropolis of Karashamb consisted of several burial mounds, around which dozens of individual graves were laid out concentrically. Each was marked with a stone circle. In total, archaeologists have identified about 1,850 burials, of which almost 1,600 have been excavated. The silver cup is dated to the early second millennium BCE and resembles another silver cup, from Kurgan XVII at Trialeti. The outside of the cup consists of six horizontal friezes. The top band shows a boar hunt as well as striding lions and leopards; the fourth frieze also shows a procession of lions and leopards. On the fifth band there are narrow flower petals and on the lowest, once again, lions and leopards. The other two friezes are more instructive. The second illustrates a ceremonial banquet: drinks, food and a stag are brought to the seated ruler, a musician plays on a lyre, three warriors armed with lances and shields approach from the left towards the centre and warriors duel on both sides. The third band depicts scenes of triumph: the centre is dominated by a bird



32. Gold cup from Kurgan XVII of Trialeti, Middle Bronze Age, eighteenth/seventeenth century. The 8-cm-high gold cup is decorated with carnelian, lapis lazuli, amber and jet. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

of prey with a lion's head, and to its left are three beheaded men. To the right of the griffin, two victorious warriors kill two bowing captives; between the two execution scenes stand captured lances, daggers and shields; and a victorious warrior sitting under a sun holds a war axe and contemplates a tower of four skulls stacked on top of each other. The griffin unites the mightiest bird of prey with the mightiest predator and is reminiscent of the hybrid creature Imdugud (Sumerian) and Anzu (Akkadian) from Sumerian–Akkadian mythology.¹⁰² Imdugud was conquered by the Sumerian war and fertility god Ningirsu, who did not kill him but adopted him as his symbolic animal epitomizing his presence on earth. The two epic friezes reveal a hierarchically structured society guided by martial ideals, which included combat, executions and beheadings.

1.5 The Late Bronze Age and Iron Age

A radical social and cultural change took place again in the southern Caucasus during the middle of the second millennium BCE, in the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age (1500–1150).¹⁰³ Whereas before the elites of the Kurgan cultures had invested in the construction of tomb monuments dedicated to deceased ancestors, they now used their resources to build stone fortresses. More and more small villages were



33. Silver cup made with repoussé technique from the kurgan of Karashamb, Armenia; transition from the third to second millennium BCE. The six friezes on the outside show predators, hunting scenes, flower petals as well as banquet and triumphal scenes; influences from the Mesopotamian region can be assumed. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

established and arable farming regained its importance over cattle farming, which, in turn, became more sedentary. The previous semi-mobile cattle farming was transformed into agropastoralism. Alongside this development, the burial mounds disappeared; the flat graves, however, continued to be marked by stone circles for some time. Renewed and expanded agriculture led to rapid population growth, forcing the elites to adapt their strategies of domination. On the one hand, the previous tribal affiliation lost its significance and cohesiveness; on the other hand, a sedentary population was easier to dominate. The fortresses, which were located on hills, replaced the monumental kurgans as landmarks of the ruling elites, and the latter controlled productive society by means of cross-clan and cross-tribal structures. To protect larger territories completely against foreign invaders, the fortresses often stood in sight of each other. Such stone fortresses are still found today in the Armenian plain of Tsaghkahovit on the northern foothills of Mount Aragats, in the regions of Tsalka (south-east Georgia), and Javakheti (South Georgia). The new structures

and ruling strategies formed the nucleus for the formation of small states, out of which arose the kingdom of Urartu in the first millennium BCE in eastern Anatolia and Armenia.¹⁰⁴ This trend towards state-building was encouraged by the need to build irrigation canals and to control ore deposits. Although the economic, social and technological conditions in the entire South Caucasus were comparable (apart from Colchis and the Gobustan region), the formation of new, smaller political entities prevented the emergence of a new cross-regional culture. For the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age periods, archaeologists in the Caucasus have identified at least twelve different regional cultures, seven of them in the south: Lchashen-Metsamor in Central Armenia; Lchashen-Tsitelgori in East Armenia and East Georgia, Samtavro in Central Georgia, Iori-Alasani in Kakheti, East Georgia, Ghodshali-Kedabeg in Nakhchivan and the surroundings, Talish in south-east Azerbaijan, and Colchis in western Georgia. In the north, the Koban, North Caucasian, Dolmen, and Priel'brus cultures are mentioned in the western half of the North Caucasus, as well as Kaiakent-Chorochoi in



Chechnya and Dagestan.¹⁰⁵ As Antonio Sagona points out, some of these cultures are insufficiently defined or overlap in essential characteristics. Our focus in the South Caucasus is therefore on the Lchashen-Tsitelgori and Colchis cultures.

It should be noted that the structuring of prehistoric history into individual epochs and the crystallization of more or less homogeneous groups of people into cultural entities are fundamentally problematic. In the absence of written evidence – be it information on political structures, ruling dynasties, the sequence of events, languages and ethnic groups, economic forms, religious beliefs, normative values or social role distributions – the historiography of prehistory remains dependent on archaeological artefacts and findings. The latter are combined and grouped into material cultures and then linked to the peoples of certain cultures. This connection is made under the assumption that a group identity existing in a certain space at a certain time can be reconstructed from verifiable elements such as artistic self-representations, the design of ceramic vessels, clothes, jewellery and armaments, as

well as in burial forms and rituals. It remains to be seen to what extent the classification of archaeologically obtained material findings and conclusions enables relevant statements to be made about the self-understanding and zeitgeist of a particular society or how it functioned. Generally speaking, however, a basic rule applies: the more diverse and richer the available archaeological material is, the more likely it is that the self-definition of a social group can be inferred. On the other hand, defining an archaeological culture merely on the basis of special features of ceramic decoration remains dubious and of little relevance.

The culture of **Lchashen-Tsitelgori** (1500–800 BCE), which also includes the traditions of Lchashen-Metsamor, Samtavro, and Ghodshali-Kedabeg, stretched from the Surami mountain range in the west to Tsitelgori on the Georgian–Azerbaijani border in the north-east and to the Mughan steppe in the south-east, and from the southern foothills of the Caucasus to Nakhchivan. This excludes the rest of Azerbaijan, the North Georgian Mountains, western Georgia, western Armenia and north-east Anatolia. Not only did fortresses dominate the hills in this cultural area, but



34. The Bronze Age megalithic fortress Abuli stands at 2,670 m above sea level on a slope of the Patara Abuli mountain in the Lesser Caucasus. Samtskhe–Javakheti, Georgia. Photo 2016.

larger villages were also built which were surrounded by stone walls and deep ditches to protect them. Fortresses and fortified settlements safeguarded the inhabitants as well as the provisions stockpiled there and the treasures of the shrines within the village walls. Signs of burning in these fortified settlements and the numerous weapons deposited there as burial objects suggest that the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age, which began around 1150 BCE, were marked by conflict and armed struggle. A number of fortified villages dominating the landscape on larger hills had a specially fortified citadel and temple complex. They served as powerful administrative centres and also included formalized religious practice. In contrast to the egalitarian village society of the Kura-Araxes epoch, that of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age was hierarchically structured with defined

political-administrative, religious, and economic functions.¹⁰⁶ As Adam T. Smith put it,

*the social inequalities visible in the kurgans of the early second millennium appear to have been formalised into a tightly integrated socio-political apparatus where the critical controls over resources – economic, social, sacred – were concentrated within the stony masonry walls of powerful new centres.*¹⁰⁷

Excellent examples of fortified centres of power are the settlements of Udabno I and II from the thirteenth century BCE, as well as of Udabno III (tenth/ninth century BCE) and Udabno IV. The four settlements are located on the ridges of the David Gareja plateau about 50 km south-east of Tbilisi as the crow

flies. The fortified settlement Udabno I formed a long rectangle of 450 m in length, which contained about 120 pit-houses standing in three parallel rows. In the west stood the shrine and the fortified citadel. The settlement was destroyed by a big fire. With 27 buildings, Udabno II was much smaller, as probably was the incompletely examined Udabno III. So far, the village of Udabno IV has not been investigated, but its ground size of 400 by 60 m suggests a settlement that was almost as large as Udabno I.¹⁰⁸ Proto-urban characteristics can be attributed to Udabno I inasmuch as it was a planned, densely built and, thanks to the protective wall, clearly demarcated settlement. With the shrine, it also had at least one public institution and was governed by an administrative centre.

The first name of the culture of Lchashen-Tsitelgori refers to the Bronze Age cemetery and fortress of Lchashen, about 50 km north-east of Yerevan on Lake Sevan.¹⁰⁹ The excavation of the necropolis, which was used from the beginning of the third millennium until the end of the seventh century BCE and numbered at least 800 graves, commenced in 1956, after a newly built hydroelectric plant had caused the water level of Lake Sevan to sink precipitously. In eight graves, the archaeologists

discovered twelve two-axle (fig. 35) and two single-axle wooden wagons as well as two light chariots, each with two spoke wheels, which are dated to the beginning of the Lchashen-Tsitelgori culture in the fifteenth/fourteenth century BCE.¹¹⁰ The wheels of the light chariots of Lchashen showed a high technical level, for they counted no less than 28 spokes, which was unique for that time.¹¹¹ In the graves of Lchashen, Lori Berd (north-west Armenia), and Gokhebi (eastern Georgia), small bronze models of manned light chariots were also found. They were decorative finials of rods, which were attached to the light wagons.¹¹² The light battle chariot drawn by horses was obviously widespread in the South Caucasus in the middle of the second millennium at the latest. On the one hand, it was a prestige object among the elite and was revered, primarily among Indo-European communities, as an attribute and symbol of the sun god who crossed the sky. On the other hand, the armies of the South Caucasian and eastern Anatolian Nairi lands, and the kingdom of Urartu which later emerged from them, used chariots.¹¹³

Metal hoards should be distinguished from necropolises with human burials. In central and eastern Georgia, archaeologists found several hoards, such as Shilda, Meligele I and II,



35. Two-axle wooden wagon from Lchashen, Armenia, fifteenth–fourteenth century BCE. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia. The approximately 160-cm-high wheels are made of oak and are similar to those from Kurgan 3 at Ananauri.



36. Wagon finial with a group of figures of a light chariot with two standing warriors, pulled by two horses. Bronze, fifteenth–fourteenth century BCE. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

Melaani and Gamdlistskaro, which consisted of carefully buried metal figures and bronze weapons, also in miniature. These hoards comprised several thousand objects; similar hoards were made in Colchis.¹¹⁴

A notable archaeological site is Metsamor, 35 km southwest of Yerevan. Situated on a volcanic hill, the site was inhabited from the second half of the fourth millennium until the twenty-fourth or twenty-third century BCE.¹¹⁵ Like most farming villages of the Kura-Araxes culture, Metsamor remained uninhabited during the period of the Kurgan cultures, apart from a few temporary settlements. Nonetheless, during the transition to the Late Bronze Age in the sixteenth/fifteenth century BCE and the simultaneous revival of agriculture, people returned and rebuilt and expanded the settlement, which they protected with a defensive wall. Within the walls, administrative buildings, shrines and workshops were built, including a large bronze smelter. Egyptian stamps and roll seals of the Babylonian Kassites and Mitanni were found in Metsamor, suggesting that the demand for high-quality

tin bronze was high, both in the middle Araxes valley and in the Middle East. The stamps bore the names of the pharaohs Thutmose III (r. 1479–1425 BCE) and Ramses II (r. 1279–1213 BCE) and a roll seal belonging to the Kassite king of Babylonia Kurigalzu II (r. second half of fourteenth century BCE). The settlement was transformed into a city at the beginning of the Iron Age: residential dwellings, administrative buildings, temples and military barracks were built outside the citadel and surrounded by a second defensive wall. The city also successfully made the transition to iron technology, as evidenced by the iron-working workshop. In the 780s BCE, the king of Urartu Argishti I (785/80–756 BCE) conquered the Ararat plain and incorporated Metsamor into the kingdom of Urartu. Since Argishti founded the great fortress of Erebuni (near today's Yerevan) in *ca.* 782 BCE and the city of Argishtihinili (today's Armavir) near Metsamor six years later, Metsamor was downgraded to a city of only local importance.¹¹⁶

1.6. Early tribal organizations, war alliances and confederations

In the Armenian highlands and eastern Anatolia, small principalities and tribal groups began to form confederations at the end of the Late Bronze Age. The aim of such small-state networks was to guarantee independence and security in the face of the two expansive major powers in the south: Assyria and the Hittite Empire. The militarily powerful Assyria, in particular, regularly undertook military campaigns in these regions in order to abduct people and steal cattle and to extort gold and silver as a tribute. The most important confederation was that of **Uruatri**, first mentioned in an inscription of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser I (r. 1275/74–1244 or 1263–1234 BCE). The Assyrian king prides himself on having conducted a campaign to Uruatri in his first year of reign: 'I conquered [...] eight lands and their fighting forces; fifty-one of their cities I destroyed [...] I subdued all of the land of Uruatri.'¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the Assyrian name 'Uruatri', which probably means something like 'mountain country', is neither an ethnic nor a politically stable entity, but rather a specific geographical area that stretched from Lake Van south-east to the Upper Great Zab in the mountainous Hakkâri region. The small kingdom of **Hubushkia** flourished here around the tenth to eighth century BCE. As Ralf-Bernhard Wartke has pointed out, Uruatri was not a consolidated confederation of states, rather 'the peoples living there only joined together in a temporary alliance against the Assyrian invaders in case of danger. In some cases, military-democratic political conditions may have emerged as part of a transitional phase to the organizational form of the state.'¹¹⁸

The proclamations of the Assyrian kings Tukulti-Ninurta I (r. 1243–1207 or 1233–1197 BCE) and Tiglath-Pileser I (r. 1115/14–1077/76 BCE) report of military campaigns against the **Nairi** lands. To the extent that the territory of Nairi included the regions around Lake Van, Hakkâri, and mountainous areas north of Lake Urmia, north-western Iran, it can be assumed that the Nairi alliance included the tribes of Uruatri or represented an extension of the league of Uruatri.¹¹⁹ Tukulti-Ninurta inscriptions repeatedly tell of campaigns against Nairi:

*I did battle with forty kings of the lands of Nairi (and) brought about the defeat to their army. [...] I fastened bronze clasps to the necks on those same kings of the lands of Nairi [...] and made them swear by the great gods of heaven (and) underworld (and) levied upon them tribute and impost forever.*¹²⁰

In view of the high number of ‘kings’, the Nairi lands must have had tribal princes. The campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser served to collect tribute. Details are found in the octagonal prism inscription from 1109 BCE.

*At the command of the god Ashur, my lord, I marched to the lands of distant kings, on the shore of the Upper Sea, which had not known submission. [...] Altogether 23 kings of the lands of Nairi combined their chariotry and army [...] and advanced to wage war and combat. With the onslaught of my fierce weapons I approached them [and] I destroyed their extensive army like a storm of the god Adad. [...] 60 kings of the lands of Nairi, including those who had come to their aid, I chased at arrow point as far as the Upper Sea. [...] I captured all of the kings of the lands of Nairi alive. [...] I took their natural, royal sons as hostages (and) imposed on them a tribute [...] and allowed them to return to their lands.*¹²¹



37. Erect stones standing up to 5 metres high, which in Armenia are called vishap, dragon stones or serpent stones. The cigar-shaped vishap stones symbolize the vishap spirits, often characterized in mythology as malevolent, which appear in the shape of a fish or dragon. From the second millennium BCE onwards, vishap were placed in the mountains and near bodies of water. Later on, in the Middle Ages, Urartian cuneiform characters or Christian crosses were carved on individual vishap. Metsamor Open Air Museum, Armenia. Photo 2017.

The hostage-taking indicates that the tribal prince's position was hereditary. Of the 23 Nairi lands, the **Daiaeni** were particularly persistent in their resistance:

*I brought Seni, king of the land Dayenu, who had not been submissive to the god Ashur my lord, in bonds and fetters to my city Ashur. I had mercy on him and let him leave [...] alive.*¹²²

It is astonishing to note that Tiglath-Pileser forgives the rebel without imposing on him a special tribute. Tiglath-Pileser undertook three campaigns against Nairi in total.¹²³ Hypothetically, if the 'Upper Lake' means Lake Van,¹²⁴ then Daiaeni, which is believed to be in the north-west of the Nairi countries, could be located in the vicinity of Erzurum. Daiaeni was considered a particularly prosperous country, as it was crossed by trade routes leading from Mesopotamia to the Black Sea. Three hundred years later the Urartian king Minua (r. ca. 810–785/80) boasted that he had subjugated the Diauehi people, perhaps to be identified with the Daiaeni:

*Menua says: I defeated the land of Diauehi. I defeated the royal city of Shashilu in battle. I razed the land. [...] Utupurshini, the king of Diauehi, entered my presence, he embraced my feet. [...] He paid gold and silver.*¹²⁵



38. Arsenical bronze belt hook representing an ithyphallic rider or a rider armed with a sword on a galloping horse. Twelfth/eleventh century BCE. Grave 65 of the necropolis of Treli, Georgia. It is the oldest known representation of a mounted warrior of the South Caucasus. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

The Hurrian kingdom of **Shubria** (Shupria, Arme-Shubria or Urme-Shubria, in Akkadian Armani-Subartu), which appears from the thirteenth century BCE in Assyrian texts, no longer belonged to the league of Nairi. Shubria was probably located south-west of Lake Van in the area of the later Sophene.¹²⁶ Shubria was annexed by Urartu in the ninth century BCE.¹²⁷ Also outside Nairi was the confederation of **Khayasa** (Hayasa)-**Azzi**, situated between Erzurum and Erzincan. Khayasa-Azzi was a fierce opponent of the expanding Hittite empire. However, around the end of the fourteenth century BCE it suffered a devastating defeat against the Hittite King Mursili II (r. ca. 1321–1295 BCE) and had disbanded by the end of the following century.¹²⁸ Due to the similarity of the name Khayasa/Hayasa with the endonym of the Armenians *Hay* (plural *Hayk*) and the corresponding toponym Hayastan, some historians have postulated that the people of Hayasa played an essential role in the emergence of the Armenian people. Most recent research rejects this hypothesis, however: 'It seems very unlikely that there is any connection between the Hayasa and the Hayk (Armenians) who emerge in the sixth century BCE, some seven hundred years later.'¹²⁹

Similarly unclear remains the alleged continuity between four peoples with similar names, the first two of which are mentioned by Assyrian sources. They are the **Eastern Mushki**, a Phrygian tribe or a tribe close to the Phrygians,¹³⁰ which came from the west in 1165 BCE and conquered two Hurrian kingdoms called Alzu and Purulumzu in the present-day province of Batman. Tiglath-Pileser I proudly claims that in 1115/14 BCE he destroyed the enemy Mushki and pacified the rebellious land of Kadmuhi:

*In my accession year: 20,000 Mushku, with their five kings, who had held for 50 years the lands Alzu and Purulumzu, [...] whom no king had ever repelled [...] captured the land Kadmuhi [today's Tur Abdin].¹³¹ [...] I put my chariotry and army in readiness [...] and I fought with their 20,000 men-of-arms [...] I brought about their defeat. Like a storm demon I piled up the corpses of their warriors [...] and I took the remaining 6,000 of their troops who had fled [...] and regarded them as people of my land.*¹³²

A year later, Tiglath-Pileser undertook a second military campaign against the Mushki.¹³³ Later, in the eighth–seventh century BCE, the **Western Mushki** appear in Cilicia and Cappadocia.¹³⁴ The Eastern Mushki coming from Phrygia were probably one of the proto-Armenian tribes that contributed to the



39. Bronze wagon finial with a bull and two goats. Lchashen, fifteenth–fourteenth century BCE. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

formation of the later Armenian people.¹³⁵ Seven hundred years after Tiglath-Pileser, Herodotus locates the **Moskhoi** (Moschi) in the XIX Satrapy of the Persian Empire, which corresponds to the north-eastern Anatolian region between Erzincan and Batumi.¹³⁶ More than a millennium after Tiglath-Pileser, Strabo mentions the Moskhoi, which he locates both in Abkhazia and in the western Georgian region of Imereti. He specifies that the region of Moskhike (Moschica) is divided among three groups: Colchians, Iberians, and Armenians.¹³⁷ The Moskhoi of Imereti are identical with the Iberian **Meskhi**. Contrary to Toumanoff's assertion, though, it is unlikely that Strabo's Moskhoi are derived from the Mushki of the Assyrian sources in view of a thousand-year knowledge gap and a distance of more than 500 km between Moskhoi and Meshki.¹³⁸ At most, the Moskhoi/Moschi of Herodotus and Strabo may be called a West Iberian tribe.

1.7 Colchis in prehistoric times

Colchis lies mainly in the west of Georgia and extends from the ancient coastal town of Nitika (today's Gagra in Abkhazia) in the north, 70 km north-west of Sukhumi, to the coastal town of Hyssos (Sürmene) in the south, 35 km east of Trabzon in north-eastern Anatolia. The western border of Colchis followed the east coast of the Black Sea and the region extended east to Kutaia (Kutaisi) and Sarapana (Shorapani), the western entrance to the Surami Gorge. The Colchic language of the period developed into today's Mingrelian and Laz, which are related to the Svan language and belong to the Kartvelian/South Caucasian language group. In the north-west of Colchis, people also spoke Abkhazian, a north-western Caucasian language.¹³⁹ The indigenous name of Colchis, Mingrelia, is based on the root *egr*, which gave rise to the classic Georgian toponym Egrisi; today's Georgian name Samegrelo derives from the same root.¹⁴⁰ The classical name Colchis stems from the Urartian name Qulḫa, pronounced as 'Kolkha';¹⁴¹ the Romans and Byzantines knew it as Lazica or Lazika, derived from the Laz or Lazi people.

Due to its unique climate and topography, the development of Colchis was separate from the rest of the South Caucasus. The Colchian lowlands enjoy a subtropical, warm and humid climate with high rainfall of up to 2,100 mm per year and mild winters. During heavy rainfall or when the banks of the meandering rivers collapsed, the swampy alluvial soil turned into a massive quagmire. For this reason, the people built their villages on hillocks, some of which they raised themselves, or on sand dunes; or the dwellings rested on wooden platforms supported by stilts, similar to a Central European pile-dwelling village. Trenches were dug around the villages for the sake of both defence and drainage. Canals, on the one hand, connected the ditches and thus the villages with each other; on the other hand, they established connections to the rivers, so that Colchis was crossed by a dense network of water transport routes. The main axis of inland navigation was the Phasis river, today's Rioni, which connected the Greek port city of Phasis (Poti) with the city of Kutaia (Kutaisi) as well as – via the tributaries Kvirila and Dzirula – with Strabo's city of Sarapana, now the small town of Shorapani. The fortress at Shorapani (fig. 87) guarded the western end of the Surami Gorge, which connects Iberia with Colchis, while the Surami fortress (fig. 41) guarded the eastern end. According to Strabo, 'It [the Phasis] is navigated up to the Sarapana Fortress [...] from there, one makes the land journey by wagon up to the Kyros [the Kura] in four days.'¹⁴²



40. The Zernek reservoir east of the city of Van, eastern Turkey. Photo 2016.

To prevent them from silting up, the canals had to be continuously maintained. In addition to the ring ditch, the settlements were surrounded by a wooden palisade reinforced with wooden towers.¹⁴³ Hippocrates (ca. 460–370 BCE) described Colchis around the year 400 BCE:

*As to the inhabitants of Phasis [Colchis], their country is fenny, warm, humid, and wooded; copious and severe rains occur there at all seasons; and the life of the inhabitants is spent among the fens; for their dwellings are constructed of wood and reeds, and are erected amidst the waters; they seldom practice walking either to the city or the market, but sail about, up and down, in canoes constructed out of single trees, for there are many canals there.*¹⁴⁴

Hippocrates' description also applies to settlements of earlier centuries. The Colchians, however, not only built their houses out of wood or loam-plastered wickerwork, but also out of stone at higher altitudes. It appears that several larger wooden settlements already had a proto-urban character at the beginning of the Iron Age, a few centuries before the establishment of Greek trading colonies.¹⁴⁵

Colchis' economy rested on four pillars: agriculture, stationary cattle breeding, fishing, and metal industry. As the many hoard finds demonstrate, during the Bronze Age the Colchian workshops produced numerous types of hand axes. Of the approximately 200 metal hoards discovered in the Caucasus, around 150 belong to the culture of Colchis. One common axe type had a semicircular blade and a long, slightly twisted neck. Some axes had geometric or zoomorphic engravings, sometimes

even adorned with figurines. While some of the hoards may have been the private storehouses of a craftsman or merchant, in the vast majority of cases they were offerings. The ritual and symbolic character of these shelters is especially evident in the miniature size of the deposited weapons. As far as the burials are concerned, they reveal great social disparities. Besides collective graves with no or sparse burial objects, there are single graves with rich gold and silver jewellery, silver vessels, glass bottles and the bones of sacrificed horses and humans.¹⁴⁶ Cremation burials have also been documented in the Early Iron Age, with bronze and iron objects also being delivered to the fire.¹⁴⁷ Another cultural type prevailed in the north-west of Colchis, today's Abkhazia, where graves of megalithic dolmens or stone circles predominated. This megalithic culture was closely related to a Middle and Late Bronze Age culture in the northern Caucasus.¹⁴⁸

As the simple iron smelting furnaces reveal, the Colchians, who had access to numerous ore deposits, began to produce iron objects shortly after the middle of the second millennium BCE.¹⁴⁹

Colchian blacksmiths used the ferrous sand of the Black Sea coast, which contains not only haematite, magnetite and limonite, but also 0.2–0.6% manganese. Manganese removes sulphur from the iron during the melting process and also has a deoxidizing effect.¹⁵⁰ Western Georgia had not only a flourishing bronze and iron industry, but also fluvial gold in mountainous Svaneti. Situated on the southern slope of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, Svaneti can be regarded from a geographical point of view as the north-eastern hinterland of Colchis. Nevertheless, the Svans have their own language, which belongs to the Kartvelian/South Caucasian language group, and their own culture. Even in prehistoric times, the Svans used sheepskins to wash gold dust from their rivers. As the finds from Vani show, this was used to make elaborately crafted gold jewellery.¹⁵¹ Strabo praised the Svans at the turn of the century as 'perhaps the mightiest [of all the Colchian peoples] in pugnacity and strength. For inhabiting the heights of the Caucasus above Dioscuria (Sokhumi, Abkhazia), they dominate all [peoples] in the region.'¹⁵²



41. The medieval fortress of Surami stands at the eastern entrance of the Surami Gorge, which connects Iberia with Egrisi (Colchis). The strategically important area of Surami has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. (Whether Surami is identical to the city of Surium near the Rioni river mentioned by Pliny remains questionable, since Surami is close to the River Kura, which was called Cyrus in ancient times. Pliny, *N.H.* VI.4 (2014.) p. 347). Photo 2018.



42. Modern monument to the legendary princess Medea, who holds up the Golden Fleece. The monument, inaugurated in 2007, is located in the port city of Batumi, Georgia. Photo 2018.

Ancient historians and geographers knew about the high quality of iron processing along the south-eastern Black Sea coast. As Pseudo-Aristotle wrote in the third century BCE:

It is said that the origin of Chalybian and Amisenian iron is most extraordinary. For it grows, so they say, from the sand which is borne down by the rivers. Some say that they simply wash this and heat it in a furnace; others say that they repeatedly wash the residue which is

*left after the first washing and heat it, and that they put into it a stone which is called fire-proof. [...] This iron is much superior to all other kinds. [...] They say that it alone is not liable to rust, but that there is not much of it.*¹⁵³

The Chalybes referenced by other ancient authors were south-western neighbours of the Colchians.¹⁵⁴ It is conceivable that the wealth of ores and metals motivated the Greeks, who were aware of Colchis from the eighth century BCE, to establish trading colonies along the Colchian coast starting in the sixth century BCE. Strabo, in any event, observed: ‘The wealth of the [Colchian] region there, [consisting] of the gold, silver and iron mines, presents a valid reason for the [Argonauts’] procession, which is also why Parios earlier also made this voyage [to King Aeëtes of Colchis].’¹⁵⁵ The fame of the Colchian metal industry entered the Greek Argonaut saga. The illegitimate King Pelias of Thessaly sent his nephew to Colchis to steal the Golden Fleece from King Aeëtes. The Golden Fleece, however, was the coat of the winged golden ram Chrysomallos, who had borne the fleeing Parios of Boeotia to safety to the Colchian King Aeëtes. There, Parios sacrificed his flying mount and offered its golden coat to King Aeëtes. There is little doubt that the Svans’ method of extracting fluvial gold using sheepskins was the inspiration for the myth, a fact confirmed by Pliny, Strabo and Appian. As the Roman historian Appian (*ca.* 95–165 CE) wrote in his *Mithridatic Wars*:

*Pompey at once pursued Mithridates in his flight as far as Colchis [in 66–65 BCE ...] Many streams issue from [Mount] Caucasus bearing gold-dust so fine as to be invisible. The inhabitants put sheepskins with shaggy fleece into the stream and thus collect the floating particles; and perhaps the golden fleece of Aeetes was of this kind.*¹⁵⁶

As for the allegedly powerful Colchian king Aeëtes from the Argonaut saga, there is only scant historical and no archaeological evidence of a united Colchian Empire during the Early Iron Age. On the contrary, Strabo explicitly reports that ‘the kings who later followed [Aeëtes] and who divided the land into governorates had [only] moderate power’.¹⁵⁷ Even Pliny’s reference to an alleged descendant of Aeëtes named Saulaces, who is said to have originated the practice of gold extraction in Svaneti,¹⁵⁸ does little to illuminate Colchian history, since the few coins bearing the name Saulaces are not found until the second century BCE.¹⁵⁹

More instructive are two inscriptions from the Urartu mountain fortress and capital Tushpa (today's Van in eastern Anatolia), which report of two military expeditions of King Sarduri II (r. ca. 756–ca. 730 BCE) against Qulḫa around the years 749 and 746. 'Khaldi's [the supreme god of Urartu] own chariot drove out, he descended on the land of Qulḫi and on the land of Abiliande, he forced them down before Sardur the Argistide,' that is the successor of King Argishti.¹⁶⁰ At the end of the first campaign, Sarduri annexed two small principalities, which the Colchians had seized from the kingdom of Diauehi not long before. During the second campaign, the Urartian king Sarduri advanced to the Colchian capital Ildamusha.¹⁶¹

*Sardur speaks: I turned to the fight against the land Qulḫa. This land [I conquered]. The city of Ildamush, a royal city of the king [Meša] of the land Qulḫa, I took in battle. [...] I burned down and destroyed the fortresses and cities, I devastated the land, I drove out men and women.*¹⁶²

Whether Sarduri also acquired a port on the Black Sea is uncertain. Three decades later, around 715/14 BCE, the invading Cimmerians from the northern steppes devastated Colchis.¹⁶³ Even during the Greek colonization of the coastal areas, Colchis was politically fragmented. Mithridates VI of Pontus (r. ca. 120/16–63 BCE) was the first to unite the region under his rule.¹⁶⁴



43. The fortified mountain villages of Chashashi (front) and Murkmeli (back) of the local community of Ushguli in Upper Svaneti, Georgia. Photo 2013.

2. The northern Caucasus

In the northern Caucasus, especially in the catchment area of the Kuban river, a new form of culture suddenly appeared shortly before the year 4000 BCE. It was characterized by monumental burial mounds, the virtual absence of permanent settlements, and spectacular metal objects. As already mentioned, the origins of this new culture are not to be found in the south in the context of a so-called Uruk expansion, but in the Russian steppes further north.¹⁶⁵

2.1 Chalcolithic settlements and early low burial mounds

The geography of the North Caucasian foothills can be divided into three regions: the western part lies in the catchment area of the Kuban river, the eastern part in the catchment area of the Terek river, which flows into the Caspian Sea, and the central part is characterized by hot water springs. The oldest way of life preceding the Maikop culture is the Chalcolithic culture of **Meshoko-Svobodnoe** (ca. 4550–3850 BCE), whose remnants are found primarily in the western and central regions.¹⁶⁶ The last two centuries of this culture overlapped temporally, though scarcely geographically, with that of Maikop. While the latter culture spread across the plains, that of Meshoko-Svobodnoe retreated to the mountains. This culture was named after the settlements of Svobodnoe south of the Kuban river and those at the overhanging cliffs of Meshoko further south. Zamok in the central region and, somewhat later, Ginchi in the eastern region should also be included. In the Kuban area alone, there are about ten known villages, each with thirty to fifty detached dwellings made of loam-plastered wickerwork and a rectangular ground plan. The villages were surrounded by approximately four-metre-wide stone or clay walls, and often also a trench. A large open square occupied the centre of the village. The economy consisted primarily of sedentary livestock farming of cattle and pigs, with hunting and, to a lesser extent, agriculture. Female clay figures found in the settlements suggest a domestic cult analogous to that of the Shulaveri-Shomutepe-Aratashen culture in the South Caucasus.¹⁶⁷ There is genetic evidence that the peoples of Meshoko-Svobodnoe and Maikop were in active exchange with the South Caucasian population. A genetic study published in February 2019 on 45 individuals from 4,500 to 6,500 years ago from the North Caucasus demonstrated that the Meshoko-Svobodnoe and Maikop peoples were genetically closely related to those of central and eastern



44. Cast bronze axe head, fourteenth/thirteenth century BCE. Such axes with a crescent-shaped cheek were used in battle and also served as burial objects; they were common in Kartli as well as in Colchis. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

Georgia during that period. At the time, the Caucasus Mountains did not constitute a hereditary dividing line, because the populations of the North and South Caucasus hardly differed genetically. On the other hand, there was a sharp dividing line between the Caucasian populations and those of the northern steppes. Only later did the genetic substance of the North Caucasians intermingle with that of steppe populations – perhaps already in the course of the invasion from the steppes by mobile cattle breeders of the late Yamnaya culture and the catacomb burial culture, but at the latest during the Iron Age and the Middle Ages. This gene flow from the steppe separated the North Caucasians from the South Caucasians, causing the original genetic unit in the Caucasus to disappear.¹⁶⁸

In the Meshoko-Svobodnoe culture, most implements and weapons were made of horn or stone. These included smaller obsidian tools, smoothly polished stone axes and cross-shaped mace heads.¹⁶⁹ The few copper objects such as knives and awls were either imported from the Carpatho-Balkan Metallurgical Province or local copies. In any case, the metallurgy of the North Caucasus was greatly impacted by the Carpatho-Balkan Metallurgical Province; later, at the beginning of the Maikop culture, the metallurgy of the North Caucasus started to boom.¹⁷⁰ With its fortified villages, the importance of pig farming, the scarcity of metal

objects, its stone axes and its female figurines, the culture of Meshoko-Svobodnoe differed significantly from that of Maikop.¹⁷¹

While the walled villages of the Meshoko-Svobodnoe culture had little in common with the Maikop culture that followed, the latter's antecedents can be found at the necropolis of Nalchik in the middle North Caucasus from the middle of the fifth millennium BCE. In lower, adjacent kurgans, there were 147 burials. Burial objects were rarely placed in the graves of the dead, who were, nevertheless, often sprayed with a thick layer of ochre.¹⁷² The same ritual can also be found in the Bedeni and Trialeti cultural stages. Presumably spraying the dead with ochre not only had a symbolic, but also a functional component, as the pigment has a certain detumescent and antiseptic effect. Indeed, spraying the dead with ochre may have been thought to prevent their further decay.¹⁷³ The kurgans of Nalchik are a first clue that the concept of the burial mound was known long before the Maikop culture in the North Caucasus. Smaller burial mounds are also found in the northern Black Sea area and in the neighbouring Volga region. The smaller kurgans of the Chalcolithic are individual burials. A mound of clay or stone of a maximum diameter of 20 m and a height of 1 m was built on top of them, with a flat stone circle sometimes surrounding the site. Precisely dated Chalcolithic kurgans include Kurgan 3 at Revova in the northern Black Sea area (4335–4231 cal BCE) and Kurgan 13 at Peregruznoe in Volgograd Oblast (4340–4236 cal BCE).¹⁷⁴ The Nalchik culture stage was most probably the link from the Chalcolithic cultural area located between the northern Black Sea and the lower Volga to the Maikop culture.



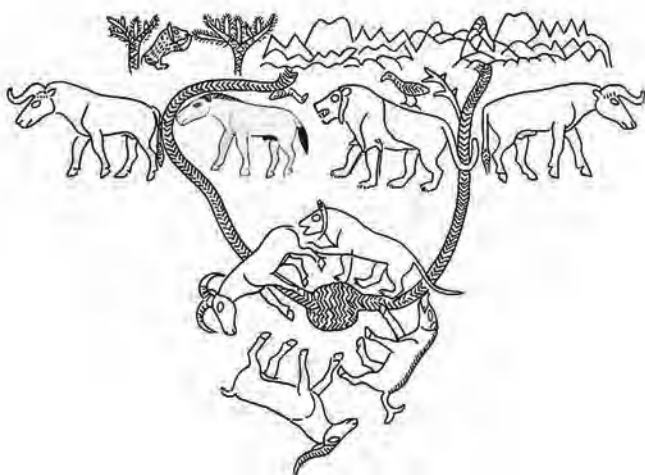
45. One of the two gold bull figurines which decorated a baldachin pole in the kurgan of Maikop, Kuban region, southern Russia, 3700–3500 BCE. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

2.2 The Early Bronze Age cultures of Maikop

The **Maikop-Novosvobodnaya culture** (4050–2500 BCE) appears quite suddenly towards the end of the fifth millennium BCE, in striking contrast to the preceding Meshoko-Svobodnoe culture.¹⁷⁵ Rather than fortified villages, only few, rather meagre settlements with pit-houses and simple huts are known. On the other hand, monumental kurgans dominate, which have a diameter of at least 30 m and a mound height of 3 m. The largest kurgans of Maikop and Nalchik, for example, were originally approximately 11 m high with diameters of around 100 m.¹⁷⁶ Maikop's semi-mobile cattle breeders did not need settlement walls,¹⁷⁷ they had to protect their herds and extensive pastures that could not be enclosed. While only about thirty settlements of the Maikop culture are known, stretching from the Black Sea in the west to Dagestan in the east, approximately 300 large kurgans have been recorded. The explored settlements had only very thin cultural layers of about 10 cm, indicating that the dwellings were only used seasonally.¹⁷⁸ While the graves in the few Chalcolithic cemeteries had no or only sparse burial objects, several monumental kurgans contained rich treasures of gold, silver and arsenic bronze. These were the individual burials of tribal leaders that celebrated their eminent social standing beyond death. Bronze kettles with a low arsenic content were among the most popular burial objects.¹⁷⁹ And while the metallurgy of the Meshoko-Svobodnoe culture was still rudimentary, it is mature in the Maikop culture, which also used the lost-wax process.

The wealth of metal objects seen in the Maikop culture stands in contrast to the rare and sparse metalwork of the Uruk period. Mesopotamia was lacking in metal raw materials and had to import them from Anatolia and the South Caucasus. Ample weapon finds only appear in Mesopotamia's and Anatolia's graves around 3000 BCE. One is therefore led to wonder whether a migration from north to south might even have taken place at about this time.¹⁸⁰ As the archaeologist Sergey Korenevsky observes: 'The Caucasus was a real centre of jewellery production during the 4th millennium BCE, preceding the prosperity of this craft in the Near East during the 3rd millennium BCE.'¹⁸¹ On the other hand, not all Maikop kurgans contained rich treasures. For instance, those located on the periphery of the Maikop culture, such as the Lower Don and Kalmykia, were poorer. In this case, the burial objects consisted mainly of ceramic vessels and simple bronze objects. For these poorer kurgans, Evgeny Chernykh coined the term 'Steppe-Maikop culture' – a culture that is at least as old as the one in the heartland.¹⁸²

The name of the culture goes back to the Maikop kurgan. Located on the Belaya river, a tributary of the Kuban, it was excavated in 1897. The kurgan was surrounded by a stone circle. It was here that the archaeologist Nikolai Ivanovich Veselovsky discovered the remains of an adult male, apparently a high-ranking leader, in a wooden burial chamber painted with red ochre. He had been followed in his death by two women, presumably concubines. People were also sacrificed at the kurgans of Nalchik and Novosvobodnaya. The Maikop site, erected around 3700–3500 BCE, contained rich burial objects. The deceased had



been laid out under a baldachin supported by six or eight thin poles, four of which were decorated with a bull figurine with long horns; two of these figurines were made of solid gold and two of solid silver using the lost-wax process (fig. 45). The head of the deceased was adorned with a diadem of golden rosettes, possibly an import from the culture of Uruk. In addition, there were silver cups (fig. 46) and silver vases decorated with animal depictions, small gold plates in the shape of lions and bulls sewn on dresses, weapons made of arsenic bronze as well as necklaces with turquoises from north-eastern Iran and Tajikistan, red carnelian pearls from western Pakistan and lapis lazuli from northern Afghanistan.¹⁸³ All these finds demonstrate the widespread trade of the Maikop culture. The kurgan gives us an example of a hierarchically structured society headed by leaders of a warrior elite. Their power transcended death, insofar as people who were close to them were sacrificed. More than half a millennium later, the custom of chariot burials with human sacrifices was also performed in the royal tombs of Ur, albeit with more human sacrifices and richer burial objects, and likewise in Gonur, in Bronze Age Margiana (Turkmenistan). The running surfaces of the wooden wheels in the Gonur graves 3235 and 3900, from about 2300 BCE, were covered with bronze.

In the Maikop-Novosvobodnaya culture, the impressive burial monuments perpetuated the memory of the leaders of a tribe, while marking its territory. Moreover, the rituals that took place there also served to reinforce cohesion within the respective clan or tribe as well as to legitimize the deceased's successor. Unlike the lavish princely burials of the Maikop culture, the burials of ordinary people are almost entirely unknown, suggesting stark social differences within the society at the time.

The Early Bronze Age monumental kurgans built for a single individual were particularly attractive to later generations

46. (upper image) Silver cup from the kurgan of Maikop, Kuban, Southern Russia, 3700–3500 BCE. The picture shows two male aurochs and below them a male gazelle; above them a mountainous landscape. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

47. (lower image) Graphic rendering of the silver cup from the Maikop kurgan. On top is a bear standing between two trees and a mountain landscape. In the middle stand two aurochs, a wild horse and a lion with a bird on his back. Underneath are a lioness, a male wild sheep, a male gazelle and a pig. Two rivers flow from the mountains into a lake which is represented at the bottom of the cup. The whole scene may be understood as a map. Analysing the habitat of the depicted animals, the two rivers probably represent the Araxes and the Kura, but the Oxus and the Jakartes are also possible; a rendering of Mesopotamia with the rivers Euphrates and Tigris is unlikely since the wild horse did not belong to the fauna of Mesopotamia in the first half of the fourth millennium BCE (Uerpmann, in Hansen et al., *Von Majkop bis Trialeti* (2010), pp. 242–7). The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

because of their prestige. This led later to satellite burials. One example is found with Kurgan 1 in the necropolis Marinskaya 3 from the second half of the fourth millennium BCE, situated at the border of Stavropol Krai and the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. Here, a ring of seventeen catacomb tombs from the Middle Bronze Age encircled the main tomb from the Early Bronze Age. The latter remained unlooted: grave robbers had looted the two burials lying above the main chamber, not knowing that the most important grave was underneath. The floor of the burial chamber consisted of a thick layer of pebbles; its walls were plastered with lean clay. The archaeologists in charge, Kantorovič and Maslov, suspect that this was 'a sacral model of the actual dwellings'.¹⁸⁴ Enclosed with the deceased male were ceramic vessels, stone axes and sceptres, silex arrowheads, a bronze axe and a knife, as well as two gold rings.¹⁸⁵ The rather modest grave inventory corresponds to the second period of the Maikop culture, the stage of Klady-Novosvobodnaya (3450–2500 BCE).

The people of the Maikop culture were technologically innovative in many ways. The construction of monumental kurgans with mounds of up to 35,000 m³ in volume not only required careful coordination of the hired workers, but also knowledge of architecture. Of particular importance was an understanding of the basic rules of statics to prevent the kurgan from collapsing around the edges under the pressure of its own weight.¹⁸⁶ The accompanying metal objects also required advanced metallurgical knowledge. Influences from the Carpatho-Balkan Metallurgical Province, the South Caucasus or the Middle East should therefore not be excluded. The finds of pickaxes, which were used for ore extraction, in Maikop and Ust'-Labinskaya suggest that both an ore-extraction and an ore-processing industry existed in the ore-rich North Caucasus of the fourth millennium BCE.¹⁸⁷ The Maikop peoples were also among the first to use the four-wheeled wooden cart pulled by oxen, as shown by the burials of such carts from the thirty-fourth century BCE onwards. The discovery of a textile fragment woven from wool and linen threads in the kurgan of Novosvobodnaya-2 from the second half of the fourth millennium BCE reveals that the Maikop culture was involved in the 'fibre revolution'. At that time, in Mesopotamia and the Zagros Mountains, the breeding of robust, wool-producing sheep replaced the cultivation of flax. This transformation had the advantage that first-class soils, which had previously been used for flax cultivation, could now be used for growing cereals. At the same time, non-cultivable land could be utilized by the rapidly increasing sheep herds. Exactly where sheep

breeding for the purpose of wool processing originated, whether in the northern Caucasus or in Mesopotamia, cannot be determined on the basis of archaeological finds, in part because this new technology spread very quickly.¹⁸⁸ Regarding these various innovations, Soviet and Russian archaeologists often assumed a technology transfer from the Mesopotamian Uruk culture to the Maikop culture.¹⁸⁹ Mariya Ivanova, by contrast, has identified a transfer of knowledge from Iran and south-west Central Asia, with the Urmia region acting as a zone of contact between the Caucasus and Iran.¹⁹⁰ Maikop's ceramic production, however, was less advanced. Most of the vessels were handmade, with a potter's wheel only being used for the final shaping of the rim.¹⁹¹ The economy was primarily based on livestock farming, with agriculture playing a subordinate role. Shifting cultivation predominated and millet was grown almost exclusively.

The classical period of Maikop culture lasted from about 4050 to 3400 BCE, after which the design of the burial chamber under the mound changed. In the **Klady-Novosvobodnaya** stage (*ca.* 3450–2500 BCE) – named after the necropolis of Klady near the village of Novosvobodnaya south of Maikop, which overlapped briefly with the classical Maikop stage – the deceased no longer lay in a pit but on a low platform of pebbles, either at ground level or slightly sunken. On top of the dead body was built a stone mound and then an earth mound. The kurgans of the Klady stage were about the same size as those of Maikop.¹⁹² Beneath the mounds of some kurgans, there was a stone box or a vault made of large stone slabs. This anticipated the dolmens spread around the southern Kuban region and in Abkhazia by the Dolmen culture (see below). In the two kurgans of Klady a stone slab separated the stone burial chamber into two rooms: an anteroom and the actual tomb; the entrance to the latter was formed by a gap in the partition slab. Both burial chambers were covered, one with a single stone slab, the other with a stone gable roof.¹⁹³ These vaults formed a permanent stone house for the dead.

A unique burial mound of the Klady-Novosvobodnaya stage is the monumental kurgan of Nalchik, today's capital of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. The kurgan, originally 11.5 m high, had been erected over a settlement of the classical Maikop stage and its sunken burial chamber consisted of 24 orthostates (upright stelae) made of tuff. Seven long stone slabs lay across the orthostates, forming the roof. The kurgan is dated around 3092–2943 cal BCE. The orthostates, however, were older than the kurgan, for they were once free-standing stelae, nine of which were engraved with geometric patterns, and at least six stelae had an anthropomorphic form.¹⁹⁴ These represented an armed



48. Two dolmens in the valley of the River Zhane, Gelendzhik district, Krasnodar Krai, Russian Federation. The dolmen in the centre of the picture has a rectangular floor plan and in front of it there is a circular stone platform; the dolmen at the right rear has a circular floor plan. Dolmen culture (3250–ca. 1200 BCE). Photo 2000.

warrior and marked his grave or a place of worship of ancestors. Anthropomorphic stelae of this kind are mainly known from the North Pontic region, as is their reuse. The practice of reusing elements of older tomb monuments for the construction of new tombs can also be found in Mongolia. In the Late Bronze Age and in the Iron Age, so-called stag stelae from the Middle Bronze Age, some of which also symbolized a deceased warrior, were reused for the construction of new tombs.¹⁹⁵

2.3 The Middle and Late Bronze Age Dolmen culture

The dolmens of the Caucasus are defined in the narrower sense as Bronze Age sites for burials and/or depositing burial objects. In the **Dolmen culture** (3250–ca. 1200 BCE) several megalithic stone slabs form the rectangular burial chamber. Weighing up to 25 tonnes, they were rammed vertically into the ground on their narrow side.¹⁹⁶ A flat, similarly massive stone slab rests on top of the orthostates to form the roof of the ‘house of the dead’. If the area of the upper cover slab exceeds the ground plan of the burial chamber, it forms a canopy. In the Dolmen culture, as with the two burial chambers of Klady, this can be divided into two

rooms by a vertical slab. With other dolmens, such as some in the valley of the Zhane river, the dolmen consists of rounded stone blocks that form a circular or polygonal burial chamber (fig. 48). The tomb is accessed through a 25 to 45-centimetre-wide opening that is located on the front plate facing south or east and closed with a stone plug.¹⁹⁷ A platform made of pebbles was sometimes spread out in front of the dolmen, and the grave was surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped stone mound or by a circle of stones similar in height to or higher than the megalithic burial chamber. The opening’s small dimensions meant that the dead had to be buried in three steps: the corpse was dried out by laying it on the branches of a tree; then the remaining flesh was removed from the desiccated body, whereupon the bones and smaller burial objects were placed through the opening in the tomb.¹⁹⁸ The vast majority of dolmens served as collective burials across generations. The dolmen of Kolikho, near the port city of Tuapse, for example, contained the remains of eighty individuals who had been deposited in the tomb over a period of 500 years. The distribution area of the dolmen graves is quite confined. It consists of a corridor less than 100 km wide along the north-eastern Black

Sea coast, which stretches from Anapa, west of Krasnodar, to Abkhazia. According to a conservative estimate, about 3,000 dolmens were used between 3250 and 1200 BCE, of which about 160 have been investigated.¹⁹⁹ Almost all of the studied dolmens had already been plundered in ancient times.

The oldest reliably dated dolmen grave in the Caucasus is that of Shepsi, south of Tuapse. Dating from about 3250 BCE, it shows that the Dolmen culture and the Klady-Novosvobodnaya stage initially coexisted. The bones of about twenty people lay in the rear burial chamber, which was used for 400 years.²⁰⁰ The sudden appearance of dolmen graves with openings is puzzling. It has been associated with the migration of people from Bulgaria, Turkey, Sardinia, the Pyrenees, Northern and Central Europe and the Levant, especially the eastern Jordan Valley.²⁰¹ The Swiss travel writer and archaeologist Frédéric DuBois de Montpéreux (1798–1850), who researched the Crimea and the Caucasus from 1831 to 1834, was the first to establish a connection between the Caucasian dolmens and those of Brittany and

England.²⁰² However, an analysis of the various regions in which similarly constructed dolmens were used for burial purposes shows that the picture is not so simple. For example, there can be no connection with the dolmens of Thrace (Bulgaria), even if they are quite similar to the Caucasian ones, as they date from the twelfth to the fourth century BCE – much later than those in the Caucasus.²⁰³ As for the dolmens of south-eastern Anatolia, they are constructed somewhat differently: generally, they are completely open on one side, and their dating around 3500–2000 BCE is a mere estimate.²⁰⁴ Some of the dolmens along the eastern Jordan Valley have similarities to the Caucasian ones and are dated a little earlier (3700–3000 BCE). Nonetheless, the 1,300-km distance by land to the North Caucasus is too great to assume a direct influence.²⁰⁵

The question as to which cultural area's dolmens – defined as megalithic graves placed above ground with access for the purpose of reuse – are the earliest has been debated since the late nineteenth century. The original hypothesis was



49. Dolmen consisting of five megalithic stone slabs in the district of Gelendzhik, Krasnodar Krai, Russian Federation. The hole in the front slab, which served as an access to the burial chamber, was formerly closed with a stone plug. Photo 2018.



50. Balkar dancer from Kabardino-Balkaria in the highlands of the Elbrus Mountains. The dance is strongly inspired by the Cossack dances. Photo 2018.

that dolmens began in the Middle East and that this burial concept later spread to the Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast. In the 1970s, coinciding with the first radiocarbon measurements, the hypothesis was put forward that the megalithic dolmens had developed independently in several cultural areas. In February 2019, a new study on the basis of 2,410 radiocarbon results reached the conclusion that the first proto-dolmen, which did not yet have reusable points of access, originated in the second quarter of the fifth millennium BCE in the north-west of France. Shortly thereafter, in the third quarter of the fifth millennium, the first genuine, reusable dolmens with sealable openings appeared in the same region. These then began to spread over a period of 200 to 300 years through Brittany, along the Iberian Atlantic coasts and into Catalonia, southern France, Corsica and Sardinia. In a second wave of expansion during the first half of the fourth millennium, dolmens were adopted in England, Ireland, Scotland and

south-west France; in the second half of the fourth millennium, they were appropriated in the area of the Funnel Beaker culture (northern Central Europe, Denmark and southern Scandinavia).²⁰⁶ Looking at the map of Europe, it can be seen that the dolmens appeared almost exclusively in coastal areas, including their hinterlands. From a theoretical point of view, a maritime diffusion of the dolmen burial to the Western Caucasus is conceivable, but has not been proven.

Simultaneous to the Klady-Novosvobodnaya culture stage, the Yamnaya culture (3300–2250) developed in the steppe area between the Volga and the Don. Their semi-nomadic economy was an adaptation to an ecological change around 3500–3300 BCE, when a significantly cooler and drier climate reduced agricultural yields west of the Don and made the steppes to the east more barren. This new situation forced the more sedentary cattle and horse breeders between the Don and the Volga to change the pastures of their herds more frequently.

In short, they had to switch to a semi-mobile form of cattle farming.²⁰⁷ The Yamnaya culture is identified by the findings in its numerous necropolises. The most important features were a pit-shaped burial chamber and a kurgan mound of various sizes. The dead were buried lying on their backs with their knees pulled up. Along with the ground, they were generously sprayed with ochre, which is why the Yamnaya culture is also known as the ochre-burial culture.²⁰⁸ The corpses were adorned with elongated, egg-shaped, yellowish ceramic vessels, needles of bone, daggers and flat axes of flint or bronze, as well as skulls and bones of sacrificed sheep, cattle, dogs and, in the case of leaders or warriors, sometimes a chariot and a horse.²⁰⁹ Most of the Yamnaya kurgans were furnished only with ceramic vessels. Monumental kurgans with a diameter of 100 m and rich burial offerings such as bronze weapons were rare.²¹⁰

Early bearers of the Yamnaya culture also penetrated the pre-Caucasian grass steppes. This is evidenced by the **Novotitarovskaya culture** (3300–2750 BCE), which is a hybrid form of the Klady-Novosvobodnaya and Yamnaya cultures.²¹¹ Its geographical distribution corresponds approximately to today's Krasnodar Krai, the north-western foreland of the North Caucasus, where burials of both the Novosvobodnaya and Novotitarovskaya types existed side-by-side.²¹² In the south, the Novotitarovskaya culture bordered that of **Petropavlovskaya**, which was located south of the Kuban river.²¹³ The most important features of the Novotitarovskaya culture are the tent-like wooden constructions erected above the burial chamber as well as the carriages and carriage wheels. The latter are also found in Petropavlovskaya burial mounds. In the Kuban, a total of 115 wagon graves of the Novotitarovskaya culture were discovered.²¹⁴ The tendency within the Yamnaya culture towards modest burial offerings continued in the regional post-Novotitarovskaya burials of the North Caucasus. Philip Kohl interprets this as a sign of declining social differentiation.²¹⁵ In the course of the spread of bearers of the **Catacomb culture** (2450–1950 BCE) developed in the second half of the third millennium BCE in the northern foothills of the Caucasus and in Kalmykia. The numerous kurgans of the Mozdok steppe in North Ossetia–Alania illustrate the transitions from the Yamnaya to the Catacomb culture, followed by the Srubnaya culture (Timber-grave culture) and finally the Early Iron Age.²¹⁶ The main difference from the Yamnaya culture was that the dead were no longer deposited in a simple pit, but in a hollowed-out room located on the side of the main shaft. Sometimes the catacomb graves were

placed in an earlier kurgan.²¹⁷ However, the custom of building a mound over the grave and, in some cases, putting a cart in the grave of the deceased remained.²¹⁸

In the eastern North Caucasus, by contrast, the Middle and Late Bronze Age **Ginchi cultures** continued the existing form of alpine agriculture, which involved the construction of artificial terraces. The gentler hills and mountain slopes were suitable for agriculture and settled livestock farming, while villages, consisting of densely built stone houses, nestled along the steep and rocky slopes. The dead were buried in flat grave necropolises.²¹⁹ The alpine Ginchi culture was probably the only permanently settled form of society in the North Caucasus during the Middle Bronze Age.

2.4 The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Priel'brus culture

In the South Caucasus, a dramatic cultural and economic change had taken place in the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE. Instead of monumental kurgans to honour the deceased, the elites began to build stone fortresses.²²⁰ A similar cultural shift began a century earlier in the central North Caucasus. During the **North Caucasian culture** (ca. 2700–1500 BCE) countless groups of burial mounds dominated the landscape in the high plateaus and valleys situated between the present-day town of Kislovodsk and Mount Elbrus. The kurgans were not only located in valleys as in the Middle Bronze Age, but they were also built along mountain ranges up to the edge of the highlands. In the vicinity of the kurgan necropolises there were seasonal campsites, but no permanent settlements. Decorated ceramic vessels and bronze objects can be found as burial objects, but there are hardly any more objects made of gold or silver.²²¹ The first stone buildings appeared at the beginning of the **Priel'brus culture** (ca. 1650–900 BCE),²²² which is older than the classical Koban culture in the Kislovodsk basin. Soon afterwards, kurgans ceased to be built. In the small territory of 850 km², situated between 1,400 and 2,400 m above sea level, about 280 archaeological monuments have been identified over the past two decades. More than half of these are settlements and buildings.²²³ The Priel'brus culture closes an archaeological gap that existed between the semi-mobile societies of the Middle Bronze Age and the sedentary communities of the Iron Age. It exemplifies the transition from elitist, semi-mobile societies to egalitarian, settled communities that did not erect monumental kurgans, but instead buried their dead in simple flat graves.

‘De-monumentalization’ was far more radical in the Priel’brus culture than in the South Caucasus of the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.²²⁴ While in the south the ruling elite built impressive stone fortresses, it appears that on the Kislovodsk plateau any kind of demonstration of power or wealth was taboo. Neither the dead nor the living were allowed to distinguish themselves from their community in the form of special monuments. The construction of the settlements was planned and both their layout and the design of the individual dwellings were standardized. In the first phase of the Priel’brus culture (seventeenth–fourteenth century BCE), the standard plan of the settlements consisted of a linear terraced-house development of small, one-roomed dwellings with a square floor plan. Such terraced-house settlements could be up to 800 m in length.²²⁵ In the second period (fourteenth–tenth century BCE), the settlement construction pattern followed a master plan of two symmetrical rows of rectangular double-roomed dwellings built side-by-side around a central, oval or rhomboid open space. Sometimes two settlements with a symmetrical ground plan were only 50 m apart, so that they formed a pair of settlements. This is the case, for example, with Kabardinka settlements 3 and 4.²²⁶ The dwellings themselves were also standardized and had an average floor area of 125 m², with one of the two rooms serving as a stable in winter. The buildings were made of stone and mostly had double-panelled walls about 150 cm high, backfilled with stones. On top, there was a wooden superstructure covered with a gable roof.²²⁷ Although the two mirror-inverted convex rows of houses represented a seamless facade, the settlements were not fortified, as the entrances to the dwellings were on the outside.²²⁸ The uniform design of the settlements and houses precluded individual initiatives, let alone any demonstrations of wealth through opulent architecture. Overall, 70 per cent of all settlements in the densely populated cultural area of Priel’brus followed a symmetrical construction plan. Finally, there were smaller settlements where the houses stood close to each other in a honeycomb-shaped pattern.²²⁹ From the architecture of the Priel’brus culture, one suspects a form of society that made the emergence of vertical social hierarchies impossible, or at least concealed it. It remains unclear, however, precisely what social mechanisms ensured that such radically egalitarian societies actually functioned.

It appears that there were only three buildings that were not used for housing humans and animals, but for community purposes. They consist of a semicircular building at the site of Tamsamesu 2, the monumental architectural complex Kichi-Balyk 1 which stands at the edge of a gorge, and another

semicircular building, Ransyrt 1, which is surrounded by four ramparts up to 350 m long and is dated to the seventeenth or even eighteenth century BCE. The chief archaeologists Sabine Reinhold and Andrei Belinsky interpret this unusual site as a shrine. The other two semicircular buildings likely also had sacred significance.²³⁰ It is not known whether the 23 identified two to three-metre-high menhirs also had sacred importance. While most of the menhirs were hewed, they were rarely given anthropomorphic shape. They always stand at exposed locations visible from afar, for example near watersheds or in the immediate vicinity of burial mounds.²³¹

The communities of the Priel’brus culture engaged in extensive pasture farming appropriate to the relatively high altitude, keeping sheep, goats and cattle. They stayed settled on the high pastures all year round. During the winter, their animals were housed and fed in enclosures close to the settlement or in the stable, in contrast to the more mobile cattle-economy, in which the cattle-breeders would bring their herds down to lower altitudes for overwintering.²³² Regarding the cemeteries of the Priel’brus culture, it remains an open question whether the burial mounds and stone-cist graves near the settlements belong to the previous cultural layer or whether they are partly related to the standardized Priel’brus settlements.²³³

A dramatic change occurred in the forms of economy and settlement towards the end of the tenth century BCE. The high-altitude settlements of the alpine regions were systematically abandoned and the populations relocated to the lower valleys. One possible reason for the sudden move to lower altitudes is a combination of overgrazing due to rapid population growth and increasing climatic dehydration due to climate warming.²³⁴ The new settlements emerging in the valleys of the Kislovodsk basin correspond to the classical, Early Iron Age **Koban culture** (ca. 1200–400 BCE), found throughout the central North Caucasus. The name was coined by Rudolf Virchow, who briefly explored the necropolis of Verchni Koban in North Ossetia in 1881.²³⁵ The settlements consisted of half-sunken, one-room pit-houses made of loam-plastered wickerwork with a stone floor. Between the individual dwellings, there were open courtyards, presumably used for keeping young livestock. As a result of the diminished space available in the Kislovodsk valleys, the economy was converted from extensive livestock farming to intensive agriculture. Here, the construction of terraces helped to expand the cultivation area. Livestock farming was sharply curtailed. The cultivation area was limited by the flat grave necropolises, which consisted of hundreds or thousands

of modest earth or stone-cist graves. Most of the graves were single burials containing ceramic vessels, jewellery, weapons and occasionally horse harnesses. In the late seventh century BCE, the economic system in the Kislovodsk basin collapsed due to an ecological disaster. It is believed that prolonged torrential rainfall caused mudslides, for the arable soils sank under a layer of loose sediment three metres thick, rendering them unusable. Towards the end of the sixth century BCE, the Kislovodsk basin was virtually uninhabited.²³⁶

The Koban culture chiefly flourished in the present-day republics of Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia–Alania, Ingushetia and western Chechnya, but has also been uncovered beyond the mountain ridge in Svaneti and South Ossetia. One of its hallmarks was the rapid decline of the monumental burial mounds and the construction of larger necropolises of flat graves. The rapid increase in individual burials suggests a levelling of social structures, since the majority of the population appears to have been deemed worthy of an

individual grave for the first time. This new practice stands in contrast to the elitist monumental kurgans and the collective burials of the Middle Bronze Age.²³⁷ The burial objects included polished black, handmade ceramic vessels, jewellery and bronze axes with a protruding, semicircular cutting edge, often decorated with geometric or zoomorphic engravings, similar to the Colchian axes (fig. 52). The cemetery of Tli in South Ossetia, which was used from the sixteenth to the fifth century BCE, was one of the richest sites of the Koban culture.²³⁸ The engraved axes, daggers and mace heads, which were also elaborately embellished with small deer, horse or ibex figures, are particularly worth mentioning. All these weapons including the zoomorphic pole mounts showed no signs of use; they had been made solely as burial objects.²³⁹

In the North Caucasus, iron metallurgy began in the later eleventh century BCE with the production of bimetallic, iron-encrusted bronze axes and daggers, which were soon followed by iron spearheads. In the tenth/ninth century BCE, blacksmiths



51. Anthropomorphic stone menhir in the valley of the Bolshoi Zelenchuk river, Nizhny Arkhyz, Karachay-Cherkessia, Russian Federation. The 5-m-high figure of a warrior dates from the eighth–tenth century CE and represents a tradition lasting more than 2,000 years. Photo 2016.



52. Cast axe with engraved stag from the Late Bronze or Early Iron Age, ninth–seventh century BCE, Koban culture. Verchni Koban, North Ossetia–Alania, Russian Federation. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

succeeded in making steel blades, which signalled the advance of iron for the mass production of weapons and equipment. Iron prevailed in the South Caucasus a few decades earlier than in the north. Even so, the quantity of bronze objects produced remained constant and only began to decrease noticeably in the eighth/seventh century BCE. It was not until the fourth century BCE that the production of bronze implements ceased in the Caucasus, except for jewellery.²⁴⁰ As explained above, iron weapons and tools are harder, more elastic and much cheaper to make than comparable bronze objects. Still, they have a serious weakness: rust. The Roman scholar Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE)

wryly summed up the advantages and disadvantages of iron, which is used to make the deadliest weapons:

*The same benevolence of nature has limited the power of iron itself by inflicting on it the penalty of rust, and the same foresight by making nothing in the world more mortal than that which is most hostile to mortality.*²⁴¹

In the eighth century BCE another social change took hold in the North Caucasus, suggesting the emergence of a new elite. Monumental kurgans started to be built again, containing light, two-wheeled chariots as well as thrusting weapons with steel blades, battleaxes, helmets, scale armour and protective armour for horses. As Reinhold notes, in the eighth century BCE, in the area between the Caucasus and the Dnieper, native populations were rearmed in spectacular fashion. This was done in response to the menacing threat of the Cimmerians and early Scythian mounted warriors.²⁴² The Cimmerians crossed the Greater Caucasus and inflicted a severe defeat on Urartu in around 714 BCE.²⁴³ Early Scythians followed in their footsteps, decisively contributing to the fall of Urartu towards the end of the seventh century BCE. Most likely, leaders of the new local warrior elite took over the lavish burial customs of the invaders, who in turn erected monumental burial mounds in the northern Caucasus plain. The early Scythian period was marked by these new forms of self-representation from the ruling classes. It came to an end in the second half of the sixth century when the majority of the Kuban-Scythians migrated westwards to the North Pontic steppe.²⁴⁴ Considering the sparse archaeological finds in the central North Caucasus from the late sixth and fifth centuries BCE, we can assume that the population shifted mainly to the west and east. Significant archaeological evidence does not reappear in the central North Caucasus until the fourth century BCE. It comes from the Sarmatians, who spoke an Iranian language and who initiated a partial Iranization of the central Caucasian population, especially in the present Ossetian region.

IV

The First Caucasian State, Greek Emporia and Northern Horse Peoples

'The god Haldi appeared with his weapons. He conquered the lands of Etiuni [at the south-east of Lake Sevan. ...] Argishti speaks: I destroyed the land of the city Kikhuni, located on the bank of the lake. [...] I built the city of Irpuni [Erebuni near Yerevan] for the might of the land of Biainili.'

Proclamation of the Urartian king ARGISHTI (r. ca. 785/80–756 BCE).¹



53. Monument to the Urartian king Argishti I (r. ca. 785/80–756 BCE) near Erebuni, Yerevan, Armenia. Photo 2015.

1. Urartu/Biainili – The first Caucasian state

Urartu/Biainili (before 858–last quarter seventh century BCE) was the first centrally governed state in the South Caucasian highlands. For more than two centuries, Urartu fought with the Neo-Assyrian Empire (ca. 935–609 BCE) for political and economic supremacy in the Middle East, but neither of the two rivals managed a decisive victory, and both fell victim, probably within about two decades of each other, to the invasions of Scythians and Medes. The geographical name Urartu, known from Assyrian inscriptions dating to about 1275/4, is an exonym. The Urartians called their political entity ‘Biainili’, sometimes also ‘Nairi’. It has been claimed that the name of the Urartian heartland Bainili became, as a result of a betacism, the present toponym Van.² The Assyrians, however, kept the name Urartu to designate their northern adversary. In the Old Testament, the name Urartu appears in a curse as *rrt* in 594 BCE in the time of the Judean king Zedekiah. It is vocalized as Ararat, as for instance when God calls ‘Ararat, Minni (Mannaeans) and Ashkenaz

(Scythians)’ to war against Babylon.³ The ancient Armenians for their part called the 5,137-metre dormant volcano Ararat *Masis*; the traditional Persian name was *Kūh-e Nūh*, ‘Noah’s Mountain’.

The Urartian language is closely related to the Hurrian language, which became extinct at the end of the second millennium BCE. Urartian, however, was not a direct successor of **Hurrian**. Both rather descended from an older predecessor language, which splintered in the third millennium BCE. The two languages belonged neither to the Indo-European nor the Semitic language families, instead constituting their own. While it is possible that they are related to the North-East Caucasian languages, as Igor M. Diakonoff postulates,⁴ it has not been conclusively proven.⁵ The **Hurrians** probably came from the Armenian highlands and surfaced towards the end of the third millennium BCE in northern Mesopotamia. They were then displaced towards south-eastern Anatolia and northern Syria, where they intermingled with the Indo-European **Luwians**. Around 1600 BCE, a militarily superior group of immigrants from the east, speaking an Indo-European language, penetrated the Middle East. They succeeded there in taking power over the Hurrians and in founding the state of **Mitanni** (end of sixteenth

century to 1275/4 or 1263/62 BCE), which extended between the upper Euphrates and Tigris. Mitanni possessed a superior army thanks to its horse breeding and light, single-axled chariots. Soon, however, their equipment and fighting style was adopted by the neighbouring powers. During the fourteenth century BCE, the Hittites and the Middle Assyrian Empire (ca. 1380–1056 BCE) struggled for supremacy over Mitanni, which had to acknowledge Hittite supremacy around 1335 BCE. But the Assyrian king Shalmaneser I (r. ca. 1275/4–1244 or 1263–1234 BCE) crushed Mitanni in his first year of reign, after which he plundered the Uruatri territory.⁶ The names of the Mitanni rulers and gods were Indo-European, as were the technical terms for breeding and training horses.⁷

In North and Central Anatolia lived the autochthonous **Hattians**, who were first documented on cuneiform tablets of the Akkadian king Sargon (twenty-fourth/twenty-third century BCE). The Hattic language was not an Indo-European language, nor was

it related to the Hurrian language or a West Caucasian language. However, elements of the Hattic language found their way into Hittite.⁸ The **Hittites**, on the other hand, were an Indo-European people whose language was related to Luwian and Palaic. The ancestors of the Hittites most probably came from the north-western area of the Pontic Steppe (southern Ukraine and Moldova).⁹ These Proto-Hittites immigrated at the latest towards the end of the third millennium BCE into North and Central Anatolia and intermingled with the indigenous Hattians.¹⁰ The migration of the Indo-European Hittites can be understood as part of the great expansion of Indo-European peoples to the south, which gave rise to the transition from the Kura-Araxes culture to the Kurgan cultures in the South Caucasus of the Middle Bronze Age.¹¹ The Hittite Old Kingdom originated around 1600 BCE; the New Kingdom was destroyed around 1180 BCE, although some small Hittite states survived for centuries.



54. Tushpa, the fortress and capital of the Urartian Empire, now called Van Kale, Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The fortress, constructed by King Sarduri I (r. ca. 840–ca. 828/25 BCE), dominated the surrounding fertile plain and had a secure water supply thanks to underground canals. Due to its strategic location, Tushpa was used by the Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians, Byzantines and Ottomans after the fall of Urartu. To the right of the fortress stand ruins of the medieval city and behind it the modern city of Van. Photo 2016.

1.1 The founding of Biainili

In this fragmented political landscape at the beginning of the fourteenth century BCE, late Hurrian tribal leaders found common cause with the Confederation of **Nairi** to defend themselves against the Assyrians, who regularly invaded their country for plunder and to demand tribute.¹² For a long time, Nairi remained too weak to deter Assyria. In the first half of the ninth century BCE, Urartu assumed control over Nairi and transformed the confederation into a centrally governed kingdom. The first ruler of Urartu known by name, **Aramu** (r. before 858–ca. 843 BCE) is familiar to us only from the Assyrian inscriptions which report on the first three campaigns of Shalmaneser III (r. 858–824 BCE) against Urartu of 858, 856, and 843 BCE. Some of these military campaigns are illustrated on the contemporary bronze bands of Balawat from the ninth century BCE, the majority of which are in the British Museum.



55. Urartian bronze helmet with the representation of a triple lightning bolt, the emblem of the weather and storm god Teisheba, eighth–seventh century BCE. Erebuni Museum, Archaeological Preserve, Yerevan, Armenia.

In 858 BCE, Shalmaneser III first defeated the king of Nairi, Kakia, and destroyed his residence at Hubushkia.¹³ In the same year,

I drew near Sugunia, the stronghold of Aramu, the Urartian; I invested the town and captured it; I killed many of his warriors and carried off plunder; I made a pile of heads over against the city; [...] Then I departed from Sugunia and went down to the Sea of Nairi, where I washed my weapons in the sea and offered sacrifice to my gods.¹⁴

These two Assyrian denominations indicate that Shalmaneser III recognized Nairi and Urartu as two distinct political units. To the extent that the Assyrians located the north at the top of pictorial representations, one can assume that the ‘Sea of Nairi’ here meant Lake Urmia and that Sugunia was north of it, between Lake Van and Lake Urmia. It is likely that Aramu was not in Sugunia at the time of the Assyrian attack. Since Shalmaneser mentions two kings and two countries respectively, Urartu had either failed to fully control Nairi in 858 BCE, or the former confederation of Nairi consisted only of the mountainous Hubushkia. Two years later, Shalmaneser again moved north and plundered Arzashkun, probably near the north-eastern shore of Lake Van; the Urartian king avoided an open battle and retreated to the mountains. The Assyrians again wrought a bloodbath: ‘I piled up heaps of heads beside his [Aramu’s] city gate. Hereon I impaled young men and young women by the heaps.’¹⁵ After a third campaign in 843 BCE, Shalmaneser commissioned his commander Dajan-Ashur with a fourth campaign against Urartu in 832 BCE. The Urartian king **Sarduri I** (r. ca. 840–ca. 828/25 BCE) succeeded, however, in repulsing the enemy attack.¹⁶ This achievement marked the beginning of Urartu’s rise to the status of a major regional power.¹⁷

The first known Urartian inscriptions are found at the western base of the citadel of Tushpa, named after its patron Tushpues (Tushpuea or Tushpea), the wife of the sun god Shivini.¹⁸ There are three identical inscriptions, written in Neo-Assyrian language and in Neo-Assyrian cuneiform script.¹⁹ The later Urartian proclamations are bilingual in the Urartian and Assyrian languages. Starting from the rule of King Ishpuini, they are written only in the native language and modified cuneiform script.²⁰ Sarduri’s proclamation reads: ‘This is the inscription of Sarduri, son of Lutipri, the great king, King of the world, King of Nairi. [...] Sarduri speaks: These rocks from Alnium I brought; with them this tower of Tushpa I raised.’²¹ This inscription, which emulated Assyrian royal proclamations and served

as a political tool to affirm political claims, is remarkable in many respects. It establishes the Urartian ruler as king of Nairi, which now no longer existed as a political entity independent of Urartu,²² and it confirms Tushpa, today's Van, as the new capital. Remarkably, Sarduri does not refer to King Aramu, but to the otherwise unknown Lutipri. With this seizure of power by Sarduri, whose descendants ruled Urartu until its demise around the 620s BCE, a dynastic change may have taken place. Mirjo Salvini has hypothesized that the name Aramu was merely the ethnicon for 'Arameans', making Aramu a 'foreign' Semite and not an Hurrian-Urartian by birth.²³ Nevertheless, Sarduri and his father Lutipri were native Urartians. It is unknown, however, whether Lutipri ever ruled and how the change of dynasty occurred. However, if we follow Andreas Fuchs, who suggested that the name Aramu was a corrupted form of the Urartian name Erimena,²⁴ the hypothesis of a dynastic change would become obsolete and it was Erimena I who founded the ruling dynasty of Urartu.

Sarduri's choice of Tushpa as royal residence was excellent from a strategic-military point of view: The royal residence stood on a mighty rock massif 1,800 m in length, only 60 m wide and up to 100 m in height (fig. 58) which was extremely steep on three of its four sides. As the later Assyrian-Urartian wars demonstrated, the fortress of Tushpa was impregnable given adequate manpower and provisions. Moreover, the plain surrounding Tushpa was very fertile, which facilitated the subsistence of a larger garrison. The necessary water supply for Tushpa and other fortified cities was ensured by an ingenious system of dams, canals up to 60 km long, and even underground terracotta pipes, which were invisible to an enemy from the outside. Drainage ditches provided surface water removal at locations threatened by periodic flooding.²⁵

Seeing as Sarduri's son and successor Ishpuini (r. ca. 828/25–810 BCE) chose the war god Haldi as the principal god of Biainili, whose main temple stood in Musasir, we may assume that the new dynasty came from the Musasir region. In the Urartian state ideology, which was similar to the Assyrian, the king identified himself with the national god Haldi and presented himself as Haldi's tool. Several royal inscriptions proclaim that at the beginning of a campaign the armed Haldi went ahead in his chariot and the king and army followed. The Haldi shrine of Musasir was probably located 20 km north of Rawanduz, about 90 km north of Erbil in today's Kurdish Iraq. In the years 1898–9, the German orientalist Carl Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt (1861–1938) located Musasir in this area, near a site the Kurds



56. Bronze figure of an Urartian god, possibly the supreme war and fertility god Haldi; eighth–seventh century BCE, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The Trustees of the British Museum, London.

called Shkenna, also called Sidekan. In 2013/14, Kurdish archaeologists found Iron Age ruins here, which may correspond to Musasir.²⁶ Musasir was a small buffer state between Biainili and Assyria, and under Ishpuini it became a Urartian protectorate.²⁷ In choosing Tushpa as the capital of the empire rather than a more southern location near Musasir, the ruling dynasty's homeland, Sarduri moved the Urartian centre of gravity northward out of reach of a sudden Assyrian attack. The Urartian heartland was protected by the Taurus Mountains in the south and the northern Zagros Mountains in the east. Though Urartu pursued a policy of expansion, its security strategy was defensive: Biainili sought control over important trade routes, especially those to the Black and Mediterranean Seas, and over fertile and resource-rich regions. At the same time, the kingdom kept an eye on natural borders and defensible positions, which were further

strengthened by fortresses. Finally, the Urartian military leaders were able to skilfully exploit the military advantages offered by a mountainous topography. They avoided open field battles against superior attackers and withdrew into the mountains or to impregnable fortresses, forcing enemies to retreat empty handed. Thanks not least to its mountainous topography and harsh climate, which made winter campaigns impossible, the Urartian kingdom was able to hold its own against the militarily overpowering arch-enemy Assyria for almost two centuries.

1.2 Biainili fights with the Neo-Assyrian Empire for supremacy in the Middle East

While King Sarduri provided the state of Biainili with a solid foundation, his successors **Ishpuini** (r. ca. 828/25–810 BCE) and **Minua** (r. ca. 810–785/80 BCE) launched a strategy of expansion that included territorial enlargements, the acquisition of vassals, and tribute collection campaigns. It is likely that the second half of Ishpuini's reign took the form of a co-regency with his son Minua.²⁸ Ishpuini's military focus was directed both to the south and the west. He advanced to Lake Urmia and conquered Musasir, which became an Urartian protectorate.



57. Golden medallion from Urartu, eighth–seventh century BCE. An Urartian king prays standing before the armed god of war Haldi, atop a lion. The god of war hands the king a bow and two arrows, which enables the king to go to war with divine weapons. Unknown source, Munich State Archaeological Collection.

*Ishpuini, son of Sarduri, and Minua, son of Ishpuini, have erected this stele to Haldi. Haldi took command with his weapon, he defeated the Meshta [today's Hasanlu], he defeated the land of Paršua [the Persians]. [...] Haldi marched before Ishpuini [...] and before Minua.*²⁹

Meshta/Hasanlu, located south of Lake Urmia, was conquered, colonized and secured with fortresses. Even further south, Ishpuini clashed with the Persians, who were mentioned here for the first time. Ishpuini and Minua brought the whole Urmia plain under Biainili's control.³⁰ This transfer of power from the pre-Urartian small states of the Urmia region to Biainili meant that the administrative centres were no longer located in the cities, but in the Urartian fortresses. Social changes resulted.³¹ To the west, Ishpuini extended the empire to Shubria, which more or less corresponds to the later Armenian and then Roman province of Sophene.³²

As we learn from two stone inscriptions, Ishpuini was not only a successful conqueror, but he also created the Urartian pantheon and established the national religion. The famous bilingual stele of Kelishin inscribed in Urartian–Assyrian, which stood on the 2,981-metre-high pass of the same name separating Biainili from Assyria, reports:

*As Išpuini, son of Sarduri, great king, mighty king, king of all, king of Nairi (in the Urartian version: Biainili), lord of the city Tušpa, and Minua, son of Išpuini, arrived before Ḫaldi to Mušašir (in the Urartian version: Ardini), they erected a cult pedestal for Ḫaldi in the main street (?). Išpuini, son of Sarduri, placed an inscription in front of the cult pedestal. [...] He brought 1112 cattle, 9120 goats (?) and sheep for sacrifice.*³³

Ishpuini thus proclaimed his royal patronage of the Haldi shrine. We know from an inscription of the Assyrian Sargon II from 714 BCE that without Haldi's consent no Urartian ruler was allowed to carry the insignia of power. Haldi legitimated the royal rule as Biainili's national patron god.³⁴ As aptly noted by Karen Radner, Musasir and the temple of Haldi were of an importance to the Urartian royal dynasty comparable to that of the Holy City of Rome to the medieval German emperors.³⁵

The stone inscription at the rock shrine of Meher Kapısı near Tushpa defines the Urartian state religion, including the hierarchy of gods and the corresponding sacrificial rituals. Standing at the top of the pantheon, which counted 63 male and 16 female deities and included deified attributes of Haldi, was a triad.³⁶ The supreme god was the god of war Haldi, depicted



58. South side of the Urartian fortress of Tushpa and, in the foreground, the ruins of the old town of Van, which was completely destroyed in 1915 during the conflict between Turkish armed forces and Armenian defenders. The trilingual inscription of Great King Xerxes I (see fig. 70) is located in the centre of the picture below the Turkish flag. Noteworthy are the royal rock tombs, two of which are visible in the middle and on the right of the site. Photo 2016.

standing on a lion or as an attacking warrior armed with a bow and a javelin and surrounded by an aureole of flames. His name appears nineteen times on the inscription. Haldi's wife was the fertility goddess Arubani in the heartland of Biainili, but in Musasir the Iranian goddess Bagmastu.³⁷ Since Haldi was the god of war, thousands of weapons were kept in his temples and the walls were decorated with shields. The second most important god was the weather and storm god Teisheba, who corresponded to the Hurrian god Teshub; the goddess of heaven Khuba stood by his side. Teisheba was depicted standing on a bull, often holding lightning bolts in his hand. The third deity of the triad was the

sun god Shivini, who corresponded to the Assyrian sun god Shamash and the Hurrian god Shimigi; his wife was Tushpues, the patroness of Tushpa. Shivini was depicted as a kneeling man holding up the winged solar disc. The pantheon also included the gods of conquered cities and territories, since Urartu, like other expanding empires, incorporated the deities of defeated enemies into its own pantheon. As Mirjo Salvini notes, 'the list of gods of Meher Kapısı [can] be interpreted as a kind of political map of the Urartian Empire during the reign of Ishpuini.'³⁸ The pantheon also included nature deities such as the gods of the moon, the water, the seas, the earth, the mountains, the caves, and so on.

Each of the 79 deities was assigned a precisely defined ritual sacrifice, whereby the number of animals to be sacrificed became smaller with the decreasing rank.³⁹ For the figurative representation of their gods, the Urartians were strongly oriented towards Assyrian and Hurrian models; in particular, the motif of two winged supernatural beings with bird heads and human bodies standing on both sides of a tree of life originates from the world of the Assyrian gods. Such Assyrian–Urartian portraits were later adopted in Scythian works of art (fig. 71).

Though several deities of the Urartian pantheon had similarities with Hurrian or Assyrian gods, Urartian temple architecture



59. The 12-m-high tower Ka'bah-e Zardusht, 'Cube of Zoroaster'; in the background the tomb of the Achaemenid Great King Darius II (r. 423–404 BCE), Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis, Iran. The name Ka'bah-e Zardusht dates to the fourteenth century CE. The tower built under the early Achaemenids in the sixth century BCE, whose purpose is unknown, was called Bon Kaanak, 'Foundation House' under the Sassanids, as can be seen from the inscription of Mobed-e Mobedan (high priest) Kartir. An earlier inscription from the year 486 BCE lists the 30 peoples of the empire. Photo 2001.

was unique. The temples built in prominent locations had a square floor plan, in front of which stood a rectangular vestibule. The tower-shaped cella, which was 10 metres high or more and where the cult image stood, rose in the centre of the complex. In front of the cella stood the sacrificial altar. The concept of the so-called 'susi' tower temples, which lacked a second floor, was adopted by the Achaemenids, for example at the Ka'bah-e Zardusht tower in the Naqsh-e Rostam complex and at the Zendan-e Soleymān tower at Pasargadae. The Achaemenids also ruled the territory of the former kingdom of Biainili from the middle of the sixth century BCE. They likewise took the Urartian rock tombs of Tushpa and Teishebai URU (today's Karmir Blur near Yerevan) as a model for their royal rock tombs in Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam (fig. 59).⁴⁰

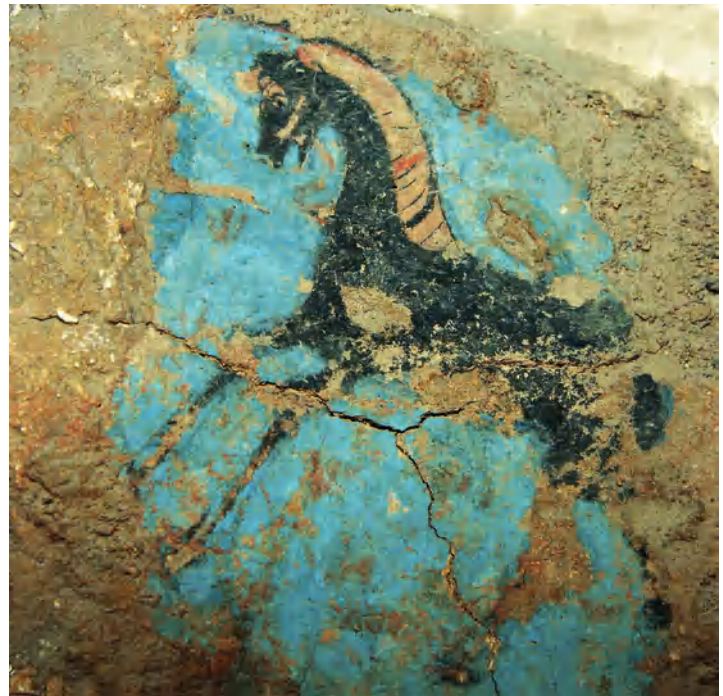
The continuous Urartian territorial expansion was facilitated by eighty years of Assyrian domestic strife. Towards the end of the reign of Shalmaneser III around 826 BCE, a succession struggle began between two of his sons, which shook Assyria's internal cohesion. While Shamshi-adad V (r. 824–811 BCE), later in his reign, and Adad-nirari III (r. 811–783 BCE) certainly succeeded in stabilizing the empire, power gradually shifted under their successors to several nobles and in particular to the commander-in-chief of the army. Not until Tiglath-Pileser III (r. 745–726 BCE) was the strength of the state and royal dynasty restored thanks to structural and financial reforms, and the Urartian expansion was countered militarily.⁴¹

The kings **Minua** (r. ca. 810–785/80 BCE) and **Argishti I** (r. ca. 785/80–756 BCE) continued Ishpuini's expansion strategy (map 5). On the one hand, they ensured that the Urartian core territory remained protected by natural obstacles such as mountain ranges and a dense network of fortresses, and refrained from annexing territories that were difficult to defend. On the other hand, they sought to gain control over the main east–west trade routes by means of tributary protectorates, which forced trade flows through Urartian territory. As a consequence, they could impose customs duties and levies there. Insofar as the area between the Caspian Sea and the Euphrates was controlled by either Assyria or Biainili, it was a classic zero-sum game: if Biainili gained additional revenue from international trade, it automatically withdrew an equal amount from Assyria, and vice versa. The surplus income was often invested in the army. The third pillar of Urartian expansionist politics consisted of regular plundering campaigns, such as Argishti's almost annual campaigns against the Mannaeans to the south-east of Lake Urmia to demand tribute. This predatory practice was consistent with previous Assyrian policy.



60. Outer fortification wall of the northern royal residence of Urartu, Erebuni near Yerevan, Armenia. Erebuni was established by King Argishti I (r. ca. 785/80–756 BCE) and after the end of the Urartian Empire it was used by the Achaemenids. Photo 2017.

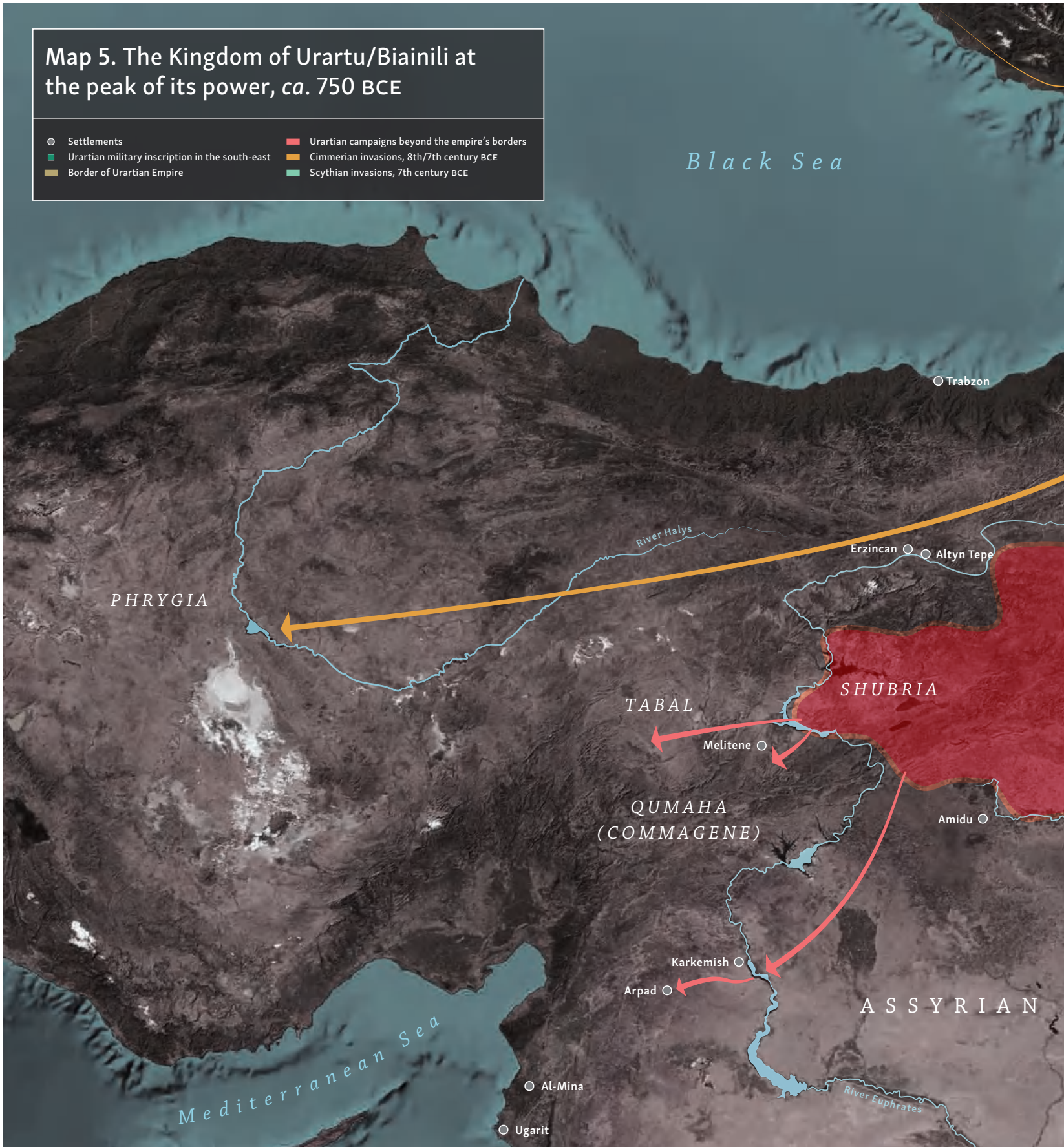
Minua waged war in all directions: in the south, he consolidated Urartian rule over the plains of Salmas and Urmia, advanced again against the Persians and reached the upper reaches of the Tigris. In the south-east, he raided against the Mannaeans and, in the north, he occupied the Araxes plain. North of Mount Ararat, he conquered the small kingdom of Erikua/Irkuahi and established the Minuahinili fortress complex at the northern foot of Ararat. Its ruins lie near the Turkish village of Karakoyunlu, 7 km south of the Armenian–Turkish border.⁴² In the north-west, Minua conquered the territory of the Diauehi in the Erzurum region,⁴³ bringing one of the most important trade routes from Mesopotamia to the Black Sea under Biainili's control. In the west, he consolidated the rule over Shubria/Sophene, whereupon he crossed the Euphrates and forced Melitene, today's Malatya, to pay tributes. After further campaigns of King Argishti, in which he advanced in the south-west as far as Tabal (north of the Taurus Mountains in southern Turkey) and forced Karkemish and Arpad (Tell Rifa'at 30 km north of Aleppo in north-west Syria) to become a Urartian protectorate, Biainili controlled the trade routes to ports of the north-eastern Mediterranean such as al-Mina.⁴⁴ Thus the southern border of Urartu, including its protectorates, ran from Arpad

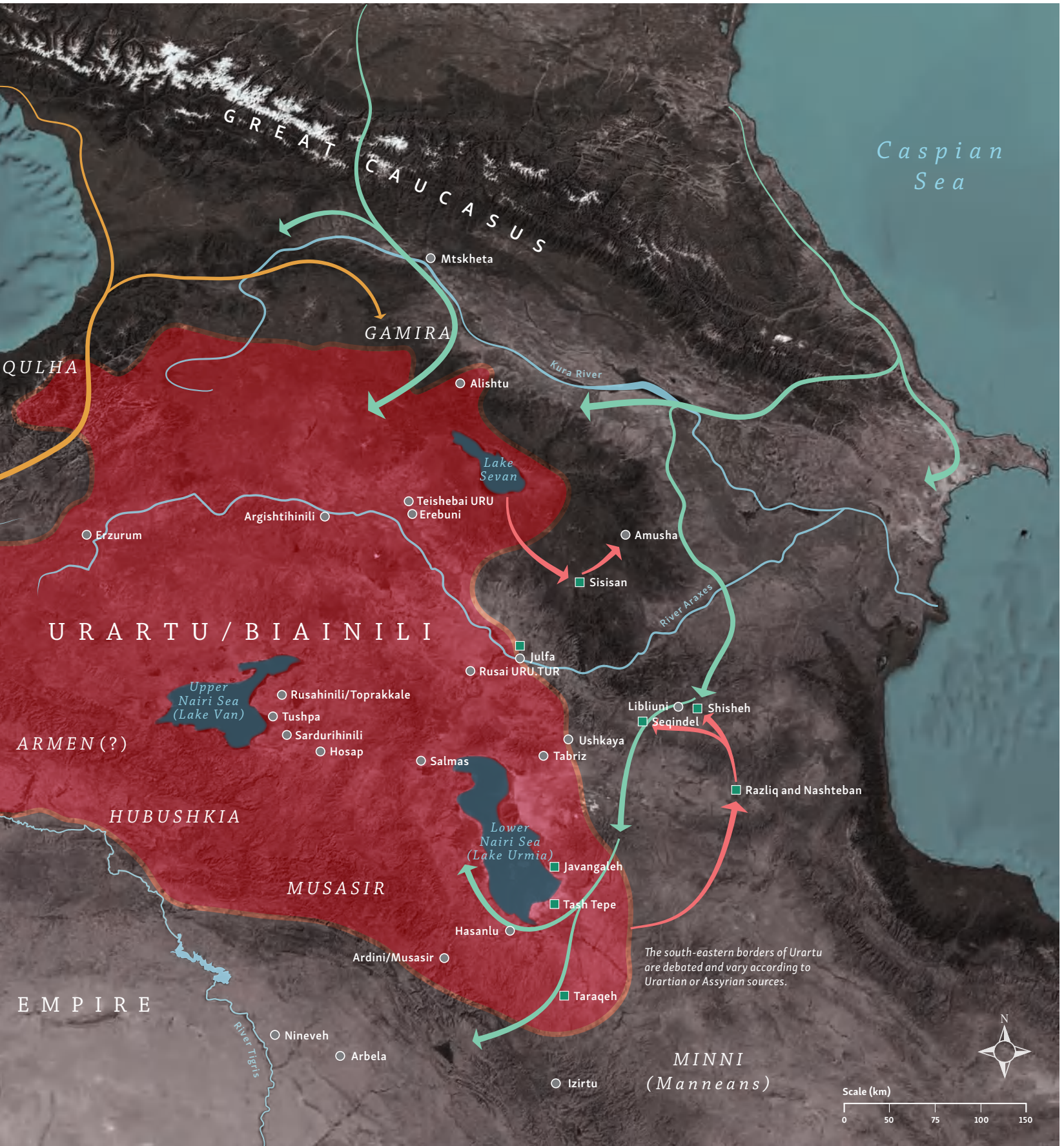


61. Mural of a horse in the great hall of the palace of Erebuni, Armenia. The Urartian murals show similarities with the Assyrian paintings; they can be dated to the seventh century BCE, possibly to the period of autonomous principalities after the collapse of the unified empire, i.e. to the last two decades of the seventh century BCE (Nunn, in Kroll, *Biainili-Urartu* (2012), pp. 331–6). Erebuni Museum, Archaeological Preserve, Yerevan, Armenia.

Map 5. The Kingdom of Urartu/Biainili at the peak of its power, ca. 750 BCE

- Settlements
- Urartian military inscription in the south-east
- Border of Urartian Empire
- Urartian campaigns beyond the empire's borders
- Cimmerian invasions, 8th/7th century BCE
- Scythian invasions, 7th century BCE







62. The Sardurihinili (Çavuştepe) fortress complex, built by the Urartian king Sarduri II (756–730 BCE), consisted of an upper and a lower fortress, each containing a temple. Photo 2016.

north-east to Amidu (the Roman Amida and today's Diyarbakır) and further south-east, first along the upper reaches of the Tigris almost to Izirtu (today's Bukan), the capital of Manna, about 70 km south of Lake Urmia. From there, the border ran either northward to Ushkaya near Tabriz or further east to Libliuni, the capital of the kingdom of Puluadi, north-east of Tabriz, which was conquered before 743 BCE by King **Sarduri II** (r. 756–ca. 730 BCE).⁴⁵ In his proclamations, Sarduri II also mentions a land called Armen on the upper Tigris, south-west of Tushpa, which Boris Piotrovsky considers 'the nucleus of a new union of Armenians' (map 5).⁴⁶

Thanks to this expansion, Biainili not only directed and controlled a substantial part of the east-west trade flow, but also surrounded Assyria like a sickle from its north-western border to its north-eastern. Biainili and Assyria, including their protectorates and zones of influence, thus shared an almost 800-km-long border, which represented great potential for conflict. The western border of Biainili was about 80 km from the eastern Mediterranean, the eastern border 160 km from the Caspian Sea. It is doubtful that Urartu ever directly dominated a port on the Black Sea. All indications are that the empire remained landlocked. Urartu reached the peak of its power in the south around 753 BCE,

when Sarduri II successfully fended off a counterattack by the Assyrian King Ashur-nerari V in the area of Melitene: 'He [Haldi] subdued Aššur-nirari, son of Adad-nirari, king of Assyria. He threw him at the feet of Sarduri.'⁴⁷

Argishti also greatly expanded the empire of Biainili to the north. After suppressing the rebellion of the Diauehi king, Utupurshini, whom he deposed, Argishti moved with his army to Kars and crossed the Araxes. In 781/80 or 777/6 BCE, he penetrated as far as Alishtu north of Lake Sevan and then annexed an area almost as large as today's Republic of Armenia. To colonize it, he deported people from other parts of the empire.

*The god Haldi appeared with his weapons. He conquered the lands of Etiuni [at the south-east of Lake Sevan]. [...] Argishti speaks: I destroyed the land of the city Kikhuni, located on the bank of the lake. I came up to the city of Alishtu. [...] I built the city of Irpuni [Erebuni] for the might of the land of Biainili [and] for the pacification of enemy lands. [...] I settled there 6,000 warriors.*⁴⁸

The deportation of population strata from looted regions not integrated into the kingdom provided Biainili with new

labour forces, which it deployed in its own new economic zones. At the same time, such deportations weakened the defeated enemy. Unlike Mesopotamian states, which emerged from the consolidation or conquest of city-states, Biainili deliberately planned and implemented urban development in a coordinated manner. As Altan Çilingiroğlu observed:

Although the Urartian Kingdom was a territorial state, unlike Mesopotamian city-states, it is apparent that cities were founded under the direct supervision of the kings. [...] The reason for the uniformity [of new Urartian cities] was a royal policy that dictated a master plan for every fortress [and city] built in any region of the kingdom. [...] The field architects [...] would be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the master plan. The Urartian royal inscriptions stated that kings personally supervised the planning and organisation.⁴⁹

About thirty years after the founding of Irpuni, Sarduri II conducted two campaigns in the mountain region of south-western Qulḫa (Colchis), north-west of Kars.⁵⁰ Sarduri's Qulḫa is presumably identical with Xenophon's 'Mountains of the Colchis', where 'the Ten Thousand' won their final battle in difficult terrain in the year 400 BCE, before they reached the Black Sea at Trabzon.⁵¹ To what extent Biainili established a protectorate over Colchis is uncertain.

To make optimal economic use of the newly conquered areas, especially the fertile plain of Ararat, and to integrate them

into the kingdom, Argishti launched an ambitious programme for the construction of cities and irrigation systems. The most important foundations were Argishtihinili, south-west of the present city of Armavir, and Irpuni (Erebuni, in Armenian Arin Berd), a southern district of Yerevan. Argishtihinili was an economic centre that included an expansive agricultural zone with newly constructed irrigation canals, and iron production in Metsamor. The citadel of Irpuni, built around the year 776 BCE on a hill in a prime strategic position, served both as a military garrison and as an administrative centre and royal residence (fig. 60). The complex was surrounded by cyclopean walls. Yet it lost its status in the first half of the seventh century BCE when King Rusa II had the new provincial capital of Teishebai URU (Karmir Blur), the 'City of the Weather God', built in the vicinity and the treasures and weapons stored in Irpuni brought there. Irpuni regained importance after the collapse of Biainili when it served as a residence within the Achaemenid XVIII Satrapy. Sarduri II in his turn strengthened the protection of the capital in the Urartian heartland by having the fortress complex Sardurihinili built on a mountain spur 18 km south-east of Tushpa, near today's village of Çavuştepe (fig. 62). The double fortress and the two temples were located along the military road that led from Tushpa over the Kelishin Pass to Musasir and on to Assyria.⁵²

Sarduri's successor Rusa I (see below, r. ca. 730–714/13 BCE) continued the building activity. A few kilometres east of Tushpa, he



63. Bronze belt plate with archers, animals and hybrid animals such as griffins, Urartu, eighth century BCE. Van region, Eastern Anatolia Turkey. Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel.



64. Fitting of a throne in the shape of a winged lion with a human torso and a face made from limestone with inlaid eyes and brows. Copper alloy, late eighth or early seventh century BCE. From the royal palace of Rusahinili (Toprakkale), eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

built the new royal residence complex of Rusahinili (Toprakkale), the 'City of Rusa', which also contained huge wine storehouses and granaries. The fortress and the temple of Haldi below it were destroyed by the Medes in the 590s BCE or slightly before. During excavations there, archaeologists discovered silk fragments; it is unknown how the materials reached Van from China.⁵³ Next, Rusa's successor Arghishti II (see below, *r. ca.* 714/13–695/85? BCE) ordered the fortification of the large hill settlement of Altyn Tepe near the present-day city of Erzincan in order to defend it against the Cimmerians who were plundering in Phrygia.⁵⁴ The last important king of Biainili, Rusa II (see below, *r. ca.* 695/85?–? BCE), made efforts to strengthen the southern areas of the already weakened kingdom. Shortly after coming to power, he ordered the extension of the citadel of Rusai-URU.TUR (Bastam), making it the second largest fortification after Tushpa. The fortress, 90 km north-west of Lake Urmia, may already have been plundered and set on fire by Scythians at the end of Rusa's reign.⁵⁵

In Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III seized power in 745 BCE, probably after a bloody coup. He reformed the ruling structures, finances and the army. One of his first foreign policy priorities was to destroy the Urartian stranglehold and recapture

the economically important areas of Syria with a view to regaining lucrative control over international trade flows. The first military clash occurred in Commagene (in today's south-east Turkey), when Sarduri II crossed the Euphrates and the Taurus and conquered three cities, while Tiglath-Pileser simultaneously besieged the city of Arpad. The Assyrian king pulled off a surprise attack, and in the year 743 BCE he achieved an overwhelming victory. Fearing for his life, Sarduri fled over the Euphrates and had to abandon his camp and troops, which fell into the hands of Tiglath-Pileser. The Syrian kingdoms west of the Euphrates were forced to swear allegiance to Assyria. If the Assyrian proclamations are to be believed (Urartian sources do not mention this defeat), Tiglath-Pileser either afterwards or somewhat later in the year 739, 736 or 735 BCE, penetrated into the Urartian heartland and besieged Tushpa in vain. Since the Assyrian inscription expressly mentions 'Turuhpa, his [Sarduri's] city', we can assume that this campaign actually took place, although the date remains uncertain.⁵⁶

1.3 Neo-Assyria's renewed ascent and Biainili's demise

Little is known of the final years of Sarduri's rule. King **Rusa I** (*r. ca.* 730–714/13 BCE), for his part, inherited the heavy burden of a state in which high dignitaries and provincial governors instigated an uprising. He reorganized the army and administration, and managed to quash local rebellions and reclaim several renegade provinces. Within a few years, Rusa was confronted with two overwhelming enemies: the Cimmerians in the north and the Assyrian king Sargon II (*r.* 722/21–705 BCE) in the south. In the second half of the eighth century BCE, Cimmerian tribes coming from the north pushed into the southern Caucasus. Rusa saw himself compelled to undertake a campaign northward to Lake Sevan in 720 BCE, where he subdued and imposed tributary obligations on four kings south of the lake and nineteen kings to its north.⁵⁷ It is conceivable that these kings maintained good relations with the Cimmerians. Afterwards, around 716 BCE or earlier, Rusa turned south-east with the aim of establishing a ring of buffer states loyal to Urartu south and east of Lake Urmia by means of intrigues and military operations. Following a skirmish, he reached the national sanctuary of Musasir, whose king Urzana was an Assyrian vassal. For Sargon II, Rusa's system of anti-Assyrian alliances was a threatening provocation. He countered it by quickly bringing several small kingdoms back under Assyrian control, including the Mannaeans, but not yet Musasir.⁵⁸ Rusa's protective measures on Biainili's south-east border had thus been shattered. From 715 BCE, Sargon prepared his next move against Biainili.

Two Assyrian sources provide detailed information on the events that followed, although the exact sequence of the battles and their location remain contested. The first source is the victory proclamation of Sargon, which reports on his eighth war campaign in the form of a royal letter to the imperial god Assur. The second source is the letters from the crown prince, Sennacherib, who headed the impressively organized Assyrian intelligence service, to his father Sargon. While public proclamations also served to glorify the king and were inclined towards exaggeration and one-sidedness, espionage reports, military instructions, and queries to soothsayers tended to be pragmatic and factual, since they dealt with military matters. They are therefore especially valuable for historical reconstruction. In the spring of 714 BCE, Rusa hastened towards the formidable Cimmerian bands threatening Biainili's northern border. Sennacherib reports to his father:

*The forces of the Urartian were completely defeated [by the Gimirrai] in Gamira, where he [Rusa] had moved to. Eleven of his governors and their forces escaped, but his commander-in-chief [and] two of his governors were captured.*⁵⁹

Rusa managed to escape to the mountains, but just after the battle the surviving commanders had nominated prince Melartua as new king since the whereabouts of Rusa were still unknown. It seems likely that Rusa managed to return to Tushpa and to regain the crown from Melartua. According to Sennacherib's informant, the high Assyrian official Assur-resuja,



66. Bronze figure of a warrior with shield and lance, ninth century BCE, Paravakar, Tavush Province, Armenia. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.



65. Bronze bowl with the cuneiform inscription of King Sarduri II (r. 756–730 BCE) and two pictograms identifying the bowl as the king's property. Karmir Blur, Armenia. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

a failed coup attempt occurred in Tushpa after Rusa's defeat.⁶⁰ In another letter, an otherwise obscure sender named Urda-Sin informs us that a second Cimmerian division had attacked during the same period from the territory of the Mannaeans, i.e. from the south-east.⁶¹ In any event, Urartu does not appear to have suffered significant territorial losses as a result of this defeat. The whereabouts of Gamira are debated. The present author concurs with Askold Ivantchik and Robert H. Hewsen, who identify Gamira with Quriani, one of the nineteen kingdoms previously conquered by Rusa north-west of Lake Sevan.⁶² Mirjo Salvini and Hermann Sauter, by contrast, locate Rusa's defeat in an area north-west of the Mannaeans, i.e. in the south-east of Urartu.⁶³ The traditional date of 714 BCE for the Cimmerian victory over Urartu has been recently questioned by Andreas Fuchs who argued that the battle took place in 709 BCE and that it was Argishti II who suffered this defeat.⁶⁴

Once Sargon learned of Rusa's defeat and the unrest in Tushpa, he seized the opportunity to vanquish his weakened arch-enemy once and for all. He personally led a large army in the later summer of 714 BCE, crossed the Zagros Mountains, and marched into the territory of the Mannaeans. Here,



67. The fortress of Hoşap, built by the Kurdish ruler Sarı Süleyman in the 1640s east of Van, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The castle stands on the ruins of an Armenian fortress, which was preceded by an Urartian stronghold (Çilingiroğlu, *Geschichte des Königreiches Van* (1988), p. 54). Photo 2016.

Sargon learned that King Rusa and his army were in the area of Mount Uaush, east of Lake Urmia. Sargon led his forces there straightaway and achieved an overwhelming victory. Rusa only narrowly escaped being captured and fled on horseback, thus depriving Sargon of a total triumph. Since Sargon did not want to run the risk of enduring a snow blockade during a siege of Tushpa or to annex the areas around Lake Urmia, he opted for a 'scorched earth' tactic that would further weaken Biainili economically. Cities, settlements and harvests were burned to the ground, fruit trees and vines uprooted, and fields artificially flooded. While he did not return directly to the Assyrian capital Kalhu (today Nimrud), he sent back the majority of his army. Nonetheless, towards the end of October 714, he attacked Musasir with nothing but 1,000 elite horsemen to avenge the

allegedly renegade King Urzana and plunder the Biainili treasure that was stored there. In the palace and temple of Musasir, the Assyrians captured more than 1 tonne of gold, 10 tonnes of silver, 108 tonnes of bronze in ingots, and more than 334,000 items, including 330,000 metal weapons such as chariots, swords, spears, shields, armour, helmets, bows and arrows. The detour Sargon took to Musasir proved to be extremely successful economically.⁶⁵ To permanently humiliate the Urartian dynasty, Sargon ordered 'the removal [of the gold statue] of Haldi, the guardian of the land of Urartu'.⁶⁶ Sargon hence robbed the enemy dynasty of its patron god. According to Assyrian annals, when Rusa learned of this disgrace, 'with his own iron sword he pierced his heart like that of a pig's and ended his life'.⁶⁷ Whether Rusa really committed suicide is not certain: maybe



he was murdered. It is also quite doubtful whether Sargon II himself fell nine years later in a battle against the Cimmerians, as is sometimes claimed.⁶⁸ More likely, he was killed in 705 BCE during a campaign against the Neo-Hittite kingdom of Tabal.⁶⁹

Argishti II (r. ca. 714/13–695/85? BCE), Rusa's son and successor, proved that while Biainili was defeated in 714 BCE, it was by no means destroyed. He took advantage of the fact that Sargon II, being militarily engaged in Syria, Palestine and Babylon, did not risk a follow-up campaign to Tushpa in order to repair war damage and set up a new army. As it took Sargon's successor, Sennacherib (r. ca. 705/04/03–681 BCE) two years after Sargon's death to consolidate rule and begin waging wars against Babylon, Palestine and Syria, Biainili could continue to bide its time. Argishti obviously made sure not to provoke Sennacherib

into open conflict and refrained from launching an offensive into the neighbouring mountains. Despite their mutual enmity, Urartu and Assyria had a common interest: their defence against the Cimmerian, and later also the Scythian federations. Regardless of this ceasefire, a 'cold war' prevailed between the two powers. Assyria had succeeded in winning Phrygia, an ally of Urartu, as a new confederate around the year 710/09 BCE. Afterwards, the smaller, pro-Urartian kingdom of Commagene also changed sides. To compensate for such losses, Arghishti extended Biainili's power to the east as far as Amusha, probably today's Stepanakert in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh.⁷⁰

Rusa II (r. ca. 695/85–? BCE) continued with the intensive building activity of his predecessors. His two largest construction projects were the Rusai-URU.TUR fortress complex (Bastam) in

the south and the new provincial capital Teishebai URU (Karmir Blur) in the north-east. Even though under Rusa II Biainili experienced a final golden age, the king was forced to confine himself to a cautious, defensive foreign policy and to avert an alliance between his enemies, the Cimmerians, Scythians and Assyrians. Conversely, the same was true of Assyria. At the time of Rusa II, it seems that Biainili not only tolerated the settlement of Cimmerians in the Van region, but also maintained acceptable relations with these groups. In any event, it can be inferred from an oracle query to the god Shamash that Sennacherib's successor Esarhaddon (r. 681–669 BCE) feared a joint Urartian–Cimmerian attack on Shubria.⁷¹ It seems, however, that Urartu and Assyria maintained good relations shortly before or after this query, for when Esarhaddon conquered Shubria around 673/2, he handed over hostile Urartian refugees to Rusa II.⁷²

Twenty years later, the relationship between Biainili and Assyria was no longer one of equal rivals, but of a hegemon and a subordinate. In ca. 653 or 652 BCE, on the occasion of the victory of Ashurbanipal (r. 669–ca. 631 BCE) over Teumman, king of Elam, Biainili sent two envoys to congratulate the victor: 'Rusa, king of Urartu heard of Ashur's power, and the fear of my majesty crushed him, and he sent his nobles to Arbail to inquire about my condition.' Most probably **Rusa III** (r. ?–after 653/2), the son of **Erimena** (dates unknown) was meant, but the possibility that the king in question was Rusa II cannot be fully excluded.⁷³ The stele of Keşiş Göl, which is situated 23 km east of Van, reports in cuneiform writing that King Rusa III Erimenahi had a dam built here, along with water canals to the Rusahinili royal residence (today's Toprakkale). This is an indication that at this time Rusa III still exercised rule over a functioning state. Nonetheless, the inscription remained unfinished, suggesting that an unexpected incident occurred.⁷⁴ The last Assyrian reference to an Urartian king around 646/42 BCE further articulates the relationship between the two powers:

*Ishtar-dûri [Sarduri], king of Urartu, whose fathers had addressed [messages of] brotherhoods to my fathers – at this time Ishtar-dûri [...] as a son sends [messages recognizing] authority to his father, so he [...] sent to me, saying: 'Greetings to the king, my lord'. In fear and submission he had his heavy gifts brought before me.'*⁷⁵

This particular Sarduri, who is clearly represented as an Assyrian vassal, was **Sarduri III** (r. before 646/42–? BCE).⁷⁶ While previous Assyrian proclamations referred to the Urartian kings as brothers of the Assyrian king and hence as equals, Sarduri was now downgraded to an obedient son of his 'father', the Assyrian king.

1.4 Biainili's fall

Up to half a century passed between the last Assyrian mention of an Urartian king and the demise of the Urartian principalities, at the latest by 590/85 BCE. Both arch-enemies, Biainili and Assyria, fell within a couple of decades of each other, probably at the hands of the same opponents, the Medes and Scythians. Thanks to their units of mobile archers, these two horseback warrior peoples were militarily superior to the armies of the two settled states – despite the fact that Sennacherib had already introduced units of mounted archers.⁷⁷ Since mobile or semi-mobile mounted cattle-breeding tribes were permanently in competition with other groups for pastureland and sources of water, the Medes and Scythians *eo ipso* possessed greater skill in the battle on horseback than the riders of agricultural societies. At the same time, Assyria was weakened internally, and in Urartu the central authority fell away to regional power centres. The ruler of the Medes, Cyaxares II (r. ca. 625–585/84 BCE) took advantage of Assyria's campaign against the rebellious Babylonia to attack and destroy the city of Assur, home of the national god of the same name, in the year 614 BCE. Later, Cyaxares allied himself with



68. Silver rhyton in the shape of a rider protome. The rider wears a short sword called an *akinakes* and clothes as worn by Medes and Armenians on the bas-relief of Persepolis. Sixth/fifth century BCE, Erebuni. Erebuni Museum, Archaeological Preserve, Yerevan, Armenia.



69. Urartian bronze cauldron with two hybrid and Janus-faced bird-men as handles, late eighth century BCE, Northern Syria. Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, Basel.

the Babylonian king Nabopolassar (r. ca. 626–605 BCE) and bribed some bands of Middle Eastern Scythians from their alliance with Assyria with promises of looting. This tripartite alliance conquered and destroyed the Assyrian capital Nineveh in 612 BCE. The last Assyrian king Ashur-uballit fled west to Harran and sought help from Egypt. In vain, since the Median–Babylonian army annihilated the Assyrian–Egyptian alliance at Harran in 609, which destroyed the state of Assyria once and for all.⁷⁸

The extent to which Biainili still existed as a unified state after the reign of Sarduri III, who is mentioned as an Assyrian vassal in 646/42, is unclear.⁷⁹ Although Babylonian chronicles report three campaigns of Nabopolassar against Urartu between the years 610/09 and 607 BCE, no Urartian kings are mentioned.⁸⁰ It seems likely that Urartu was a geographical, not a political term in these texts. Even the biblical curse of Babylon in 594 BCE, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, provides no evidence of the existence of a unified state of Urartu.⁸¹ By the end of the seventh century BCE, Biainili was most probably divided up into smaller principalities, which would mean that the Urartian kingdom collapsed around the 620s. Be that as it

may, the imposing fortresses of Teishebai URU (Karmir Blur), Argishtihinili (ancient Armavir), Rusahinili (Toprakkale), Sardurihinili (Çavuştepe), and perhaps even Rusai-URU.TUR (Bastam) were destroyed around the turn of the seventh to the sixth century BCE or slightly before. The Scythian mounted archers probably conquered the northern fortresses and cities, while those in the south fell victim to the bowmen of the Medes. Archaeologically, there is little evidence of a distinction between Scythians and Medes, since both Scythians and Medes used bi- and trilobate bronze socketed arrowheads with added barbs.

When Urartu collapsed and the great fortresses, with the exception of Irpuni and Tushpa, were destroyed, the former state territory probably came under Median control. The principalities of Urartu must have been pacified when in the spring of 585 BCE, at the very latest, Cyaxares II tried to force an end to the five-year war against Lydia with another attack, since it could not have withstood any potential enemy at its back.⁸² According to Herodotus, Cyaxares had insulted some of his Scythian allies in 590 BCE when they returned from a hunt without prey. ‘The Scythians, in revenge [...] decided to kill one of their young pupils [given to

them by Cyaxares], chop him up, dress the pieces in the ordinary way like meat [and] serve them to Cyaxares as a dish of game.⁸³ The Scythians then fled to the Lydian king Alyattes (r. 619/05–561 BCE), who refused to relinquish his guests. The decisive battle at the north-eastern Anatolian Halys river was interrupted by a solar eclipse on 28 May, 585 BCE, at which point the adversaries made peace and determined the Halys as common border.

The Median Empire did not last very long, however. In the year 553 BCE, the Persian vassal prince Cyrus II rebelled (r. as Achaemenid ruler 550–530/29 BCE) and captured the Median capital Ecbatana three years later.⁸⁴ After unifying the Persians and the Medes, Cyrus founded the Achaemenid Empire.⁸⁵ According to the Chronicle of the last Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (r. 556–539 BCE), Cyrus supposedly invaded

Urartu in the year 547/6, where he killed the king and then established a Persian garrison.⁸⁶ However, the king referenced here can only have been a local Median vassal. In the early Achaemenid inscriptions, the synonymous toponyms Urartu and Armina were used for the area that roughly corresponded to the former territory of Biainili. In the trilingual cuneiform Bisotun Inscription from *ca.* 516 BCE, Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) lists the 23 territories belonging to the empire.⁸⁷ In the Babylonian version, the eleventh territory is called ‘Urashtu’ (Urartu), in the ancient Persian and Elamite versions ‘Armina’ (Armenia).⁸⁸ The connection of Urartu/Armenia to the Achaemenid Empire is celebrated by the trilingual cuneiform inscription that Xerxes I (r. 486–465 BCE) ordered to be chiselled into the southern rock face of Tushpa in about 480 BCE (fig. 70).⁸⁹



70. Trilingual inscription of Great King Xerxes I from about 480 BCE on the south side of the fortress of Tushpa (Van Kale), Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The inscription, written in Old Persian, Babylonian and Elamite, proclaims, among other things, the legitimacy of the Great King Xerxes to rule over the empire. ‘A great god is Ahura Mazda, who is the greatest of gods, who created this earth, who has created that heaven, who has created mankind, who has given happiness to man, who has made Xerxes king, sole king of many kings [...] I am Xerxes, the great king, the king of kings [...] Says Xerxes the King: Darius the king, my father, did many works, through the protection of Ahura Mazda, and on this hill he commanded me to make his tablet and an image; yet an inscription he did not make. Afterwards I ordered this inscription to be written. May Ahura Mazda, along with all the gods, protect me and my kingdom and my works.’ (After Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 69.) Photo 2016.

2. Horsemen from the North and Greek trade colonies

In the eighth century BCE, there were harbingers in the Caucasus of a fundamental ethnic, economic and sociopolitical revolution which, with disruptions, extended over two millennia and toppled two European empires. We are dealing here with the migration of Central Asian peoples from east to west, beginning in a first phase with the Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans. This phase reached its first climax with the Huns. The often violent migrations displaced established peoples, who also set out on marches in search of new habitats. In a kind of domino effect, they in turn expelled or subjugated other peoples. The Roman Empire disintegrated as a result of the continuing pressure from the so-called *Völkerwanderung* (migration of peoples), called from the Roman and Byzantine perspective ‘barbarian invasions’. The second expansion phase of Central Asian peoples began with the migration of the various Turkic peoples. This gave rise to profound and permanent change in the ethnic composition in Central Asia itself, in north-western Iran, in Azerbaijan and throughout Anatolia, and led to the disappearance of the Byzantine Empire. On the other hand, the third east-west expansion – that of the Mongols – was less a population migration than a war of conquest on a massive scale. The territorial gains here were controlled by the Mongol military but administered by local representatives of the conquered peoples. In most of these migratory movements, the Caucasus was not an obstacle, but a narrow passageway resembling that of an hourglass. Within or through the Caucasus migrated Cimmerians, Scythians, Sarmatians, Alans, Huns, Western Turks, Khazars, Oghuzes, Seljuks, Kipchaks, Mongols and Ottomans. In the final phase, Mongolian Kalmyks settled on the Caucasus’ north-eastern shore.

2.1 Cimmerians

In contrast to the Greek sources, which were written with a temporal lag, the Neo-Assyrian sources on the archaeologically elusive Cimmerians and early Scythians are particularly valuable because they originated at the time of Assyria’s clashes with the Cimmerians. The Cimmerian people emerged against the backdrop of climatic change in the northern Pontic region towards the end of the second millennium BCE and the extensive land use during the Srubnaya (Timber-grave) culture. The rapidly declining profitability of pastures and fields led to population

migration and the transition to mobile livestock farming. It is assumed that around the ninth century BCE pre-Scythian, Iranian-speaking mounted nomads from the east made their way into the east Pontic steppes and the region of the Kuban.⁹⁰ The Greek designation of the Kerch Strait as the Cimmerian Bosphorus evokes their presence along the north-eastern Black Sea coast. The bimetallic battle pickaxes common among the Cimmerians have their origin in the Tagar culture of the Minusinsk basin, thus providing one of the clues in favour of the hypothetical migration from the east.⁹¹ As mentioned above,⁹² the Cimmerians first appeared in Assyrian texts in 714 (or 709) BCE, when Crown Prince Sennacherib informed his father Sargon II that the Urartian Rusa I had suffered a devastating defeat in Gamira at the hands of the Gimirrai. At the same time, there were probably also Cimmerian units in the region of the Mannaeans, who tried to attack Urartu from the south-east.⁹³ Despite the defeat, Rusa or his successor Argishti II managed to prevent the Cimmerians from invading Biainili. Instead, they gradually moved south-west and seemed to have left the Caucasus region behind them. Other Cimmerian tribes had remained north of the Greater Caucasus.

After Sargon’s death, the Cimmerians disappeared from the Assyrian texts for a quarter of a century. They reappeared around 679 BCE, at the same time as the first Scythians, the ‘Ašguzâi’ or ‘Iškuzâi’. According to the Annals of Esarhaddon and the stele of Tell Ahmar, Esarhaddon defeated the Cimmerians led by King Teushpa in eastern Anatolia in 679/78 BCE. Some burial chambers on the upper Euphrates near Norsun Tepe with stone foundations and horse sacrifices could be connected with the nomadic Cimmerians in that region.⁹⁴ According to Strabo, a Cimmerian army invaded the kingdom of Phrygia in central and western Anatolia around 676–5 and plundered the capital of Gordion. When Gordion was about to fall, King Midas II is said to have chosen suicide by drinking bull’s blood.⁹⁵ Less than ten years later, Cimmerians attacked the Lydian king Gûgu (Gyges), who, thanks to Assyrian help, was initially able to drive away the horseback warriors. However, as Gyges broke his oath of allegiance to Ashurbanipal around 655 BCE, he was abandoned during the next Cimmerian attack under their king Lygdamis (Dugdammê). The Lydian king was killed around 652 or 644 BCE. As Ashurbanipal proclaimed: ‘The Gimirrai, whom he [Gûgu] had subdued using my name [help], rose up and overwhelmed his whole country. Following him, his son [Ardys II] sat on his throne.’⁹⁶ After an alleged attack on Ephesus, Lygdamis turned to Cilicia, where he died.⁹⁷ His son and successor Shandakshatru continued the war unsuccessfully. From this point on, the



71. Akinakes with gold hilt and gold-plated sheath from Kurgan 1, Kelermes, Kuban region, Adygea, Russian Federation, ca. 675–625 BCE. The figures on the sheath, from the Assyrian–Urartian imaginative world, represent in the upper part two winged deities in front of a tree of life as well as eight four-legged hybrid creatures with fish-shaped wings, four of them shooting with bows. The recumbent deer depicted in the upper indentation looks typically early Scythian. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Cimmerians no longer appear in the Assyrian texts. The remaining Cimmerian forces in Asia Minor were finally defeated by the Lydian king Alyattes (r. 619/05–561 BCE) with the support of Scythian mercenaries.⁹⁸

One of the rare archaeological traces of the Cimmerians could be found in the town of Sardes, where a massive burned layer dates back to the time of King Gyges' death.⁹⁹ Cimmerian settlements, however, could not be found in the Near East, the Caucasus or the Northern Pontic region, and it seems that the Cimmerians buried most of their dead leaders and warriors in older Bronze Age kurgans. The burial objects found in the North Caucasus and Ukraine – weapons and horse bridles – were decorated with geometric patterns of spirals, volutes, rhombuses, squares and crosses, but not with animal-style motifs.

2.2 Immigrant Scythians and autochthonous Maiotes

Towards the end of the eighth century BCE, mobile European and Iranian-speaking Proto-Scythians originating from the east of Central Asia crossed the Urals and the Volga. They then invaded the North Caucasus, where they subdued the remaining Cimmerians and the indigenous Proto-Maiotes. These autochthonous **Maiotes** lived along the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea and the east coast of the Sea of Azov, which the Greeks called the swamp of Maiotis, as well as in the Kuban lowlands. They engaged in agriculture and livestock breeding. Ancient authors subsumed the non-Greek, indigenous peoples and tribes of this region under the generic term Maiotes. Strabo lists at least ten Maiotic peoples and tribes whose languages probably belonged to the North-West Caucasian language family.¹⁰⁰ The **Scythians**



also did not form a homogeneous people. Some groups of the early Scythian nomad horsemen settled in the Kuban, choosing its pastures as their homeland and using it as a deployment area for their campaigns to the Near East. The kingdom of 'Iškuzâi' mentioned by the Assyrian sources of the seventh century was probably located here in the Kuban.¹⁰¹ Around the year 679 BCE, about 35 years after the Cimmerians, other groups of Scythian warriors crossed the Caucasus, called the 'Scythian Road' by the Greek tragedian Aeschylus.¹⁰² They presumably advanced along the west coast of the Caspian Sea, towards the northern border of Assyria.¹⁰³ Initially, the Ishkuzai, under the leadership of their king Ishpakaia, allied themselves with the eastern Mannaeans of Lake Urmia against Assyria, which was also waging war against the Cimmerians. Esarhaddon succeeded not only in defeating

the Ishkuzai of King Ishpakaia, but also in forming an alliance with his successor Bartatua.¹⁰⁴ From an oracle consultation of Esarhaddon, it is known that he considered giving the Scythian king an Assyrian princess as his bride. While it has not been confirmed whether the Scythian-Assyrian marriage came about, from then on the Scythians pursued a pro-Assyrian policy and supported Esarhaddon in the fight against the Medes in 673 BCE. Some of the Scythians most probably returned to the North Caucasus loaded with ample spoils of war. Evidence of this can be found in the Assyrian-Medic-style gold objects from the first princely kurgans of Kelermes (670–625 BCE; figs 71, 73).¹⁰⁵

We learn of the events that followed solely from Herodotus' remarks. As for his descriptions of the North Pontic Scythians and their customs in the area of present-day Ukraine,

archaeology has corroborated most of them. Herodotus, who did not know of Biainili, possessed only fragmentary knowledge of the early eastern Scythians; he exaggerates the significance of individual events and his time indications are inaccurate. If one believes Herodotus' account, the Scythian-Assyrian alliance came to the fore once again at the time of Ashurbanipal (r. 669–ca. 631 BCE). The Medes, who had become independent from Assyria, according to Herodotus penetrated deep into the Neo-Assyrian Empire around the year 640 BCE and besieged its capital Nineveh.¹⁰⁶ The Median king 'Cyaxares fought [at the beginning of his reign] a successful battle against the Assyrians, but while he was besieging the town he was attacked by a large Scythian army under the command of King Madyas, son of Protothyas [Bartatua].' Herodotus continues:

The Medes were defeated and lost their power in Asia, which was taken over in its entirety by the Scythians. The Scythians next turned their attention to Egypt, but were met in Palestine by Psammetichus, the Egyptian king, who by earnest entreaties supported by bribery managed to prevent their further advance.

According to Herodotus, Madyas' victory heralded twenty-eight years of rule by Scythian nomadic horsemen in the Near East.¹⁰⁷



72. Scythian-like bronze belt buckle from Mingachevir, ca. seventh century BCE. A deer is attacked by dogs. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

These particulars cannot be taken literally. It is likely that Cyaxares did not suffer a defeat by the Scythian army of Madyas, but it was instead his father and predecessor Phraortes (r. ?–ca. 625/24 BCE). In addition, the Scythian horseback warriors did not create a well-structured empire, but profited from the temporary weakness of the Medes to plunder the area east of Assyria with impunity. The Scythian warrior units were in any case feared. The prophet Jeremiah, a contemporary, described them as follows: 'Their quivers are like an open grave. [...] They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and know no mercy.'¹⁰⁸ It is quite conceivable that these Scythians operating in the Middle East had their base in the Sakasene mentioned by Strabo, where they had also advanced on their march to the south and, from here, carried out their war campaigns.¹⁰⁹ The Sakasene lies east and south-east of Lake Sevan, in the west of Azerbaijan and in Nagorno-Karabakh. Prior to his own attack on Assyria, the Median king Cyaxares succeeded in averting the danger posed by pro-Assyrian Scythians by (as Herodotus relates) getting their elite drunk at a banquet and murdering them.¹¹⁰ As a consequence, these pro-Assyrian Scythian war-bands were stripped of their leadership and Assyria lost an ally. However, Scythian groups continued to cause unrest in the Near East and, according to Herodotus, provoked a war between Media and Lydia.¹¹¹ The vast majority of the Scythians remaining in the Near East returned to the North Caucasus between 616 and 585 BCE.¹¹² The Scythians left few material traces in the Near East, except for the numerous finds of Scythian arrowheads and horse bridles, which could also have come from Cimmerians or Medes.¹¹³

The contact with the Assyrians and Medes promoted the further development of Scythian warfare. The Scythians, for instance, adopted scale armour. Consisting of leather lining on which rows of small iron plates were attached, the armour's fish-scale surface was both highly durable and flexible. While the Assyrians limited the use of the metal scales to the upper body armour, the Scythians also began to equip combat belts, thigh protection, leg splints and shields with this technology. Later, the Sarmatians, successors of the Scythians in the Kuban, also protected their horses with a breastplate and replaced the scale armour with ring armour around the year 300 BCE.¹¹⁴ Later still, the scale helmet with cheek and neck protection replaced the heavy, cast bronze helmet. But the stirrup was still unknown at that time, which meant that heavy cavalry could not carry out compact frontal attacks with inserted lances.¹¹⁵

In the Kuban, the two most important early Scythian necropolises of Kostromskaya and Kelermes reveal obvious



73. The reverse of a silver mirror from Kelermes, decorated with sheets made of electrum, a gold-silver alloy, which was manufactured in Greek Ionia or Lydia. Kuban region, Adygea, Russian Federation, ca. 675–625 BCE. In the eight triangular segments, moving clockwise from the upper left, the following scenes are portrayed: the winged mistress of animals holds two panthers; a lion attacks a bull standing on the back of a boar; two winged hybrid creatures made up of predatory cats and women's heads turned backwards flank an Ionic column, while a small panther crouches beneath them; a powerful leopard stands on a crouching ram; two bearded men with thick hair or dressed in pelts attack a griffin. The scene presumably illustrates a story referred to by Herodotus in which the far-eastern Arimaspi try to steal gold guarded by griffins (*Histories*, III.116, IV.27 (2003), pp. 219f, 249). In the next segment, a bird of prey flies over a large bear, which stands over a small dog; two sitting sphinxes face each other above a winged griffin and two lions standing on their hind legs confront each other over an ibex. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



74. Gold plaque of a panther whose paws and tail are formed from coiled panther kittens. The 32.6-centimetre-long plaque presumably decorated a shield. Kurgan 1, Kelermes, Kuban region, Adygea, Russian Federation, ca. 675–625 BCE. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

influences from the Near East.¹¹⁶ At Kostromskaya, 30 km east of Maikop, around 600 BCE, the Scythians removed the uppermost part of the top of a Bronze Age kurgan and built a wooden pit in the now flat platform, which was covered by a tent-like wooden structure. In the kurgan, archaeologists discovered the skeletons of twenty-two sacrificed horses on the outside of the vault, thirteen human skeletons, intentionally broken weapons and ceramic vessels inside the crypt, as well as the 700-gram gold emblem of a stag that once adorned a gorytos (case for a reflex bow) (fig. 75).¹¹⁷ The stag, fleeing with tucked legs and profuse antlers extending across its back, appears to want to escape an enemy, such as a feline predator. One such predator was the golden panther discovered in Kurgan 1 of the nearby Kelermes necropolis, which tracks down a scent with flaring nostrils. Ten small curled-up panther kittens form the feet and the tail of the predator. Thus two of the three preferred animals of early Scythian steppe art already appear in perfect form in the seventh century BCE in the North Caucasus.¹¹⁸

Two different grave types converge at the necropolis of Kelermes, 10 km north of Maikop, from about 675–625 BCE,

reflecting a community of two peoples with their own customs. In the flat graves were buried members of the upper class of the native population of the Maiotes; in the neighbouring kurgans were buried representatives of the ruling Scythian military elite, where numerous weapons were deposited.¹¹⁹ As in Arzhan, southern Siberia, the Scythian warrior graves of the Kuban region preserved objects of the Scythian triad, namely horse bridles, weapons and items in the characteristic animal style. The animal images, which were made according to a fixed set of rules, emphasized certain attributes of selected animals conveying symbolic meaning. The animal style expressed ideological views in animal form. From the seventh century BCE, the Scythian animal style began to take up iconographic elements from Urartu, Assyria, and later Iran, whereby hybrid creatures united the attributes of different animals in a fantasy animal.

The most significant princely kurgans of Kelermes, along with their finds, date from the second and third quarter of the seventh century BCE.¹²⁰ Many of these objects have Near Eastern aspects. These include, from Kurgan 4, a bimetallic mirror with eight triangular gold fittings showing both Ionic–Lydian and

Assyrian influences (fig. 73),¹²¹ and, from Kurgan 3, a gold diadem with a griffin head; this head adornment, widespread among pre-Scythian warriors, was later adopted by Sarmatian women. Further influences from the Near East, which had a lasting impact on the art of Scythians, can be found on the lavish golden weapons of princes and military leaders who had fought in the Near East and were buried in the Kuban.¹²² These include a gold-plated battleaxe from Kurgan 1 at Kelermes depicting two ibexes standing on their hind legs on both sides of a tree of life and a magnificent akinakes, also from Kurgan 1, on whose golden scabbard winged deities stand before a tree of life. Both are Assyrian motifs (fig. 71). The other decorations on this scabbard also originate from the Assyrian–Uartian visual world: four bow-shooting, four-legged mixed creatures with lion or griffin heads as well as four striding predators with goat or ibex heads. All eight hybrids have wings in the shape of fish. In these fantastical beasts, the three areas of life

of air, earth and water are united in a single creature. Obviously the Scythians who had penetrated into Neo-Assyria and Urartu were attracted by the pictorial symbolism they found there and incorporated some of their motifs into their own, equestrian nomadic pictorial language.

In Kelermes, there were a remarkably high number of horse burials, namely twenty-four horses in Kurgan 1, twenty-one in Kurgan 3 and sixteen in Kurgan 2; only the twenty-two horses of Kostromskaya are comparable.¹²³ These ritual horse sacrifices are reminiscent of the horse burials and human sacrifices of Arzhan in the Republic of Tuva, the presumed home of the Scythians in southern Siberia. As shown by the kurgans and shrines of Ulyap, north of Kelermes, the Scythian rituals were adopted by the indigenous Maiotes after the emigration of the majority of Scythians from the Kuban during the second half of the sixth century BCE. Near Kurgan 1 at Ulyap, the first excavator



75. 31.7-centimetre-long gold plaque of a fleeing or recumbent deer, which originally adorned a gorytos or a shield. Kostromskaya kurgan, Kuban region, Krasnodar Krai, Russian Federation, ca. 600 BCE. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



76. Golden kalathos headdress from the Bolshaya Bliznitsa kurgan near the Cossack village of Vyshestebliyevskaya not far from Phanagoria, Taman Peninsula, Krasnodar Krai, Russian Federation. The scene on the kalathos from the fourth century BCE shows the battle described by Herodotus between the predatory, supposedly one-eyed Arimaspi and the gold-guarding griffins. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Nikolai Veselovsky discovered between 1898 and 1909 no fewer than 360 skeletons of sacrificed horses. Some time after the burial, another fifty horses were sacrificed on the mound.¹²⁴ This sacrifice of fifty horses at the end of a long ritual cycle is evocative of a description by Herodotus. He remarks how fifty young men were strangled at the end of a year and placed atop fifty dead, stuffed horses which were pierced by long lances and set up in a circle around the kurgan.¹²⁵ They constituted a gruesome vigil at the grave of their dead leader. Kurgan 4 at Ulyap, from the fifth century BCE, was a particularly richly furnished grave. Here, Alexander Leskov discovered a nearly right-angled golden rhyton ending in a panther head and a finial in the form of a golden deer's head; both magnificent objects stem from local production.¹²⁶ The third magnificent find, a silver, partly gilded rhyton in the shape of a Pegasus (fig. 77), clearly comes from the Greek realm. A circulating golden frieze adorns the central part of the torso; the six high-relief images show scenes from the gigantomachy, the battle of the gods against the giants.¹²⁷

In contrast to the Scythians, the Maiotes used kurgans not only as grave complexes, but also as open-air shrines. In the early 1980s, Leskov excavated seven shrines in the Ulyap complex, which

were shaped like kurgans but had no graves. The most impressive of these is Kurgan 5 from the fourth century BCE. The central area of the complex was surrounded on three sides by an earthen rampart and a ditch, where people, including children, and horses were sacrificed; the entrance was on the south side. A Maiotic sword lay in the middle of the ritual area.¹²⁸ According to Herodotus, such shrines served to worship the god of war, whom he calls Ares:

In every district, at the seat of government, Ares [the god of war] has his temple: it [...] consists of an immense heap of bushwood [...] One top the heap is levelled off square, like a platform, accessible on one side but rising sheer on the other three [...] and on the top is planted an ancient iron sword, which serves for the image of Ares. Annual sacrifices of horses and other cattle are made to this sword [...] Prisoners of war are also sacrificed to Ares[, ...] one man is chosen out of every hundred.¹²⁹

The Maiotes had obviously adopted the Scythian ritual of worshipping the war god.

The Kuban represented the military and cultural centre of the European Scythians in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE. In

the second half of the sixth century, however, an emigration took place of a majority of the Scythian tribes westward to the lower and middle course of the Dnieper. It is possible that a conflict, described by Herodotus, between the returning veterans from the Near East and those Scythians who had stayed in the Kuban, led to this emigration.¹³⁰ Or perhaps the Scythians living in the Kuban came under the pressure of the emboldened Maiotes, who were described by Greek sources as especially belligerent. In any case, this migration and land seizure of the Northern Pontic steppe by Scythian groups must have occurred before Darius' invasion of 513/12 BCE, since it was there that the power centre of the Scythian king Idanthyrsos, mentioned by Herodotus, was located. Two additional factors contributed to the geographical shift of the Scythian base of economic and military power. On the one hand, a more humid climate developed at that time in the northern Black Sea region, which produced lush pastures.¹³¹ On the other hand, from there one could ideally control the trade of the North Pontic

agricultural societies with the up-and-coming Bosporan Kingdom and with Greece. During this period, Athens was dependent on grain imports from today's South Ukraine.¹³² In the north-western Caucasus, the future Adygean region, Scythian influence declined, even though the Maiotes adopted Scythian customs. The tribe of the Sindi living in the west of the Maiotis came into contact starting from the seventh century BCE with Greek seafarers whose settlements promoted the urbanization of the southern half of the land of Sindica (Greek Sindika). Sindica, which reached from Temryuk to Novorossiysk, was incorporated into the Bosporan Kingdom by the middle of the fourth century BCE.¹³³

2.3 Greek emporia in the north-western Caucasus

From the seventh century BCE, three worlds collided in the north-west of the Caucasus, especially in the coastal region of the Sea of Azov and the north-eastern Black Sea: the native Maiotes were confronted by Greek sailors and merchants from the Mediterranean area, and these by Iranian nomadic tribes – the Sarmatians – from about 300 BCE. Beginning in the seventh century BCE, Ionian cities, above all Miletus, began to navigate the Black Sea in search of resources such as metals, wheat and new soils for agriculture, as well as additional trade opportunities. The designation of this sea as 'Black' presumably goes back to the Persian Achaemenids, who symbolically used colours to designate the cardinal directions. North was associated with the colour black, **Axšaina* in Persian meaning 'dark coloured', whereupon the Greeks reinterpreted the name as *Pontos Axeinos*, 'inhospitable sea', as the poet Pindar first observed in 462 BCE. Later, that ominous name was transformed into *Pontos Euxeinos*, 'hospitable sea'.¹³⁴ The Greek merchants founded emporia – trading settlements with their own ports – and colonies, on the Black Sea coasts and also along the coasts of the Crimea and the South and North Caucasus. The Caucasus thus came for the first time under the sphere of influence of a Western power, the Greeks, through which, half a millennium later, it came under the dominion of the Roman Empire. Meanwhile in the middle of the sixth century BCE Iran extended its sphere of influence into the Caucasus, thereby setting the political parameters that would persist until the twenty-first century: the peoples and states of the Caucasus, especially the South Caucasus, remained trapped between major European and Asian powers. Rarely could they assert themselves as truly independent. Often they formed buffer states and had to pursue a 'Janus-like' double strategy.¹³⁵ Sometimes they lost their autonomy and were absorbed by a great power, most recently the Soviet Union.



77. Silver, partly gilded rhyton in the shape of a Pegasus protome from Kurgan 4, Ulyap, fifth century BCE. Adygea, Russian Federation. The middle golden frieze shows scenes from the gigantomachy, the epic battle between the Greek gods and the giants. State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow.

The oldest Greek foundations on the Cimmerian Bosphorus, in the Sindica region and in the delta of the River Tanais (Don) include:¹³⁶

- *Pantikapaion* (Panticapaeum), today's Kerch (seventh/sixth century BCE) and the nearby *Nymphaion* (first half of the sixth century BCE) on the west bank of the strait.
- The emporium at *Taganrog*, partially sunk today in the sea (third quarter of the seventh century BCE), at the northern end of the Tanais delta, which possibly corresponds to Herodotus' port of *Kremnoi*.¹³⁷
- The settlement at *Elizavetovka*, located in the south of the Tanais delta on a large island; fortified by the Sindi, it served as a Greek emporium in the late sixth century BCE after Taganrog had been destroyed for the first time. Elizavetovka is probably identical with Strabo's *Alopechia*.
- The city of *Tanais*, also situated in the Tanais delta, formed a sporadically used trade venue for Maiotes and Scythians starting from the seventh century BCE. It was expanded around the year 275 BCE into a key emporium.
- The city of *Patraios* (Patraeus), founded in the middle of the sixth century BCE, which lay at the eastern side of the Cimmerian Bosphorus opposite Pantikapaion and whose ruins are submerged today as a result of sea-level rise.
- The Greek colony of *Kepoi* (Cepi), which also had its roots in sixth century BCE, was located south-east of Patraios.
- Only 3 km south-west of Kepoi stood the large trading town of *Phanagoria*, founded in 543 BCE.
- A few kilometres further south-west was the harbour city of *Hermonassa* (today's Tmutarakan), which was



78. The prytaneion, the ancient seat of government in the lower acropolis of Pantikapaion, today's Kerch. Photo 2011.

established in the second quarter of the sixth century BCE. Over the centuries, the embankment eroded and parts of the city fell into the sea; the Turks covered over the remaining ruins with a fortress.

- Opposite Nymphaion on today's Cape of Tuzla stood the Greek settlement of *Korokondame* (Corocondame), in whose necropolis anthropomorphic stone figures were discovered, some of which are adorned with Greek epigrams. They marked the graves of Sindi or, less likely, Scythians.
- The port city of *Gorgippia*, established in the middle of the sixth century BCE, lay 70 km south-east of Korokondame; today's Anapa stands on its ruins. Whether Gorgippia is identical with the 'Sindic harbour' mentioned by several ancient authors remains an open question. Gorgippia, which Strabo calls the 'king's seat of the Sindi', was mostly inhabited by Maiotic Sindi.¹³⁸ It seems that the majority of native Sindi and Greek traders and immigrants achieved a peaceful *modus vivendi*.

Around the year 480 BCE several Greek cities on both sides of the Cimmerian Bosphorus joined together to form a *symmachia* – a military alliance system analogous to the Attic Sea League – from which the **Bosporan Kingdom** (approx. 480 BCE until after 342 or 376 CE) emerged later. By this time the Greek settlements and emporia had come under pressure from the Pontic Scythians. After their victory over the Achaemenid king Darius in 513/12 BCE and the influx of new immigrants from Central Asia, the mounted nomads felt so emboldened that they undertook campaigns of war not only against the similarly expansionary Thracian Odrysian Kingdom, but also against the Greek colonies. However, Scythian groups had already gained a foothold in the north-east of Crimea in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, from where they threatened the Greek settlements located there. The Bosporan cities were initially under the leadership of the Milesian noble family of the Archaeanactidae. Four decades later, in 438 BCE, the Thracian Spartocid dynasty supplanted the Archaeanactidae in the Bosporan capital Pantikapaion.¹³⁹

Towards the end of the third century BCE, the Greeks' change of trade orientation towards Asia Minor and Egypt plunged the Bosporan Kingdom into an economic crisis. At the same time, the weakened Scythians left their tribal land between Dnieper and Don more or less without a fight to Sarmatian tribal groups



79. A lekythos, a Greek ceramic vessel to store oil, in the shape of a sitting sphinx from the Phanagoria necropolis near the Cossack village of Sennaya, Taman Peninsula, Krasnodar Krai, Russian Federation. First quarter of the fourth century BCE. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

and withdrew to western Crimea, threatening the Bosporan cities. The eastern part of the Bosporan Kingdom was also in a state of imminent danger, as the Sarmatian Siraces (Sirakoi) had forged a military alliance with the native Maiotes.¹⁴⁰ It was under this pressure that the last Spartocid, Peirisades V (r. ca. 140–109 BCE) turned to the king of Pontus, Mithridates VI (r. ca. 120/16–63 BCE) for help. The latter's general Diophantus destroyed king Palacus (Palakos) of Scythia Minor and his ally, the Sarmatian Roxolani, in several battles in two campaigns around the year 110/109 BCE.¹⁴¹ Immediately afterwards Mithridates VI extended his power over Colchis.¹⁴² The Pontic protectorate, however, did not bring prosperity back to the Bosporan cities. On the contrary: Mithridates' wars against Rome resulted in oppressive taxation.

When Mithridates fled from the Roman general Pompey to Crimea in 63 BCE, the Bosporean cities revolted, led by the wealthy trading city of Phanagoria. Mithridates' son Pharnaces joined them in their rebellion. Besieged in Pantikapaion, Mithridates was forced to commit suicide. As a token of gratitude for their uprising and commitment in the struggle against Mithridates, Rome granted Phanagoria independence.¹⁴³ The new king Pharnaces (r. 63–47 BCE) believed he could exploit the Roman civil war between Pompey and Caesar with an attack in Asia Minor. However, Caesar defeated him and his Sarmatian allies in 47 BCE at Zela – a victory commemorated by the famous dictum 'veni, vidi, vici'.¹⁴⁴ Resistance quickly arose once more in the cities east of the Cimmerian Bosphorus against the king of Pontus, Colchis and the Bosporean Kingdom, Polemon I (r. in the Bosporean Kingdom 14–8 BCE), a son of Pharnaces who had been installed by Rome. As a result, as Strabo reports, Polemon destroyed the rebellious city of Tanais as well as settlements and fortresses in the vicinity of Gorgippia. Later, however, he was captured and executed by Maiotic Aspurgians in the hinterland.¹⁴⁵

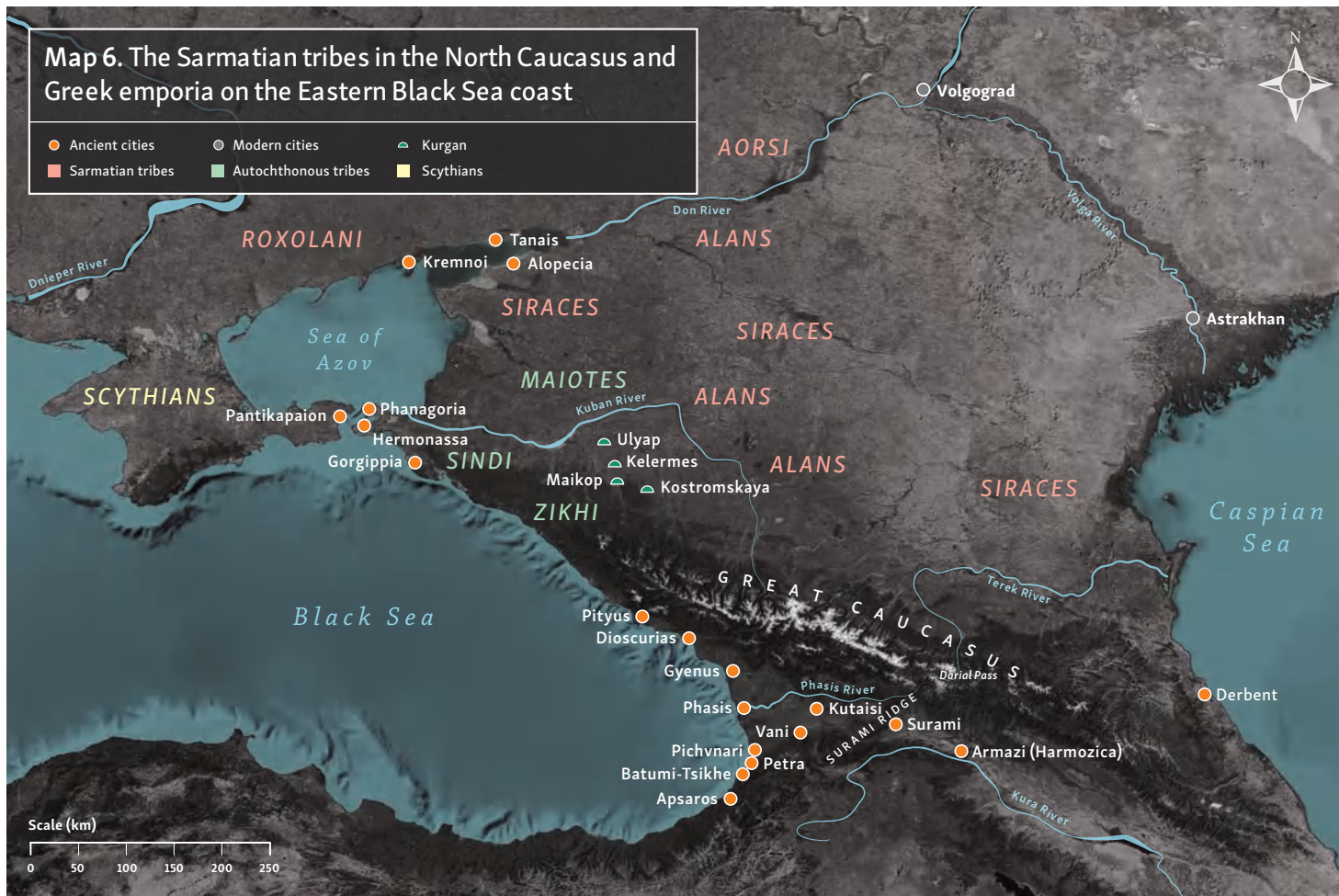
Shortly after the start of the Common Era, King Aspurgus (r. 10/11–37/38 CE) established a new dynasty of Bosporean rulers, which remained in power until the middle of the fourth century. Whether Aspurgus was really of Sarmatian descent is uncertain.¹⁴⁶ His name could be derived from the Persian *aspa*, 'horse', but also from the Aspurgians living between Phanagoria and Gorgippia, whom Strabo expressly counts among the Maiotes.¹⁴⁷ However, the stability of the Bosporean Kingdom remained dependent on Rome's military support, which is why it resembled a Roman protectorate. When the emboldened Crimean Scythians besieged Chersonesos, Emperor Nero, who also pursued an active and interventionist policy in the southern Caucasus, sent Roman troops, who defeated the Scythian aggressors in the year 63. From now on, Roman garrisons were stationed on Crimea, and a Roman fleet patrolled the Black Sea. The power struggle between Bosporeans and Crimean Scythians was settled in favour of the former thanks to Roman support. The end of the Bosporean cities coincided with the beginning of the *Völkerwanderung* when the Goths and Alans (after the year 240) and the Huns (around 375) destroyed most of the Bosporean cities, with the exception of Chersonesos.¹⁴⁸

2.4 Sarmatians, Alans and the Hun invasion

The presumed ancestors of the predominantly Indo-European **Sarmatians** – who did not form a unified ethnic group, nor even a federation, but a loose group of Iranian-speaking tribes – were the **Sauromatae**. Mentioned by Herodotus, they lived east of the River Tanais (Don). They were allies of the Scythians at the time

of the Persian invasion of Darius I and submitted themselves to the command of the Scythian subking Scopasis.¹⁴⁹ The most eastern group of the early Sarmatians led a nomadic existence in the Mangyshlak peninsula and the adjacent Ustyurt plateau in today's north-western Kazakhstan, whose landscape was less barren 2,500 years ago than today. These early Sarmatians were probably related to Herodotus' Massagetae and the tribal federation of the Dahae. In the fourth century BCE the last migration wave began of Iranian-speaking tribes moving from east to west. Lasting half a millennium, it led to the Iranization of individual regions in the middle North Caucasus.

The migration of Sarmatian tribes, whose lifestyles, armaments and crafts – though comparable – distinguished them from the Scythians, had multiple causes. The 'push factors' included the expansion of proto-Turco-Mongol peoples to the west, the climatic desiccation of the North Caspian regions, and perhaps demographic pressure. The most important 'pull factor' was the power vacuum which occurred among the Pontic Scythians after the death of King Agarus around 300 BCE. This westward trend becomes recognizable as Sarmatian tribes of the Prokhorovo culture west of the Urals crossed the River Don and infiltrated the regions of the Kuban and eastern North Pontic steppes.¹⁵⁰ Taking a snapshot around the middle of the second century BCE, the following picture emerges:¹⁵¹ The **Siraces** settled in the Kuma–Manych lowlands and the Kuban, where they became partly sedentary. At the same time they further expanded their settlement area along the middle and lower course of the Terek river and along its tributary, the Sunza. The Siraces thus settled across virtually the entire North Caucasian steppes and the wooded valleys to the south. This gave them the opportunity to control some important passes over the Greater Caucasus.¹⁵² Living to the north of the Siraces, between the Don and the middle Ural river, were the **Aorsi**. While Strabo states that the former could muster 20,000 mounted warriors, the latter were capable of presenting 200,000.¹⁵³ Around the beginning of the Common Era, the Aorsi were partly assimilated by the kindred Alans approaching from the Syr Darya area. They were also partly driven westwards. The **Roxolani**, whose name means 'radiant Aryans' or 'radiant Alans', lived to the west of the Aorsi, between the Don and the Dnieper. All these Sarmatian immigrants continued to trade with Central Asia from their new homeland, bringing the Bactrian camel to the North Caucasian and North Pontic regions. Strabo reports: 'They [the Aorsi] possessed a larger land [than the Siraces] and ruled almost the entire coast of the Caspian, so that they imported Indian and Babylonian goods



on camels.¹⁵⁴ In fact, archaeologists in Tanais and other neighbouring towns have discovered many camel bones.¹⁵⁵ The Aorsi controlled a portion of the transcontinental trade route that led from India and China via the Volga and Don delta to Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.

The Siraces frequently used existing Bronze Age kurgans to bury their dead. In many cases, added items such as swords or mirrors were intentionally broken during the interment. In the necropolises of the North Ossetian Mozdok plain, the Siraces adopted the custom of placing the dead in dolmen-like graves, although in a modified form. They sealed the catacomb graves with heavy millstones, which had a hole in the middle. This type of grave was adopted by the later Alans and their descendants the Ossetians, as revealed by the Alanic graves of the fourth century CE and by the medieval Ossetian graves of Zmeiskaya from the tenth to twelfth centuries. Later, the medieval Ossetians were content to put a real millstone (or a copy) into the tomb for their deceased. Indeed, up to the nineteenth century the Ossetians

cultivated the 'custom of (placing) a millstone on the grave of the last male member of the family or of an entire family'. As Anatoli Nagler points out, the 'development from the Sarmatian catacombs [with millstone closure] to the Alan graves and the Ossetian tombs is continuous'.¹⁵⁶

In the Kuma–Manych region and in the Kuban there was a mixture of peoples consisting of Greek immigrants, Sarmatian Siraces, and the native tribes of the Maiotes. In the pre-Christian centuries, the Siraces were the most active in foreign policy. They thus intervened several times in the events of the Bosporean Kingdom. The Siraces risked their first intervention in 310/09 BCE, when, in the fratricidal war between the legitimate crown prince Satyrus and his rebellious brother Eumelus, they supported the latter. Though Eumelus, who was supported by the Siraces' king Aripharnes, lost the battle against his elder brother and his Scythian allies, Satyrus would soon fall during the siege of the city to which Eumelus had retreated. Eumelus then ascended the Bosporean throne.¹⁵⁷ Among the Sarmatian tribes, the Siraces



were the most Hellenized. Many of them settled down and traded intensively with the Bosporan cities and, via Armenia, also with Mesopotamia. One example of such a strongly Hellenized city was Labryta, which stood in the hinterland of the Taman Peninsula about 30 km north-east of Gorgippia (Anapa), near the kurgan group known as the ‘Seven Brothers’ (in Russian Semibratnye kurgany).¹⁵⁸ In the later wars, however, the Siraces were often on the losing side. First, they were defeated in 47 BCE at the Battle of Zela, where Caesar smashed the Siracian king Abeacus (Abeakos) and his ally, the Aorsian king Spadinus, along with the Pontic king Pharnaces.¹⁵⁹ Around the beginning of the Common Era the Siraces had to gradually give way to the more numerous Aorsi and moved south. As a consequence, they fought against their northern neighbours in another fratricidal Bosporan war in the 40s CE. In the brutally waged war, they supported the anti-Roman Bosporan king Mithridates VIII (r. 39/40–44/5 CE) against the alliance that Mithridates’ challenger Cotys I (r. 45/6–67/8 CE) had forged with Rome and the Aorsian king Eunones. Mithridates and Cotys were sons of King Aspurgus. In 45 CE the Roman–Aorsian army won an overwhelming victory, whereas the Siraces quickly lost their military importance.¹⁶⁰

The victory of 45 CE consolidated Aorsian supremacy. The Aorsi inhabited the vast delta of the Don and the northern forest steppe, from where they had expelled the Scythians at the beginning of the third century BCE and destroyed their fortified settlements.¹⁶¹ The Aorsi formed their own federation. The archaeological finds suggest that the Iranian-speaking Aorsi pushed their way to the Don in several waves from the habitat of the Massagetae, situated between the Caspian Sea and the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. In doing so, they spread their Central Asian culture, which included Chinese elements in the decoration of weapons, to north-eastern Europe. While, in the long period of the first land seizure, the Aorsi often buried their dead leaders in already existing Scythian kurgans,¹⁶² from the middle of the first century CE they established their own earthen tumuli over

single graves. The dead were buried diagonally with their heads facing south in square burial chambers, the corners of which were aligned to the four cardinal directions. Despite their sword worship and obvious warlike character, they renounced both human and, by and large, animal sacrifices in their burials.¹⁶³

Among the most famous kurgans of the later Aorsi are those of Datchi (fig. 80) south of Azov, of Kobiakovo (fig. 82) near Rostov, and those of Khoklach north of Azov, which were all erected at the end of the first to the beginning of the second century CE. A noble woman was buried in each of the latter two: in Kobiakovo, a princess killed by an arrow, who was also interred with a Chinese mirror;¹⁶⁴ and in Khoklach, a noblewoman with possible religious functions (fig. 81).¹⁶⁵ The woman buried in Kobiakovo might have been killed in battle, which suggests that there were indeed female warriors among the later Scythians and Sarmatians, as reported by Herodotus,¹⁶⁶ or that females fulfilled defensive military functions when their men were far away at war.¹⁶⁷ That Scythian or Sarmatian women also served as warriors in the forest steppe zone has been indicated by the recent excavation of barrow 9 at the cemetery Devitsa V on the River Don dated to the second quarter of the fourth century BCE. Here, four women were found who had been buried with grave furniture including more than thirty iron arrow heads, daggers, iron knives and two spears. The eldest woman aged 45 to 50 years must have belonged to the elite as she wore a golden headdress, a kalathos, similar to the one discovered in Kurgan 8 at Piat’ Brat’ev in the delta of the Don.¹⁶⁸ In total, eleven burials of armed women have been excavated along the River Don since 2010.¹⁶⁹

The polychrome animal style in the gold work of the Sarmatians, especially that of the Aorsi and Alans, deviates from the classic animal style of the Scythians.¹⁷⁰ The polychrome gold work accentuated certain body parts such as eyes, ears, hooves, paws, shoulder and pelvic muscles with coloured inlays of almandine, garnet, carnelian, coral, turquoise and stained glass. Under the influence of Eastern Roman and Bosporan jewellery techniques the zoomorphic representations began to disappear from the third century CE, causing the polychrome animal style to vanish.¹⁷¹ The goldsmith’s art also included the adornment of the pommel of long cavalry swords with jade inlays, rock crystal or chalcedony. This novel knob ornamentation is found increasingly among the Aorsi and Alans from the second century CE and points to Chinese influence.¹⁷² Another custom observed at the same time among members of the Aorsi elite also reveals an origin in the east of Central Asia: intentional skull deformation, in which the back of the head was flattened and the forehead was raised backwards.¹⁷³

80. (previous page) Ceremonial dagger from Datchi, crafted in the Sarmato-Alan polychrome animal style, Kurgan 1, Datchi, Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation, end of the first century CE. The knob and the sheath with the four indentations are made of gold and decorated with turquoise and carnelian. On the knob a Bactrian camel is portrayed, and beneath it a griffin lunges at a standing camel; on the sheath a griffin attacks a kneeling camel four times. The dagger found in Datchi shows great similarity to the dagger from grave 4 at Tillya Tepe, northern Afghanistan (40–70 CE) and to the dagger from grave 6 in Kurgan 3 from Isakovka, Omsk district (Koryakova, in Aruz et al., *Golden Deer of Eurasia* (2006), pp. 108–10). The dagger from Datchi is most probably an import from the homeland of the Alans on the Syr Darya or from today’s Kazakhstan. Azov History, Archaeology and Palaeontology Museum Preserve, Azov.



81. Completed copy after the original diadem, discovered in 1864, of Khoklach kurgan at Novocherkassk, Rostov Oblast, Russian Federation, end of the first/beginning of the second century CE. The diadem, made in the Sarmato-polychrome animal style for a noblewoman of the Aorsi, reveals an Alan influence. The diadem's band is decorated with garnets, turquoise, pearls and coloured glass; in the centre is an amethyst bust of a woman, while on the upper rim deer approach trees of life. The woman may have worn the diadem during religious rituals. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

At the beginning of the first century CE, the **Alans**, who came from Central Asia and spoke an Iranian language, advanced to the Don. There they assimilated the Aorsi, before soon afterwards advancing together to the west and south, to the Kuban and the middle North Caucasus – in short, to the settlement areas of the Siraces. This marked the beginning of an Iranization of the central North Caucasus. While the Siraces had more or less adopted a sedentary way of life, the Alans remained faithful to their semi-mobile tradition until the fourth or fifth century. In the Kuban, the settlements gradually disappeared, while the Maiotes living there were displaced to the wooded coastal areas. The Maiotes living to the south and south-west of the Kuban river and the tribal association of the **Zikhi** are regarded as the ancestors of the Adygeans. According to Strabo, the Zikhi (whom he calls Zygi) lived beyond the Sindi in the coastal region between today's Novorossiysk and Tuapse.¹⁷⁴ To their east lived the Kasog who had merged with the Zikhi by the tenth century; the Arab historian and geographer al-Masudi (896–956) called this confederation the Keshak.¹⁷⁵

Although the Alans took control of important mountain passes from the Siraces, some of the foothills of the Greater Caucasus remained in the hands of local tribes. To protect themselves from attacks by native mountain tribes, the Alans erected chains of fortifications and signal towers that formed a kind of 'Alanian *Limes*' and secured the southern border. One

example of this is found along the Podkumok river in the southern Kislovodsk basin. Eventually, after the destructive war campaigns of the Hunnic bands, the sedentary Alans built defensive hamlets and cave castles from the fifth century onwards.¹⁷⁶

According to the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–395), the Alans worshipped the sword in a similar way to the Maiotes:

*No temple or shrine is found among them, [...] but their savage custom is to stick a naked sword in the earth and worship it as the god of war, the presiding deity of the region over which they range.*¹⁷⁷

The warlike Alans gladly allowed themselves to be used by foreign powers for military campaigns south of the Caucasus. As early as the year 35 CE, Alanian and Siracian bands crossed the Darial Pass, which was named after them the 'Gate of the Alans', *Dar-e Alan* in Persian.¹⁷⁸ They backed the Iberian king Pharasmanes I (r. ca. 35–before 75) against the Parthian prince Orodes, when he tried to expel the brother of Pharasmanes, Mithridates, whom Rome had installed as king of Armenia. The Iberian–Alanian–Siracian army defeated the Parthians, who were supported by Aorsian mercenaries.¹⁷⁹ In the year 72, Alanian troops plundered Atropatene (in the south of Azerbaijan and north-west Iran), after either Pharasmanes I or Mithrdat Mithridates (Mithrdat) II (r. before 75–106/10 CE) had approved their free

passage through the Iberian kingdom. The Parthian ruler of Atropatene, Pacorus II (r. 51–78), fled to the mountains, leaving the Alans to plunder the land unhindered. They then proceeded to attack Armenia and in one battle nearly captured the Armenian king Tiridates (Trdat) I (r. ca. 54–58 and 62/63–72/75 or 88). As the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100) reports:

*Tiridates [...] narrowly escaped being taken alive in the engagement: for a noose was thrown around him by a distant enemy who would have dragged him off, had he not instantly cut the rope with his sword and succeeded in escaping.*¹⁸⁰

The Parthian king Vologeses I (r. 51–78), brother of Pacorus II, subsequently asked the Roman emperor Vespasian (r. 69–79) for military assistance. While Vespasian did not send legionaries, in the year 75 he did have Roman military architects renovate and extend the strategic fortress Armazi (Harmozica), located 20 km west of Tbilisi at the confluence of the Mtkvari

(Kura) and Aragvi rivers. The mighty fortress complex controlled access from the Darial Pass to the Iberian plain.¹⁸¹ But because Rome did not station its own garrison in Armazi, the Iberian king could always reopen the floodgates for Alanian military expeditions to the south. Indeed, it was sixty years later that the Iberian king Pharasmanes II (r. ?–141), who wanted to demonstrate his independence from Rome, allowed the Alans to march through Iberia to attack Caucasian Albania and the Parthian region of Media Atropatene. After the Parthian king Vologeses III (r. ca. 105–47) bought their withdrawal, they marched through and plundered Armenia, then attacked Roman Cappadocia, only to then be repulsed by the commander and governor of Cappadocia, Flavius Arrianus (the historian Arrian) in 135.¹⁸²

The contemporary historian Ammianus Marcellinus reported that in the early 370s another warlike nation of horsemen nomads emerged from Central Asia: the **Huns**. For the first time, it was not an Indo-European people from Central Asia that had pushed westwards, but an Altaic people. The tribal



82. Gold torc of a princess from Kobiakovo near Rostov, Russian Federation, end of the first/beginning of the second century CE. In the centre of this piece of jewellery, made in the polychrome animal style of the Sarmatians, a bearded man sits on a carpet with a chequerboard pattern; a sword rests on his thighs. On each side three anthropomorphic figures with monkey heads wrestle playfully with a winged dragon, which could indicate a Chinese influence. Regional Museum of Rostov, Archaeological Preserve.





association of the Huns were most likely descendants of the east-Central Asian Xiongnu and were probably led by a Turkic elite.¹⁸³ Where the Alans were the last Iranian-speaking tribe to migrate from east to west, the Huns were the first Altaic-speaking Turco-Mongols to do so. With the migration of the Huns began the transformation of ‘the Eurasian steppes from being inhabited by Indo-European speakers of largely West Eurasian ancestry to the mostly Turkic-speaking groups of the present day, who are primarily of East Asian ancestry’.¹⁸⁴ Before 375, probably in 371, they had already defeated the Alans on the Don, some of whom fled to the North Caucasus. The Huns incorporated the remaining Alanian fighters into their army as auxiliary troops and advanced further west, then defeating the Ostrogothic Greuthungi in the years 375–6.¹⁸⁵ The latter escaped into the territory of the Visigothic Thervingi, whom they drove into the Roman Empire. These, in turn, inflicted a devastating defeat on Rome at the Battle of Adrianople in 378.¹⁸⁶ The Huns also owed their victories to their superior weaponry. They possessed a 120-centimetre-long, asymmetrical reflex bow with glued bone reinforcements, and their arrows, which were equipped with heavy iron points, could penetrate the Alanian scale and chain armour. (Be that as it may, the glued Hun bow was susceptible to damp weather.)¹⁸⁷ The destruction of the military power of the Alans paved the way for the unhindered irruption of equestrian Turkic tribes into the North Caucasus from the late fifth century. Among them were the **Utigurs** and the **Sabirs** roaming in the Steppes between the Sea of Azov and the Caspian, and the **Onogurs** living further west. The relation between the Onogurs and the **Protobulgars**, who in the earlier 630s founded the short-lived empire of Greater Bulgaria (Bulgaria Magna), remains disputed. The first capital of Greater Bulgaria, from *ca.* 632 till 665, was Phanagoria on the Taman Peninsula. More than half a century earlier, a **Western Turkic**

army had reached the Taman Peninsula. It then crossed in the winter 576–7 the (probably frozen) Cimmerian Bosphorus, captured the Byzantine city of Pantikapaion, but initially failed to capture the heavily fortified city of Chersonesos.¹⁸⁸

Around the year 395/6, powerful Hunnic bands under the leaders **Basikh** and **Kursikh** plundered the Caucasus and devastated Syria, parts of Anatolia and Mesopotamia, where their raid was halted by the Persian Sassanians. Then they retreated along the west coast of the Caspian Sea, past burning natural gas and oil wells on the Absheron peninsula near Baku, and crossed the bottleneck of Derbent.¹⁸⁹ The Maiotes living near the coast in the north-west of the Caucasus were largely unaffected by the Hunnic wars, however. Around the year 440, under their leader Kheran, Hunnic groups living in the North Caucasus, presumably present-day Dagestan, intervened in the war between rebellious Armenian princes and their Sassanian overlords and inflicted a bloody defeat on the Sassanian troops. However, when the Armenian prince Vardan Mamikonian again asked the North Caucasian Huns for help in 451, another pro-Sasanian Armenian prince who had occupied the Derbent defile prevented the latter from advancing. In 454 or 455, the Hun Empire’s supremacy was shattered after the devastating defeat at the hands of the East Germanic Gepids on the Nedao river in Pannonia. As a result, the Alans were able to regain their independence. An intense wave of resettlement began in the Kislovodsk basin, fuelled by Alanian returnees from Western Europe. The Alans spread out along the northern rim of the Greater Caucasus and settled in valleys south of the mountain ridge. At the head of the Alanian confederation was a king. After its involvement in the Byzantine–Sasanian Wars, the confederation formed the independent mountain kingdom of Alania in the tenth century.¹⁹⁰

83. (previous pages) Medieval, 25- to 30-metre-high fortified towers at the fortified settlement of Erzi on the hillside above the Armkhi river, Dzheirakh district, Ingushetia, Russian Federation. The North Caucasian fortified settlements in the mountains mostly belonged to family groups and offered protection against other clans. Photo 2017.



The South Caucasus under Achaemenid Supremacy, Armenian Kingdoms and Pontus

*'O King, either strive to be stronger than Rome, or do her bidding
without a word.'*

The Roman general Gaius Marius demands obedience from the king of Pontus,
MITHRIDATES VI in the year 98 BCE.¹

1. Achaemenid supremacy

Before states were formed in the southern Caucasus on an ethnic basis, the majority of the region was under Achaemenid rule. Greek seamen and merchants had established trading posts in the coastal area of Colchis. After the fall of the Medes in 550 BCE, the Achaemenids seized control of the former Urartian dominion, by 547 BCE at the latest.² Various, somewhat contradictory Persian and Greek texts give information about the extension and territorial structuring of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE) in the Caucasus in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. On the one hand, there are seven Persian inscriptions which list the peoples of the empire, of which the inscriptions of Bisotun (Behistun), of Naqsh-e Rostam (486 BCE) and of Xerxes in Tushpa/Van (480 BCE) are the most instructive.³ On the other hand,

Hecataeus of Miletus (*ca.* 560–480 BCE) mentions Armenians (*Armenoi*) for the first time around the year 525 BCE,⁴ and Herodotus reports two different categorizations: one deals with a division of the empire into twenty administrative units, called satrapies, ordered by Darius; the second is the army formation of Xerxes in Doriscus, Greek Thrace, from the year 480 BCE, ordered according to people.⁵ In the inscription of Bisotun, Darius I legitimizes his seizure of power and boasts of how he defeated his nine adversaries, whom he calls ‘lying kings’ (fig. 84). One of these rivals ‘was Arakha, an Armenian; he lied, saying: “I am Nebuchadnezzar [Nabu-kudra-asura], son of Nabonidus.” He made Babylon to revolt.’ It is remarkable that an Armenian posed as the alleged son of the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which had perished in 539 BCE. The impostor Arakha, whom the Persian commander Intaphrenes (*Vidafarnâ*) defeated and captured, was crucified by Darius. Darius had not only to prevail against Arakha,



84. On the rock relief of Bisotun, carved around 516 BCE, the King of Kings Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) proclaims his victory over the nine rebellious kings, who appear before him with their hands bound behind their backs and chained together by the neck. The seventh captured king standing before Darius is the Armenian Arakha, who pretended to be the son of the last New Babylonian king Nabonidus. Photo 2001.



85. Painted dome of the Thracian tomb of Kazanlak from the fourth/third century BCE, Thrace, Bulgaria. On the occasion of the princely couple's burial, competitions such as chariot races were held (at the top of the dome), and horses were sacrificed. Photo 2019.

but also to crush an uprising in Armenia in 521 BCE. The recapture of Armenia was only possible after two campaigns and five battles, in three of which the Armenian or Urartian commander Dâdarshi, in Darius' service, was victorious.⁶

While it remains uncertain in the case of the proclamation of Bisotun whether the twenty-three different toponyms designate geographical regions or administrative units,⁷ Herodotus' division into twenty satrapies clearly refers to administrative units and the respectively owed taxation.⁸ Four of these satrapies are relevant for the southern Caucasus: the XIth Satrapy also included the region of Caspiane, thus Azerbaijan and the north-west of modern-day Iran; the XIIIth Satrapy extended from the Armenian heartland around Lake Van to the Black Sea; the XVIIIth Satrapy lay north-east and east of the XIIIth and consisted of the Alarodians (Urartians of the Ararat plain), the Saspirens (in Iberia or central and eastern Georgia) and the Matienians, the former Mannaeans; the XIXth Satrapy enclosed

the west Iberian tribe of the Moschi (Moskhoi), who lived in the north-east of Anatolia and in the south-west of Georgia, with the Colchic Mares living north of them as well as the Tibareni, Macrones and Mosynoeci (Mosynoikoi) located west of the Moschi. Although the tribes and principalities of Colchis and their northern neighbours up to the Greater Caucasus were in the Achaemenid sphere of influence, they were not subject to satraps and did not have to pay tribute. Every five years, however, they were obliged to give a 'voluntary' gift in the form of one hundred young men and women each. According to Xerxes' army formation they also provided troops.⁹ Insofar as Colchis belonged to the Achaemenid sphere of influence, the empire dominated the coasts of the Black Sea from Thrace in the west to Abkhazia in the south-east. In 450/49 BCE, Athens affirmed in the so-called Peace of Callias that Persian warships could sail the entire Black Sea up to the Symplegades, the confluence of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Pericles, however, de facto nullified this agreement in the



86. Ruins of the medieval fortress Batumi-Tsikhe (Tamaris-Tsikhe) near Batumi, Georgia. The castle goes back to the fortress of Losorium built by Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565), which possibly stood on a Greek site. Photo 2018.

year 436/35 BCE by sending a fleet to Sinope and probably also to Colchis, making the Colchian coastal towns allies of Athens.¹⁰

We know that the Achaemenid Empire stretched from the Mediterranean and Black seas to the Indus, but the extent to which it stretched north into the northern Caucasus is disputed. According to Herodotus, the Greater Caucasus formed the northern border. However, Herodotus also reports that Darius had eight fortresses built near the Oarus river standing about 60 stadia (about 11 km) apart, the ruins of which still stood in Herodotus' time. The construction took place during his second Scythian campaign from 513–512 BCE, in which he attacked from the west and pursued the Scythians fleeing to the east until beyond the Tanais. He then returned with his army westward.¹¹ The Oarus river is identified either with the Volga or the Sal, a tributary of the Don. According to Herodotus, Darius and his army spent a little more than sixty days beyond the bridge over the Danube. Given that the distance between the bridge and

the Sal – which, as Herodotus points out, flows into the Lake of Maiotis (the Sea of Azov) – is 1,200 km as the crow flies, the Persian army would have had to march about 45 km a day, which is hard to conceive. Bruno Jacobs consequently hypothesized that a second Persian army must have penetrated Maiotis to attack the Scythians in a pincer movement. This second army detachment is nevertheless speculative. In fact, there are no archaeological relics suggesting that there was a permanent Achaemenid presence in the North Caucasus between the year 512 BCE and the Persian defeat at Plataea (479 BCE).¹² Moreover, Herodotus writes that Darius left the eight forts 'half-finished'. On the other hand, architectural finds in central Georgia prove that Iberia actually belonged to the Achaemenid Empire.¹³ Today's Azerbaijan was also part of the Achaemenid Empire, as can be seen from the large palace complex of Gurban Tepe at Karajamirli. The palace, which also had an impressive audience hall, was surrounded by extensive gardens, called *paradeisoi* in

Greek. According to the archaeologists Florian Knauss and Ilyas Babaev, the floor plan of the residence, which probably served as a (seasonal?) seat of a satrap, was based on the palace of Xerxes (r. 486–465 BCE); it can also be dated to the first half of the fifth century BCE.¹⁴ As the temple complex of Dedoplist Mindori near the city of Gori in central Georgia reveals, Achaemenid palace and temple architecture continued to influence Iberian architecture at the turn of the second and the first century BCE. The eight temples not only had central porticoes, modelled on the Persian ones, but the Iberian column capitals in the form of an open lotus blossom were strikingly similar to the Achaemenid bell-shaped column bases. The temple complex belonged to the nearby palace of Dedoplist Gora, which was built at the same time; the latter was probably the residence of a king of Kartli or an *eristavi* (feudal provincial governor).¹⁵ The palace and temple complex were destroyed at the end of the first century CE, either during the Alanian invasion of the year 72 or during the Iberian–Armenian war around the year 100.

2. The Hellenization of Colchis

Colchis, which was freed from tribute payments to the Achaemenids, was politically fragmented. In contrast to the Hellenistic settlements in Maiotis, where the settlers also looked for opportunities for agricultural cultivation, the Miletian city founders sought in Colchis exclusively new markets and especially new resources. The latter included gold and iron, wood for shipbuilding, wax and resin for sealing ship hulls, linen and not least slaves, which the Colchians procured on raids. After a first phase of a pre-colonial trade, trade settlements were founded along the Colchian coast in the sixth century BCE. The most significant from the beginning of that century were: *Phasis* (near today's Georgian port city of Poti), *Gyenus* (Ochamchire in Abkhazia, Georgia), and *Dioscurias* (Eshera near Sukhumi in Abkhazia, Georgia), which the Romans called Sebastopolis.¹⁶ On the basis of pottery finds, *Batumi-Tsikhe* (north of Batumi, Georgia) and



87. The fortress of Sarapana (Shorapani), described by Strabo already in ancient times, guarded the western entrance to the Surami Gorge, which had to be crossed by the trade caravans between the Caspian Sea and Black Sea. The present ruins date from the seventeenth–eighteenth century. Photo 2018.

the Byzantine fortress of *Petra* (Tsikhisdziri, south of Kobuleti, Georgia) may also have originally been Greek colonies from the sixth century BCE. *Pichvnari* (north of Kobuleti, Georgia), whose Greek name is unknown, dates from the fifth century BCE.¹⁷ Whether the Roman fortress of *Pityus* (Pitsunda, Abkhazia, Georgia) from the middle of the second century CE was of Greek origin is uncertain.¹⁸ The Roman–Byzantine army camp of *Apsaros* (Gonio, south of Batumi, Georgia), on the other hand, was founded in the first century CE. The large fortress complex in the Greek hinterland of *Archaeopolis/Arkhaiopolis* (Nokalakevi) is an early Byzantine building that was built on the site of a significantly older settlement from the seventh to sixth century BCE. While this early settlement was not Greek, it traded with the coastal towns.¹⁹ Phasis was the most important of these emporia, as it stood at the mouth of the river of the same name. The river was navigable to Sarapana (Shorapani), from where trade caravans reached the Caspian Sea via the Surami Gorge and River Araxes.²⁰

The selective Greek colonization of the Colchian coast and the intensive trade exchange with the local Colchians, including the Heniochi who were dreaded pirates and raiders,²¹ led to a profound Hellenization of the Colchian elite. This cultural assimilation was reflected, for example, in the mintage of local coins, which at first resembled Miletian coins, but were later modelled on the gold staters of Alexander and Lysimachus.²² Subsequently, both Greek and Colchian burials revealed the typical Greek custom of the Charon's obol, i.e. placing a silver coin under the tongue of the deceased. The coin was to be handed over to the ferryman Charon as payment when crossing the River Styx into the realm of the dead.²³ Hellenistic architecture also had a strong influence on Colchian urban planning, as the example of *Vani* shows. A settlement and temple town in Imereti, which stood on a hillside and boasted richly endowed rock tombs, Vani's ruins attest to an eventful history (figs 88–90). In the eighth–seventh century BCE, there was a small settlement of simple log houses



88. Golden temple ornament in the shape of two horsemen standing on a cart, fourth century BCE, grave 6, Vani, Imereti, Georgia. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Vani Archaeological Reserve, Tbilisi.



89. Bronze figure of Nike, the winged goddess personifying victory, second century BCE, Vani, Georgia. The 22-centimetre-high figure was an appliqué affixed to a large vessel. Vani, Imereti, Georgia. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Vani Archaeological Reserve, Tbilisi.



90. Portico and eastern entrance to the lower terrace of Vani, Imereti, Georgia, second century BCE. Photo 2018.

built from whole tree trunks, and probably also a regional site of worship. In the second period (sixth century to about 350 BCE), wooden buildings stood on all three terraces, including a temple consecrated to an unknown deity. Some of the richest graves come from this phase, a time when trade with the Greek colonies flourished. The burial items excavated there consisted of high-quality Persian silver objects, imported Greek gold objects and ornate objects of local production.

In the third period of Vani (*ca.* 350 to *ca.* 250 BCE), stone buildings with tiled roofs were erected under Greek influence and Greek burial rituals were adopted. At the same time, the now widespread custom of burying the dead in large, clay storage vessels and depositing them in rock tombs was not of Greek, but rather Armenian origin. Sacrificed servants and domestic animals were now interred with their masters and laid to rest on a nearby stone bench. Wealthy city dwellers were buried in subterranean wooden constructions that resembled residential dwellings. Finally, smaller anthropomorphic metal figures about 10 to 20 cm high were sewn into clothes and buried at the entrance to the temple. These figurines likely replaced human sacrifices symbolically. Excavated Greek inscriptions – such as a longer text on a

bronze plaque from about 300 BCE which mentions the Greek earth goddess Ge, the sun god Helios and the moon deity Meis – suggest that in Vani Greek served as the official and colloquial language of the Colchian elite. Following its destruction in the middle of the third century BCE, during the time of civil war within the Seleucid Empire (312–64 BCE), Vani was rebuilt purely as a fortified temple city. In this last period (*ca.* 250–50 BCE), both the houses and the custom of digging rock tombs inside the perimeter of the city disappeared. From this last phase, ruins of fortifications, defensive towers, the city gate and a temple complex built from large basalt blocks are still visible on the lower terrace. On the middle terrace, there are traces of a temple with a mosaic floor, presumably dedicated to Dionysus, an altar with twelve steps and a round temple; and on the upper terrace, there are remains of another altar and sacrificial platforms.²⁴ Most likely the temple mentioned by Strabo in honour of the sea goddess Leucothea stood in Vani;²⁵ it is less probable, however, that Vani is identical with the town of Surium mentioned by Pliny the Elder.²⁶ As Strabo reports, Vani was devastated twice in the middle of the first century BCE: in 49 BCE by the king of Pontus, Pharnaces II and in 47 BCE by the Roman ally, Mithridates of Pergamon, an illegitimate son of Mithridates VI.²⁷



91. Stone figure of the head of King Antiochus I of Commagene (r. 69–34 BCE) and of an eagle, western terrace of the Hierothesion of Nemrud Dağı, south-eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Antiochus proclaimed on inscriptions that he was descended from the Armenian royal dynasty of the Orontids. Photo 2001.

3. Early kingdoms of Armenia

The first ethno-linguistically defined states in the southern Caucasus emerged from the Achaemenid and Seleucid satrapies, first and foremost Armenia. A kingdom of Armenia was formed in the Greater Armenian region (map 7), during whose almost eight-hundred-year history – from about 336 BCE to 428 CE – three dynasties ruled with minor interruptions: the Orontid, also called the Eruandid or Yervanduni dynasty (*ca.* 401–336 as a satrapy, *ca.* 336–200 BCE as a kingdom), the Artaxiad dynasty (200–189 as a satrapy, 189 BCE–2 CE as a kingdom), and the Arsacid dynasty (54–428 CE).²⁸ The historical development of these three dynasties always depended on the strategy of the neighbouring great powers, Rome and Iran. The same applies to the kingdoms of Iberia and Caucasian Albania, though the reconstruction of their respective histories is less certain.

3.1 Armenian dynasties of the Orontids/Yervanduni and early Artaxiad

Armenian is unique among Indo-European languages and not related genetically to any other. It is assumed that tribes of the Proto-Armenians, who were probably linguistically close to the Phrygians, immigrated in the first half of the second millennium BCE from the north-west, probably from Thrace, to Anatolia and took part in the destruction of the Hittite Empire in the twelfth century BCE.²⁹ The degree to which the Proto-Armenians were linguistically related to the Phrygians remains open to debate. In any event, they were not pure ‘Phrygian colonists’ as Herodotus believed.³⁰ In the course of the centuries that followed, they migrated further to the east, until they reached their historical settlement area around the eighth century BCE. By the middle of the first millennium BCE, the Armenian language had completely supplanted the Urartian. For historical reasons, there are Hurrian and Urartian substrates in the Armenian language; nevertheless,

the greatest influence on classical Armenian was exerted by the Parthian and Persian languages. Classical Armenian, called *Grabar*, formed the basis of the Armenian alphabet at the beginning of the fifth century CE. It was used until the nineteenth century, but later only remained in use as church language. In day-to-day life, it was replaced by the modern written language.³¹ The Armenians' self-designation is *Hay*, plural *Hayk*; they call their country *Hayastan*. According to the Armenian tradition, specifically as it was handed down by the Armenian historian Movses (Moses) Khorenatsi from the late eighth or ninth century CE, Hayk was a son of Togarmah, who was a great-grandson of Noah. This Hayk allegedly emigrated from Babylon to the Ararat plain to become the progenitor of all Armenians.³² As already mentioned, an etymological connection between the toponym *Hayastan* and the confederation of Khayasa (fourteenth–thirteenth century BCE) is unlikely.³³ Another theory that belongs to the realm of mythology is that of Tamaz Gamkrelidze and Vyacheslav Ivanov from the 1980s, according to which the Armenian plateau is not only the original home of the Armenians, but indeed of all Indo-Europeans.³⁴

Two types of sources provide information about the early satraps and kings of the Orontids, in Armenian 'Eruandids'. On the one hand, there are the inscriptions engraved on stone stelae, which King Antiochus I of Commagene (r. 69–34 BCE) erected at his hierothesion, a combined shrine and tomb monument located on Mount Nemrud Dağı (today in south-east Turkey). The inscriptions there proclaim the royal descent from the Orontids (fig. 91). On the other hand, we have information from classical historians, in particular from the *Anabasis* of Xenophon (ca. 426–354 BCE), the 'March of the Ten Thousand', written around 370 BCE. The *Anabasis* tells the story of the return of the Greek contingent of troops led by Xenophon in 401–400 BCE from Kunaxa north of Babylon through enemy territory to Trabzon. Xenophon mentions two high Persian officials in Armenia. First, he describes the son-in-law of the Achaemenid King of Kings Artaxerxes II (r. 404–358 BCE) named **Orontes/Yervand I**, satrap of the 'great and rich satrapy Armenia', to whom Artaxerxes had married his daughter Rhodogune; second, he tells of Tiribazus, satrap of Western Armenia who was a privileged friend of the King of Kings.³⁵ At the time, Western Armenia was located north-west of the Upper Euphrates. The name 'Orontes' is of Iranian origin and derived from *aurand*, 'hero', 'mighty'.³⁶ Strabo later pointed out that Orontes was a descendant of Hydarnes I, one of the 'Seven Persians', including Darius himself, who, according to Herodotus, overthrew the impostor Gaumata and placed Darius

on the throne.³⁷ Hydarnes II commanded the Persian elite troops of 'ten thousand immortals' in the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE.³⁸ It seems that before Orontes I, a **Hydarnes III (Idernes)** and his son **Terituchmes** may have been satraps of Armenia.³⁹ **Orontes I** (in office in Armenia 401–366/62? BCE) had supported King Artaxerxes against his rebellious brother and the Greek mercenary army at the battle of Kunaxa in the autumn of 401 BCE. Although he enjoyed a high degree of independence in his Armenian satrapy, this did not prevent him from rebelling against the King of Kings in 366 or 362. But Artaxerxes pardoned him and sent him into exile, probably to Mysia in north-west Anatolia, where he died in 344 BCE.

Since the available information is fragmentary, the successor to the satrap Orontes I can only be loosely reconstructed. Armenia's next satrap was probably the Achaemenid **Artašiyāta**, in Greek called **Codomannus** (in office ?–before 338 BCE), who in the year 336 BCE became King of Kings under the name Darius III (r. 336–30 BCE) and, five years later, was



92. Dexiosis relief with King Antiochus of Commagene and Heracles, Hierothesion of Arsameia on the Nymphaios, first century BCE, south-eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Photo 2001.

defeated by Alexander in the decisive Battle of Gaugamela near Arbil. Artašiyāta was followed by **Orontes (Yervand) II** (in office *ca.* 338–331? BCE), who, according to an inscription from Commagene, took the royal title around 336 BCE. Yervand II personally led the Armenian corps, which counted 40,000 foot soldiers and 7,000 cavalry warriors, to the Battle of Gaugamela on 1 October 331 BCE, where he was presumably killed. The victor, Alexander the Great, never set foot in the Caucasus. Nonetheless, he appointed Yervand's supposed son **Mithranes** (r. 331–*ca.* 317 BCE), who had taken sides with the Macedonian invader, as the new vassal king of Armenia. In the years 323–321 BCE, the Macedonian **Neoptolemus** briefly seized the Greater Armenian throne. After Alexander's death, which made sovereignty possible for Armenia for a short period, the Wars of the Diadochi (Alexander's successors) broke out in 323 in the course of which Seleucus I Nicator (r. as king 305–281 BCE) secured the vast area between the Euphrates and India for himself. In the year 301 BCE, he extended his sovereignty over East Armenia, and **Orontes III** (r. *ca.* 317–260 BCE) was downgraded to the status of a Seleucid vassal. During the Seleucid Empire, the Armenian territory was

divided into four kingdoms: Greater Armenia (Armenia Major, Mec Hayk) east of the Euphrates, Lesser Armenia (Armenia Minor, Pokr Hayk) north-west of the Euphrates, the small kingdom of Sophene (Dsopk) south-west of Greater Armenia and further west the even smaller kingdom of Commagene.⁴⁰ The Euphrates now emerged as a strategically important natural border, first between Greater and Lesser Armenia, then between the zones of influence of Rome and Persia, and, finally, as a direct border between the two great powers.

The Armenian kings tried to pursue independent policies, which provoked punitive actions from the Seleucids. When King **Arsames** (r. after 260–*ca.* 228 BCE) granted safe haven to the rebellious brother of Seleucus II in Armenia, he lost his throne. Even worse was the fate of his successor **Xerxes** (r. 228–*ca.* 212 BCE), when he refused to pay Antiochus III (r. 222–187 BCE) the tribute his father owed. After Antiochus laid siege to him in Arsamosata (today Elazığ, eastern Turkey), he capitulated and Antiochus then gave him his sister Antiochis as his wife. But she turned out to be a female 'Trojan horse', for shortly after their marriage she had Xerxes murdered. Doubtless the last Orontid/Eruandid of



93. Bronze figurine of a wolf or a dog, sixth–fifth century BCE, Ayrum, Tavush Province, Armenia. In ancient Armenia, wolves and dogs were considered helpful and healing. In Armenian mythology, the spirits called *Aralez* appeared in the shape of dogs and used to heal wounded warriors in battle by licking their wounds; they were even able to bring fallen warriors back to life (Grigoryan, *Au pied du Mont Ararat* (2007), p. 166). National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.

Greater Armenia was **Orontes IV** (r. 212–200 BCE), who introduced a comprehensive urban planning programme. He had Erebuni and Van rebuilt and moved the capital from Armavir further west to Ervandashat, in whose western vicinity the religious centre of Bagaran arose.⁴¹ However, Antiochus III tried to destabilize Orontes IV and encouraged two Armenian princes, Artaxias (Armenian Artashes, Persian Artaxerxes) and Zariadris (Armenian Zareh), to revolt, which led to the fall and death of Orontes IV and his brother Ervaz in 200 BCE. Antiochus took the opportunity to reintegrate the insubordinate Armenians into the Seleucid Empire. In Greater Armenia, he installed **Artaxias I** (r. 200/189–159 BCE) as strategos (military governor), in Sophene **Zariadris** (r. ca. 200–ca. 163 BCE) and in Lesser Armenia his nephew **Mithridates**. All three rulers were tribute-paying vassals.⁴²

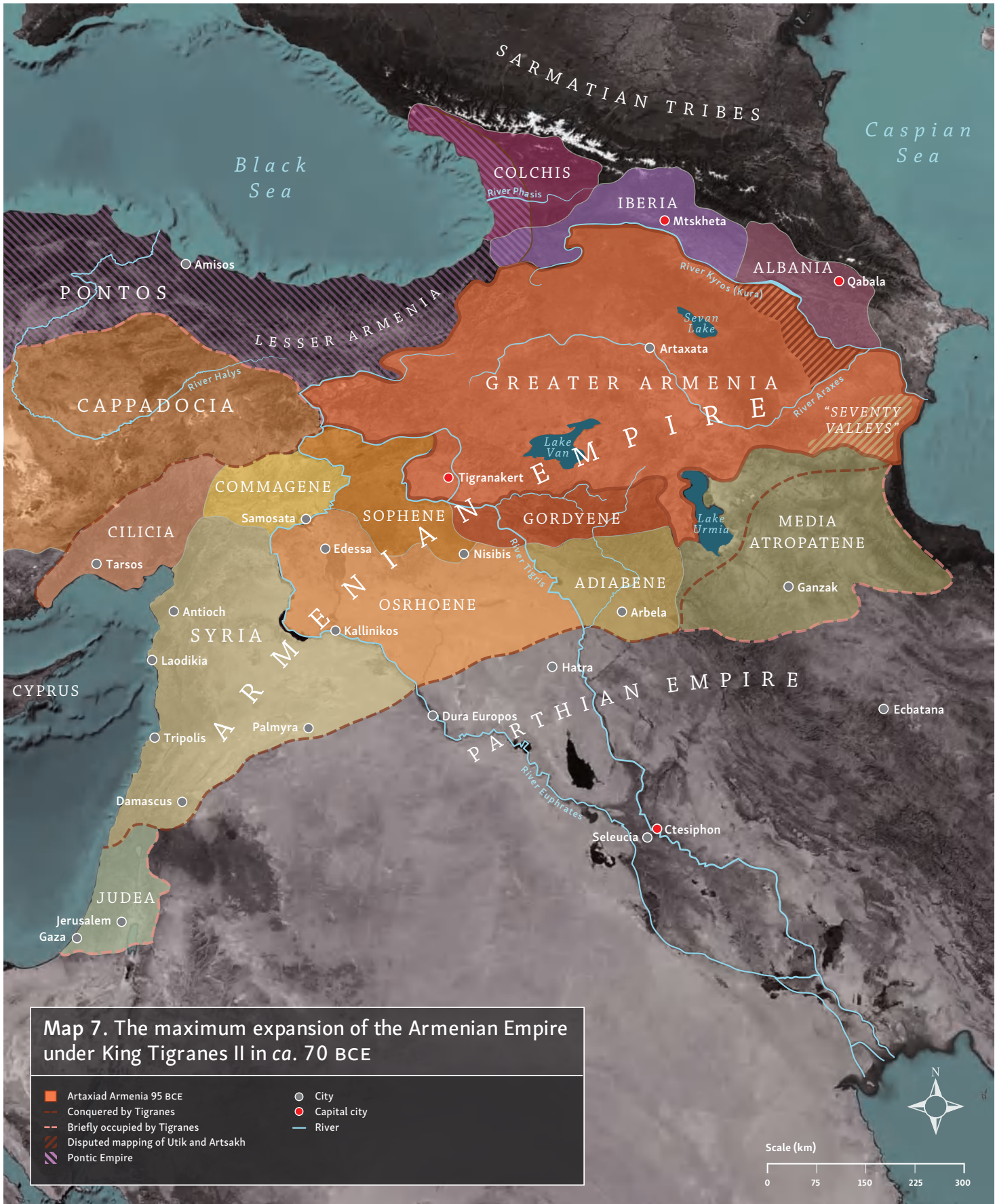
The impetuous, westward-advancing Antiochus, who wanted to resurrect the Seleucid Empire to its former size, conquered large parts of Asia Minor in 197 BCE and threatened an ally of Rome, Attalus I of Pergamon (r. 241–197 BCE). He then crossed the Hellespont to Thrace, overextending his power and colliding with the similarly expanding Roman Republic. The Macedonian king Philip V (r. 221–179 BCE) had earlier provoked Rome in the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE) through a pact with Hannibal and an alliance with Antiochus. Rome marched into the Aegean region and in 197 BCE defeated Philip in the Battle of Cynoscephalae in Thessaly. As a result, Macedonia became a Roman protectorate; its eastern boundary bordered Thrace, which was part of the Seleucid zone of power. When Antiochus welcomed Rome's arch-enemy Hannibal as a counsellor and attacked southern Macedonia, Rome launched a counter-offensive, defeating Antiochus in 191 BCE during the Second Battle of Thermopylae. The Roman Republic now wanted to drive Antiochus out of its Aegean backyard and secure Pergamon. First, the Roman fleet triumphed at sea. Afterwards, the commanding brothers Lucius Cornelius Scipio and Scipio Africanus annihilated the numerically superior army of Antiochus at Magnesia ad Sipylum (65 km north-east of İzmir) on 10 December 190 BCE.⁴³

As in the case of Cynoscephalae, the battle of Magnesia revealed the superiority of the Roman legionaries over the Macedonian–Seleucid phalanx. While the former operated in mobile units and were well armoured, the latter's hoplites had relatively little protection. Should a first frontal attack by the phalanx prove unsuccessful, it was extremely vulnerable to flank attacks from the light Roman cavalry. The legionaries, as at Magnesia, could also avoid close combat from the outset and instead bombard the hoplites from a distance with javelins.

Moreover, the war elephants positioned between the phalanx brigades posed a greater danger to their own hoplites than to the enemy legions. Not only could the legionaries quickly form gaps and strike the advancing elephants from the side, but the animals also panicked and even attacked their own soldiers. Finally, infantry that fought in the phalanx with the *sarissa* (a lance up to 5 m long) were not flexible as far as the formation was concerned, whereas legions organized into maniples (two *centuriae*) could quickly adjust to enemy tactics and battle developments.⁴⁴ The later battles of Roman armies against the Armenian king Tigranes the Great and his ally Mithridates VI of Pontus confirmed the superiority of the Roman military organization – provided the legionaries were well led (see below).

In the Treaty of Apamea of 188 BCE, Antiochus had to abandon Europe and Asia Minor as far as the Taurus Mountains, surrender his fleet, pay war reparations and hand over Hannibal. Artaxias and Zariadris took advantage of the opportunity to liberate themselves from the Seleucid Empire's stranglehold in 189 BCE and declared their independence, which was then confirmed by the Roman Senate. Nevertheless, according to Strabo⁴⁵ and Plutarch,⁴⁶ the newly won friendship with Rome did not prevent King Artaxias from extending hospitality to Hannibal. During this time, Hannibal supposedly planned and supervised the construction of the new capital of Armenia, Artaxata, which replaced Ervandashat around 176 BCE. Artaxata remained the Armenian capital until 172/3 CE, when it was relocated to Vagharshapat, now Etchmiadzin. (Some ruins of Artaxata were discovered near today's Khor Virap monastery, south of Yerevan.) As history shows, the reclaimed independence from Greater Armenia and the Sophene was soon tempered by the fact that both states were in Rome's sphere of influence, which in turn aroused Persia's hostility. Whenever Rome's standing in Asia Minor was strong, Persia – be it the Parthians or later the Sassanids – attempted to weaken Rome through intrigues with its allies; and whenever Rome lost influence in the region, Persia sought to impose Persian sovereignty on the Roman client-states. The reverse was equally true.

Lesser Armenia, whose history is hard to reconstruct, was confronted after some time by an all-powerful adversary, the Kingdom of Pontus. Lesser Armenia soon came under its influence and was annexed by Mithridates VI around 115 BCE.⁴⁷ In **Sophene**, King Zariadris, who died around 163 BCE, was succeeded by his son Mithrobuzanes in spite of the intrigues of the Greater Armenian king Artaxias who tried to have him murdered, as related by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (ca. 90–30 BCE).⁴⁸ In 94 or 93 BCE,



Tigranes II of Greater Armenia defeated King Orontes IV (called Artanes by Strabo, ruled ?–94/93 BCE) and annexed Sophene.⁴⁹ After Mithridates' defeat, the rulers of Lesser Armenia were installed by Rome, until the kingdom was integrated into the Roman province of Cappadocia in 72 CE.⁵⁰ Armenia Minor belonged to the Roman or Byzantine Empire for 999 years, until the fateful Battle of Manzikert.⁵¹ Mithridates I of **Commagene** (r. ca. 109–70 BCE), who was of Orontid descent, also had to acknowledge the sovereignty of Tigranes II.

Artaxias I founded the **Artaxiad** dynasty, which remained in power in Greater Armenia until the year 2 CE. Like Zariadris, Artaxias pursued a successful expansion policy, particularly towards Media Atropatene, and afterwards north-west of Lake Sevan, into the Erzurum region and further south to Taron in the current province of Muş.⁵² As a result of these conquests, the Armenian language established itself in eastern Anatolia, where it remained strongly rooted until the genocide of 1915. However, Artaxias' attempts at annexation of Sophene, where Mithrobuzanes had triumphed, and of Lesser Armenia, which was under Pontic protection, failed.⁵³ In 165 BCE, the Seleucid Antiochus IV (r. ca. 175–164 BCE) launched a military campaign against Greater Armenia and forced Artaxias to pay tribute again.⁵⁴

Indeed, Artaxias' successor **Artavasdes I** (r. 159–ca. 123 or 115 BCE) managed once again to shake off Syrian–Seleucid dominion. All the same, he and King **Tigranes I** (r. 123 or 115–95 BCE) were confronted by aggression from a new enemy, the Parthians, an Iranian people stemming originally from Central Asia. The expansionary Parthian kings Mithridates I (r. ca. 171–132 BCE) and Mithridates II (r. 124–88 BCE) launched several attacks on Greater Armenia, relegating its kings to the level of tributary vassals.⁵⁵ In addition, Crown Prince Tigranes II had to be taken hostage to the Parthian court.⁵⁶ According to Cyril Toumanoff, King Artaxias I of Iberia (r. 90–78 BCE), who was placed on the Iberian throne around 90 BCE by Iberian aristocrats and Armenian forces, was a son of the Armenian king Artavasdes I. Iberian nobles had rebelled against their king (said by later chroniclers to be the semi-legendary Parnajom), when he sought to introduce the Zoroastrian fire cult of Persia in Iberia and asked the Armenian king, presumably Tigranes II (r. 95–55 BCE), for assistance.⁵⁷ If this reconstruction is correct, the founder of the Iberian Artaxiad dynasty must have been of Armenian origin.

The Armenian power structures resembled the Persian. Royal status was inherited and the ruler was originally also commander-in-chief and supreme legal authority. However, the



94. Silver Armenian tetradrachm coin of King Tigranes II (r. 95–55 BCE) from the mint of Antioch. On the front is the bust of the king, who wears an Armenian tiara decorated with a sun symbol and two eagles. On the back is the goddess of fate Tyche. At her feet is a floating youth symbolizing the River Orontes. National History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia.



95. House facade at the fortress of Erbil, Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, Iraq. King Tigranes II conquered the city of Erbil, capital of Adiabene, around the year 85 BCE. Photo 2009.

leading noble (or *nakharar*) families succeeded in monopolizing the most important state offices under the Artaxiad and the subsequent Arsacid dynasty, even making these offices hereditary. In order to maintain control over the extensive estates and to avoid territorial losses due to dowry, the large noble families preferred endogamous marriages. Over time, the strongest *nakharar* houses maintained their own armies, which they made available to the king in the event of war under the leadership of a *sparapet*, a commander-in-chief. Thus a noble family which bore the office of *sparapet* possessed great power, which in turn severely limited that of the king. Furthermore, the leading nobles were allowed to meet without the presence of the king, who could neither change the hierarchy within the *nakharar* houses nor downgrade individual members. The Armenian king had to buy the ‘loyalty’ of the nobles by means of gifts, which induced Persian and later Byzantine emperors to bribe the *nakharar* by means of greater gifts. The *nakharar* additionally solidified their dominance through control over the pagan temples, and from the fourth century over bishoprics and monasteries, by also monopolizing the high clerical offices.

The urban development promoted by individual kings, as for example by Artaxias I or Arshak II (r. 350–368), further intensified the opposition between king and nobility. Where the cities were trade-oriented and open to Hellenistic cultural influences, the aristocrats were organized according to the Persian model and strongly oriented toward the ethos of the Persian nobility. They also maintained their source of power and income in the countryside. For their part, the mercantile townspeople abhorred the rigid privileges of the nobility and were more pro-Roman, while the nobles shunned the cities as breeding grounds for nouveau riche upstarts and royal minions. (This was also the reason why in Christian times the bishops, who came almost exclusively from noble families, did not live in cities, but in the residences of the leading nobles. Even the highest church office of the Catholicos was often the monopoly of individual families.) One example of the enmity of nobility and clergy towards cities is found when Patriarch Nerses I (in office 353–373) cursed the city of Arshakavan (fig. 133) built by King Arshak II.⁵⁸ All its inhabitants died of a plague allegedly sent by God and the city was razed.⁵⁹

This fundamental conflict between the pro-Roman, urban class, often supported by the king, and the more pro-Iranian alliance of nobility and clergy encouraged the Armenian nobility in 428 CE to ask the Persian King of Kings to abolish their own monarchy. Shah Bahram V gladly complied with the request. The Kingdom of Armenia became the Sassanian province of Persarmenia.

3.2. Tigranes the Great, Pontus and the Mithridatic Wars

In the first half of the first century BCE, Armenia attempted to assert itself as a great regional power and to stop the two empires of Rome and Iran advancing on the Caucasian peripheries. Greater Armenia and Pontus owed their short-lived successes not least to internal Roman intrigues and three Roman civil wars, which undermined the military Roman successes in Asia Minor: first the Social War of 91–88 BCE and then the two armed conflicts between Gaius Marius, on the side of the Populares, the political faction supporting the demands of the commoners,

and Sulla, representative of the Optimates who defended the privileges of the aristocracy and the oligarchy; the conflict lasted from 88–87 and 82–81 BCE. At the same time, between Mithridates II's downfall around 88 BCE and the assumption of power by Orodes II (r. 57–36 BCE), the Parthian Empire went through an unmistakable period of decline. In the end, however, Mithridates VI of Pontus and Lesser Armenia and Tigranes II of Greater Armenia could not withstand the Roman generals Sulla, Lucullus and Pompey. The biographies of Roman generals by Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120), the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio (ca. 155–235) and the *Mithridatic Wars* of Appian (ca. 95–165), as well as other ancient historical writings, provide detailed information about the events that followed, making this one of the best-documented periods of early South Caucasian history.⁶⁰

Mithridates VI (r. ca. 120/116–63 BCE) – who claimed to be descended on his father's side from the Achaemenids Cyrus II and Darius I and on his mother's side from Alexander the Great and Seleucus I – was the eighth king of the kingdom of Pontus,



96. The city of Edessa, today Şanlıurfa in south-east Anatolia, was conquered by Tigranes II around 83–80 BCE. In the picture, the crusader castle and on the right two columns of a Roman temple. Photo 2001.

founded around 281 BCE on the south coast of the Black Sea. **Pharnaces I**, the fifth king (r. ca. 185–after 169 BCE), laid the foundations for the kingdom’s expansion when he conquered the city of Sinope, which not only had an excellent port, but was also a trading post for the trade routes coming from the east. The seventh king, **Mithridates V** (r. ca. 152/51–120 BCE) expanded the Pontic sphere of influence further by turning Paphlagonia, Cappadocia and Phrygia into vassals and thus laid the cornerstone for his son Mithridates VI’s vision of transforming the Black Sea into a Pontic Sea. Mithridates V’s successful reign came to an end in 120 BCE when he was poisoned by his wife Laodike VI, a Seleucid princess. Laodike was the mother of Mithridates VI, born between 140 and 135 BCE. Since she wanted to remain regent and Mithridates feared for his life, he went into hiding. Around the year 116 BCE, he got rid of his mother and his brother and seized power. First, he annexed the neighbouring Lesser Armenia, and then incorporated the Bosporean Kingdom and Colchis into the Pontic Empire.⁶¹

After the death of the Armenian king Tigranes I, **Tigranes II** (r. 95–55 BCE), who lived as a captive in Parthian exile, bought his freedom by ceding the ‘seventy valleys’ in

south-eastern Armenia to Parthia. The first thing Tigranes did was to reorganize the Armenian army according to the Parthian model, similar to what Mithridates of Pontus had done after the Roman Gaius Marius (157–86 BCE) provoked him in 98 BCE with the following words: ‘O King, either strive to be stronger than Rome, or do her bidding without a word.’⁶² Mithridates, who had previously sought Rome’s favour, interpreted Marius’ words to mean that there could be no friendship with Rome. The alternatives were submission or war. Around the year 94/3 BCE, Tigranes annexed Sophene and entered into a military alliance with Mithridates of Pontus concerning Cappadocia and a neutrality agreement in the event of a Roman–Pontic war. The alliance was sealed by the marriage of Mithridates’ daughter Cleopatra to Tigranes. The alliance was risky for Armenia, as an attack on the Roman client-state of Cappadocia would inevitably lead to conflict with Rome. On the other hand, it was advantageous for the Pontic king, who was determined to go to war for supremacy in Asia Minor. In any case, at Mithridates’ insistence, Tigranes allowed himself to be tempted to invade Cappadocia in 91/90 BCE and to force King Ariobarzanes I, who had been installed by Rome, to flee. Rome reacted quickly. Sulla (ca. 138–78 BCE), the propraetor

The eight deities of the Armenian pantheon

For many nation-states, one nation-building measure was the formation of a separate pantheon. As Michael Shenkar has demonstrated, the best sources for the pre-Christian pantheon of Armenia are the two Armenian historians Agathangelos (a pseudonym, second half of the fifth century) and Movses (Moses) Khorenatsi (eighth/ninth century CE).⁶³ According to Movses, Artaxias I brought back from his successful conquests the figures of Greek gods – Zeus, Artemis, Athene, Aphrodite, Apollo, Heracles and Hephaistos – which were displayed in Armenian temples. As part of the reorganization of Greater Armenia, Tigranes II had the main temple of each respective deity erected in seven different cities, with three temples dedicated to the main deity Anahit–Artemis. He also brought back from Mesopotamia a statue of Barshamin.⁶⁴ The two Armenian kings, however, not only introduced new gods into Armenia, but reinterpreted already established deities within context of a strategy of Hellenization. In the writings of Agathangelos, who preceded Movses by three centuries, the majority of deities have Iranian or Middle Eastern names. Movses provided the Greek equivalent.⁶⁵

Of the eight god names, five are of Iranian origin, one is ancient Babylonian, one Semitic, and one presumably Caucasian–Armenian.

This indicates how strongly the early Armenian culture was rooted in the Iranian Middle Eastern world. Despite its proximity to Zoroastrian deities, the fire cult did not play a dominant role among the pre-Christian Armenians; fire temples in Armenia were often due to a Sassanian initiative. The eight-member pantheon embraced the following deities, seven of which had a Hellenistic equivalent:⁶⁶

- **Anahit–Artemis**, the goddess of fertility, healing, wisdom and water, was the patron goddess of the Artaxiad dynasty and ranked first, as Strabo noted; Strabo also emphasized the connection of the Armenian deities to the Iranian–Median cultural realm.⁶⁷ Anahit was derived from the ancient Iranian goddess Anahita and, together with Aramazd and Vahagn, formed the supreme triad of gods. Anahit’s temples were located in Artashat (Artaxata), Ashtishat (Taron province, now Muş), and Erēz (Erzincan).
- **Aramazd–Zeus** was derived from the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. The fertility and creator god was the father of Anahit, Nanē, and Mihr. His temple stood near Ani, in today’s Turkish province of Kars.

- **Vahagn–Heracles** corresponded to the Iranian god Verethragna; he was worshipped as the god of fire, thunder and war. In Armenia, Vahagn had the epithet *Vishapakagh*, which means ‘dragon reaper’ or ‘dragon slayer’. He was one of the most popular deities in Armenia and since the introduction of Christianity he has continued to be worshipped as a dragon slayer and weather god in the guise of the archangel Gabriel.⁶⁸
- **Tir (Tiwr)–Apollo** was the god of the oracle, of priestly wisdom and of the interpretation of dreams; he recorded all the deeds of humans, and also guided the souls of the deceased through the underworld. Despite the proximity to the Iranian deity Tir/Tishtrya, K. Ishkol-Kerovpian believes that Tir was a ‘primordial Armenian’ deity and that it was ‘only later, at the time of Artaxias I, [that the god] came under Hellenistic influence and then in the third century [CE], at the time of the Sassanian rule, under Iranian influence’.⁶⁹ Tir’s temple was located close to Artashat. Tir’s function as a recorder of human deeds lives on in Armenian folklore, namely as **grol**, the ‘scribe’ who can both prophesy and unleash disaster.
- **Nanē–Athene** was a mother goddess as well as goddess of wisdom and war, who was represented with breastplate, spear and shield, like Pallas Athene. She corresponded to the ancient Babylonian goddess Nanai, who was also revered in Persia and later merged with Inanna. Nanē’s temple stood in the town of Til.
- **Mihr–Hephaistos**, the sun and truth god was closely related to the Zoroastrian sun god Mithra, who was also worshipped as the god of truthful vows. Mithra was also popular in the Roman Empire in a modified form as Mithras, especially among the army. Mihr’s shrine was located in Bagayarich 90 km west of the present-day town of Erzurum.
- **Astlik–Aphrodite** was an astral goddess, whose name means ‘starlet’, and the goddess of love; she assumed some aspects of the Sumerian–Babylonian–Assyrian goddess Ishtar. Her temple was in Ashtishat.
- **Barshamin** was a weather and sky god and corresponded to the Semitic sky god Baal Shamin, who was worshipped in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Barshamin’s shrine stood north-east of Ani in Tordan.

Along with these eight main deities, there were other gods, including:

- **Tork**, an ugly but extraordinarily strong mountain god who was also worshipped as the god of the underworld. His most important shrine was at Angel-Tun west of Sophene.
- **Vanatur**, a god of nature known for his hospitality. His feast coincided with the New Year’s feast of *Navasard*, which was celebrated at the beginning of the harvest season in mid August; Vanatur was, accordingly, also considered the protector of the harvest.

The Iranization of early Armenian culture and the pantheon took place under the influence of the first three royal dynasties which were probably all of Iranian origin.⁷⁰ Zoroastrian thought, however, was strongly adapted to local traditions and differed markedly from the purist reforms of the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir from the third century. This explains how it found its way into the Christian folk religion in a diluted form. (Christian folk religion also integrated pre-Christian ideas in Georgia.) Contrary to what is occasionally written, however, it is highly unlikely that Zoroastrianism continued to be practised in the medieval Christian Armenian sects of the *Arewardik*, the ‘Children of the Sun’, who were rather closely related to the Bogomils and the Paulicians.⁷¹

of Cilicia, expelled the Armenians and reinstalled Ariobarzanes I, after which he returned to Rome.⁷² Sulla’s departure prompted Mithridates to attack again in 88 BCE. He overran almost all of Asia Minor and, in the incident known as the ‘Ephesian Vespers’, ordered a general massacre of all the Romans and Italic peoples of Asia Minor. He then moved on to Europe, taking Athens and Sparta. Sulla, whom Marius declared an enemy of the state soon after the former assumed command of five legions, recaptured Athens and, thanks to brilliant tactics and personal bravery, twice defeated the Pontic army at Chaeronea (86 BCE) and at Orchomenus (85 BCE). Since Sulla and some of his troops had to return to Rome immediately in order to put an end to the intrigues of Marius’ followers, he conceded Mithridates relatively lenient conditions in the Treaty of Dardanus: though Mithridates had to abandon

97. (over) Illustration of the Battle of Tigranocerta, in which the Roman commander Lucullus, with scarcely three legions, crushed the huge army of the Armenian king Tigranes II in 69 BCE. The image shows the decisive manoeuvre of the Romans, whereby they block the Armenian cavalry, attack the enemy infantry and their retinue and will soon confront King Tigranes. While the general Murena continues the siege of the city of Tigranakert (left in the background), Lucullus follows the western bank of the river and pretends to cross it at the ford at the same altitude as the Armenian king, who is observing the events from a throne (centre back left). Lucullus, however, leads his infantry to a second ford further north, crosses the river and climbs a high plateau out of sight of Tigranes. The Roman cavalry then crosses the river (back right), whereupon the Armenian cavalry rushes towards them and takes position in front of their own infantry. While the Roman cavalry keeps the Armenian cavalry in check, the legionaries led by Lucullus (front right) suddenly pounce on the right flank of the enemy cavalry as well as on the unprotected retinue. As a result, the battle is decided before it has even really begun. The armoured, heavy Armenian cavalry is stalled and unable to manoeuvre between the river, the Roman cavalry and the attacking legionaries. It therefore falls back against its own infantry, which is at the same time attacked by the legionaries who are far superior in close combat. Chaos and panic ensue among the Armenian foot soldiers and in the retinue, while King Tigranes is forced to flee in order to avoid capture.







98. Columned street of the ancient city of Hierapolis/Kastabala. In 67 BCE the Roman commander Gnaeus Pompey settled defeated pirates here as peasant farmers. Once located on the spur north of the Roman colonnaded road was the acropolis, now a medieval castle of the Cilician Armenians; south-eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Photo 2018.

Achaea (mainland Greece), Macedonia, Paphlagonia, Bithynia and Cappadocia and deliver seventy warships, he was allowed to retain his throne. The Treaty of Dardanus, however, did not prevent Sulla's deputy Lucius Licinius Murena from attacking Pontus on his own from 83–81 BCE, against the order of the Roman Senate. Murena's defiance resulted in a bitter defeat.⁷³ At the same time, Mithridates consolidated Pontic sovereignty over the Bosporan Kingdom and appointed his son Machares as ruler. When his father however suffered a bitter defeat at Cabira against Lucullus around 71 BCE, Machares switched sides and swore loyalty to Rome. Mithridates nevertheless survived and escaped to Crimea in 65 BCE. Machares, who feared his father's revenge, committed suicide.⁷⁴

In the 80s BCE, Tigranes II found opportunities for new conquests. Parthia was going through a period of decline, and in Syria eight Seleucid kings had succeeded each other within twelve years. Initially, Tigranes conducted smaller campaigns between about 95/93 and 86 BCE against Iberia, Albania and Media Atropatene, which stretched from Lake Urmia to the Caspian Sea. The region was named Atropatene after the Persian satrap appointed by Alexander, named Atropates (*ca.* 370–after 321 BCE), who, after Alexander's death, declared himself independent and founded his own dynasty.⁷⁵ In the ensuing three years, Tigranes recaptured the 'seventy valleys' and occupied Gordyene (or Corduene, today Kurdistan), as well as the adjacent Adiabene with Arbela (Erbil) as its capital.⁷⁶ The Armenian army crossed the Euphrates around 83 BCE. Tigranes began conquering Mygdonia (the Nisibis/Nusaybin region), Commagene, Osroene whose capital was Edessa (Şanlıurfa), Cilicia, south-western Syria including Antioch on the Orontes (Antakya), Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon) and northern Palestine. Even though individual cities and fortresses put up longer resistance, the Armenian campaign wiped out the already greatly diminished Seleucid Empire. Tigranes allowed the local princes and city administrations to remain in their positions and subordinated them to his viceroy Magadates, who resided in Antioch (in office until 69 BCE). Greater Armenia, including its vassals, now stretched from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea and from northern Palestine to the Greater Caucasus.

But an empire of this size could no longer be governed from the now remote city of Artaxata, while the *nakharar* system made stringent and efficient administration impossible. As a consequence, Tigranes decided to build the new capital Tigranakert. It probably corresponded to the Byzantine city of Martyropolis, near today's Silvan in the region of Amida (Diyarbakir in south-east Turkey).⁷⁷ In order to eliminate aristocratic rule, Tigranes ordered that all heads of the *nakharar tuns* and their families move to the new capital. When Tigranes learned of the death of the dreaded commander Sulla in 78 BCE, he invaded Cappadocia and deported about 300,000 people to Tigranakert. The forced resettlement of Syrians and Jews increased the population of Tigranakert to half a million.⁷⁸

If Tigranes thought he could rest easy after the death of Sulla, he was sorely mistaken. With Lucius Licinius Lucullus (117–56 BCE), a strategist even more skilful than Sulla entered Asia Minor. Rome could tolerate neither the Armenian invasion of Cappadocia nor the more recent provocation of Mithridates. In 76 BCE, Mithridates had allied himself with the rebellious Roman commander Quintus Sertorius, who was entrenched in Spain, as

well as with the pirates of Cilicia, who threatened the vital food supply to Rome. In 74 BCE, the Senate appointed Lucullus, who had already fought successfully as a military tribune under Sulla, to be proconsul of Cilicia. After Cotta, the proconsul of Bithynia, had lost more than sixty warships to Mithridates at Chalcedon, Lucullus appeared at his back. In 73 BCE, Lucullus destroyed the Pontic army that besieged the port city of Cyzicus on the eastern shore of the Sea of Marmara. As Sallust and Plutarch reported, it was here that the Romans saw Bactrian camels for the first time. After victorious sea battles, Lucullus marched east to liberate the cities of Bithynia and Galatia from Pontic rule. In the meantime, the legionaries complained that the proconsul did not open the city for plunder.⁷⁹ Two years later, Lucullus inflicted another defeat on the retreating Mithridates at Cabira. Mithridates fled to his son-in-law Tigranes, who placed him under house arrest. At this point, Tigranes' wife Cleopatra, Mithridates' daughter, prodded two of her sons into overthrowing their father Tigranes. Both coup attempts failed, however. In 70 BCE, Lucullus sent secret messengers to Syria to

stir up the dissatisfied minor Syrian kings upon whom Tigranes had imposed high taxes. At the same time, he gave Tigranes an ultimatum to deliver his father-in-law Mithridates once and for all. The Armenian king, who underestimated the fighting prowess of the Roman legionaries, refused and thus squandered the chance to hold onto his conquests of Asia Minor.⁸⁰

In 69 BCE, Lucullus crossed Sophene and reached the capital Tigranakert, which he immediately commenced to lay siege to. Lucullus attacked on 6 October with only 24 cohorts (about 10,000 legionaries) and 1,000 riders. Tigranes, who had hurried to the scene with a massive but hastily assembled army, proceeded to mock Lucullus: 'If they come as ambassadors, they are too many; if as soldiers, too few.' Lucullus conducted a side manoeuvre at the head of the two foremost cohorts and stormed so vigorously against the Armenian rearguard that the latter flocked back in panic to the rear of its own infantry and the king. The cataphracts (armoured riders), however, were unable to move – 'owing to the weight and rigidity of their armour [...] they [were] as immured'



99. Aerial view of Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.



100. The confluence of the rivers Aragvi (right) and Mtkvari (middle back) to form the River Kura (left) near Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Kartli. On the right of the picture, the city of Mtskheta with the Sveti Tskhoveli Cathedral and, on the left, the ruins of Harmozica (Armaz-Tsikhe), the first capital of Kartli. Image location: Jvari Monastery. Photo 2013.



– and took flight, trampling on their own foot soldiers.⁸¹ Tigranes also fled (fig. 97). When Lucullus conquered Tigranakert, he allowed its Greek, Syrian and Jewish inhabitants to return to their homeland. Next, Lucullus intended to attack the duplicitous Parthian King Phraates III (r. 70–57 BCE), but his legionaries resisted the order to march. Lucullus therefore advanced into the Armenian heartland instead. After two victorious skirmishes, Lucullus defeated Tigranes again in the autumn of 68 BCE near Artaxata. Tigranes escaped, and the approaching winter and a looming mutiny in his army forced Lucullus to retreat to Nisibis. Further mutinies and Lucullus’ ousting allowed Tigranes and Mithridates to plunder Asia Minor again in 67 BCE. Lucullus was unpopular with the troops because of his harsh discipline and general ban on looting, and in Rome’s financial circles he was hated because he had consistently restrained the greedy tax-farmers in Asia Minor.⁸² In the words of historian Anne E. Redgate, ‘Rome’s generals were eager for triumphs, her soldiers for loot, and her business class of merchants and financiers for profit.’⁸³ Lucullus’ military campaign to Artaxata marked the beginning of a series of Roman and later Byzantine interventions in Armenia, which did not come to end until 1071, a thousand years later.

The dismissal of Lucullus did not bring any relief for Tigranes and Mithridates, for the new Roman supreme commander in the East, Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey, 106–48 BCE) possessed considerable experience and limitless authority. In 67 BCE, he had wiped the Mediterranean Sea clean of Cilician pirates in just three months, destroying their fleets and occupying their ports. The threat of famine in Rome was thereby averted. But instead of executing the captured pirates, he allowed them to settle as farmers in several areas of Anatolia, including Hierapolis/Kastabala in Cilicia (fig. 98). At the meeting between Pompey and the departing Lucullus, the two commanders disparaged each other. Pompey called Lucullus a corrupt and stingy ‘Xerxes in a toga’, while Lucullus compared Pompey to ‘a vulture alighting on bodies killed by others and tearing to pieces the scattered remains of war’.⁸⁴ Pompey marched towards Pontus, and when he encountered the enemy forces holed up in a camp, he ordered a night-time attack. Mithridates escaped, but lost his army. When he again appealed to his son-in-law Tigranes II for asylum, the latter not only refused to allow him to cross the border, but put a high bounty on his head. Mithridates then fled to Colchis and spent the winter in Dioscurias. From there, he continued to Crimea in 65 BCE, which as mentioned above led his disloyal son Machares, who ruled there, to commit suicide.⁸⁵ The aging Pontic king, who was still respected, had another son named Xiphaxes executed. However, Mithridates made



101. Ruins of Harmozica (Armaz-Tsikhe), behind them the River Kura and in the background the church of Jvari, Kartli, Georgia. The Georgian name Armaz-Tsikhe means 'Citadel of Armazi'. Photo 2018.

the mistake of pardoning his rebellious son Pharnaces instead of executing him during the revolt of Phanagoria. In 63 BCE, he rebelled again and enlisted the leading officers to his side. Forsaken by everyone, Mithridates had no choice but to order his bodyguard to kill him. Pompey, who had placed a sea blockade around Crimea, left the Bosphoran Kingdom in the hands of Pharnaces II, but incorporated Pontus into Bithynia.⁸⁶

After his victory over Mithridates in 66 BCE, Pompey invaded Armenia, where Tigranes was threatened by an alliance between his rebellious son Tigranes and the Parthian king Phraates III. When their attack on Artaxata failed, the young Tigranes switched to the Roman side. With Pompey only a few kilometres from Artaxata, King Tigranes, who had heard of Pompey's leniency towards the captured Cilician pirates, decided to surrender without a fight. Tigranes had to renounce for good all his conquests, which he had already lost to Lucullus, and pay reparations. He also had to give every Roman officer and soldier a gift of money to compensate them for the missed looting opportunity of Artaxata. On the other hand, he was allowed to retain Greater Armenia just as he had inherited it. Gordyene, which was

occupied by Phraates, was returned to Tigranes two years later, after Pompey had demanded that the Parthian king abandon it.⁸⁷ As far as the Armenian zones of influence in the north were concerned, Pompey planned to conquer them himself. When the younger Tigranes, to whom Pompey had promised Sophene, continued to intrigue against his father, Pompey had him put into chains. He then took him to Rome in 62 BCE to parade him as a trophy during his triumphal procession. Pompey now passed Sophene on to Ariobarzanes, king of Cappadocia.⁸⁸

Instead of pursuing Mithridates in Colchis, Pompey led his legions eastwards against Caucasian Albania to penetrate and neutralize the hinterland of Pontic Colchis from the east. At the beginning of the first century BCE, Albania was fragmented into 26 tribes with different languages, each ruled by a different king. Now, however, all of Albania was under the control of one king.⁸⁹ As Plutarch reports, Pompey received permission from the Albanian king **Oroeses** to march unhindered through Albania. Consequently, he spent the winter of 66–65 BCE on Albanian territory, in a camp south of the Cyrus river (Kura).⁹⁰ While the Romans celebrated the Saturnalia in January 65 BCE,

a 40,000-strong Albanian army crossed the river coming from the north and attacked Pompey. He managed to successfully repulse the attack and imposed peace on Albania.⁹¹

To this day, Armenian and Azerbaijani politicians and historians continue to discuss whether the Nagorno-Karabakh region – i.e. the territories of Gardman, Kolt, Otene (Uti) and Orchistene (Artsakh), which all lie to the south of the Kura – were only annexed to Albania after the division of Armenia in 387 CE, or whether they had already been in Albanian possession earlier. In this regard, Plutarch's description is revealing. He notes that at the time of the military campaign of Pompey, Albania extended to areas south of the Kura,⁹² which is also confirmed by Strabo's mention of 'the Cyrus [Kura], which flows through Albania'.⁹³ By contrast, for Pliny,⁹⁴ Ptolemy⁹⁵ and Cassius Dio,⁹⁶ who probably had in mind the political situation in the first or second century CE, the Kura formed the border between Armenia and Albania. Since Plutarch dealt intensively with the campaigns of Lucullus and Pompey and his accounts seem plausible, and since Cassius Dio

wrote about a hundred years after Plutarch, the present author tends to accept Plutarch's description.⁹⁷ On the other hand, Strabo mentions that one hundred years before Pompey's campaign, Artaxias I had wrested Caspiane and Phaunitis (Syunik?) from the Medes, which would indicate that he might have occupied the southern third of the land of Orchistene lying in between.⁹⁸ However it seems unlikely that Tigranes II had relinquished these territories to Albania only a few months prior to Pompey's attack. Presumably they were in Albanian possession for some time.

The Iberian king **Artoces** (Artag, r. 78–63 BCE) was the son of the founder of the dynasty of the Iberian Artaxiads, Artaxias I of Iberia. Artoces feared Roman occupation and ostensibly offered Pompey peace talks. In reality, he equipped himself for war. But Pompey saw through this stratagem and marched up the Kura river to the Iberian capital Harmozica (in Georgian Armaz-Tsikhe), whose name means 'Fortress of Armazi'. Pompey captured the city and defeated King Artoces, who became a vassal of Rome and had to present his children as hostages. Then Pompey crossed the



102. The early medieval castle of Bebris-Tsikhe stands on the right bank of the River Aragvi and protected Mtskheta from attacks from the north, which penetrated Kartli via the Darial Pass. Parts of the fortifications built by the Roman Emperor Vespasian against the threatening Alans probably also stood on this rock. Photo 2018.

Surami Mountains and invaded Colchis, where the only resistance came from Prince Olthaces. Arriving at the Black Sea, Pompey ordered his admiral, Servilius to set up a sea blockade against the fleeing Mithridates, and appointed **Aristarchus** (in office 65–after 54 BCE) Prince of Colchis. He returned to Albania immediately afterwards, since King Oroeses had rebelled in the meantime. The Roman army struggled to cross the rivers Kura, Cambyses (Iori), and Abas (Alazani), where Pompey destroyed the enemy army commanded by the brother of the Albanian king Cosis, while killing Cosis himself. As in the case of Iberia, Pompey allowed King Oroeses to remain in power after he had reaffirmed his subservience. According to Cassius Dio, some tribes who settled south of the eastern foothills of the Caucasus joined the surrender.⁹⁹

Plutarch reports that Pompey intended to reach the Caspian Sea after his victory over the Albanians, only to turn back three days before arriving at his destination because of numerous poisonous snakes.¹⁰⁰ While it remains a mystery whether the snakes were actually responsible for Pompey's return, his motivation for reaching the unknown sea is more important. Pompey wanted to determine whether the well-known trade route from the Black Sea via the Phasis and Kura to the Caspian Sea would in fact lead to the River Oxus (Amu Darya) and then on to Bactria and India.

*Pompey ascertained that a seven days' journey from India into the Bactrian country reaches the river Bactrus [the River Balkh in northern Afghanistan], a tributary of the Oxus, and that Indian merchandise can be conveyed from the Bactrus across the Caspian to the Kur and thence with not more than five day's portage by land [over the Surami ridge] reach Phasis in Pontus.*¹⁰¹

Long before Pompey, the historian Aristobulus (d. after 301 BCE) and the admiral Patroclus (first half of the third century BCE) had mentioned that Indian goods were transported via the River Oxus over the Hyrcanian Ocean (Caspian Sea) to Albania and then on to the Black Sea.¹⁰² According to Pliny and Emperor Claudius (r. 41–54), Seleucus I Nicator (r. 305–281 BCE) had already intended to build a canal between the Caspian and the Black Sea.¹⁰³ As far as the trade route was concerned, Pompey's assessment was not wrong: it was indeed possible to get from the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea via the rivers Uzboy, Oxus and Balkh to the large trade city of Balkh, which in turn was located on the trade route connecting northern India with Bactria. But travelling along the road from Punjab over the Karakorum Mountains to Balkh, a journey of more than 900 km overland, did not take seven days, but about fifty to sixty.

Pompey then departed from the Caucasus and proceeded to Asia Minor to create a new order of states. The territories west of the Euphrates that once belonged to Pontus and Armenia were either annexed by Rome or transferred to associated Greek city-states; vassal kingdoms emerged east of the Euphrates. With the reorganization in the southern Caucasus, Pompey created a chain of vassal states that stretched from the Black Sea to the Caspian. They were supposed to form a barrier against the raids of steppe peoples invading from the north. Armenia became an independent buffer state between Rome and Parthia. However, without the stationing of Roman garrisons, the loyalty of the new vassals was doubtful. Despite this proviso, the Roman, and later Byzantine, strategy remained in force in the Caucasus, with some modifications and at times in cooperation with Iran, until the invasion of the Arabs. As a result, the gravitational pull of South Caucasian politics ceased to be local, but was instead concentrated in Rome and the Iranian capital Ctesiphon.

3.3 Late Artaxiad: Armenia between Rome and Parthia

In Armenia, Tigranes was succeeded by his son **Artavasdes II** (r. 55–34 BCE), whom his father had appointed as co-regent around the year 66 BCE. He quickly became caught up in the Roman–Parthian tug of war, from which he ultimately could not escape. When the Roman proconsul and triumvir Marcus Licinius Crassus (ca. 115–53 BCE) provoked a war with Parthia at the end of 54 BCE in order to take control of the lucrative trade with India, the Parthian king Orodes II (r. 57–37 BCE) invaded Armenia, seeking to annihilate the Armenian army before Artavasdes could strike an alliance with Crassus. Artavasdes subsequently advised Crassus to avoid the Syrian Desert, where the Parthian cavalry would be fully deployed. Instead he should march through the mountainous highlands of Armenia, where the Roman infantry would have the advantage. The proconsul carelessly ignored the advice, however, and opted for the direct route to Parthia. Shortly after departing, his six legions were completely wiped out by the numerically inferior mounted Parthian archers at Carrhae (Harran) in May 53 BCE; Crassus was beheaded.¹⁰⁴ In the meantime, Artavasdes had drawn closer to Parthia politically; the new alliance was sealed by the marriage of Artavasdes' sister to Orodes' son Bakur (Pacorus). At the wedding banquet, an officer entered and threw Crassus' head into the centre of the celebrating gathering. At the same time, an actor recited the fateful verses from Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*, of the furious royal mother Agave, who had just beheaded her son Pentheus:

*We bring from the mountain
A tendril fresh-cut to the palace,
A wonderful prey.*¹⁰⁵

As a result of this debacle, Rome lost sovereignty over Iberia and Albania, and Armenia allied itself with Parthia.

Fifteen years later, in the years 39–38 BCE, the Roman commander Publius Ventidius Bassus expelled the Parthians from Syria.¹⁰⁶ Rome then decided to compel the South Caucasian countries by force of arms to recognize Roman sovereignty. In the winter of 37–36 BCE, the general Publius Canidius Crassus (d. 30 BCE) forced King Artavasdes to distance himself from Parthia. Thereafter, Canidius Crassus subjugated the Iberian king **Parnavaz II** (r. 63–32 BCE). Crassus coerced Parnavaz to join him in attacking the Albanian king **Zober**, who was likewise forced to yield to Rome's rule.¹⁰⁷ As soon as Octavian resolved

the power struggle against Mark Antony in 30 BCE and the latter had committed suicide, the rulers of Iberia and Albania swiftly pledged their loyalty to the victor.¹⁰⁸ With the short campaign of Canidius Crassus, Rome had demonstrated that, with an effective army command, it could assert Roman supremacy in the South Caucasus militarily at any time. That said, in the spring of 36 BCE, Antony himself (83–30 BCE) was less skilful when he attacked Parthia via Armenia and Media Atropatene. He forced Artavasdes II of Armenia to take part in the campaign with his cavalry. Nevertheless, when the Roman legions rashly forged ahead to storm the fortified royal city of Phraaspa, the Parthians destroyed the Roman rearguard and baggage train, which included the siege engines, whereupon Artavasdes II and his cavalry hastily retreated to Armenia. Antony, however, could not take the city without the siege engines and so he aborted the effort. During the retreat, the majority of the legionaries were massacred.¹⁰⁹



103. The ancient capital of Armenia, Artaxata, was located near the monastery of Khor Virap south of Yerevan; in the background is Greater Ararat. Photo 2015.

Two years later Antony took revenge for Artavasdes' alleged betrayal by invading Armenia, capturing Artavasdes, and deporting him to Alexandria. There, he handed over the hapless Armenian king to his lover, Pharaoh Cleopatra VII (r. 51–30 BCE), who had the prisoner tortured and killed.¹¹⁰ Artavasdes II's son **Artaxias II** (r. 30–20 BCE) had fled from Mark Antony's attack to Parthia. After Antony's decisive defeat by Octavian at Actium in the year 31 BCE, the Parthian king Phraates IV (r. 37–2 BCE) installed Artaxias as the new king in Armenia. Artaxias II was pro-Parthian and eager to avenge previous Roman interventions, so he ordered the murder of all Roman merchants active in Armenia. Octavian, now Emperor Augustus (r. 27 BCE–14 CE) did not respond until ten years later, when he sent his stepson Tiberius to Armenia, together with Tigranes, a younger son of Artavasdes II living in Roman exile. Next, a pro-Roman group of Armenian *nakharar* murdered the unpopular Artaxias, and Tiberius put **Tigranes III** (r. 20–8 BCE) on the throne as a Roman client-king. Fearing a Roman invasion, Phraates IV recognized Roman sovereignty over Armenia and also returned the eagles, the standards of Roman legions, captured in the defeats of Crassus and Mark Antony. From now on, the Armenian monarchy increasingly became the pawn of pro-Roman and pro-Parthian *nakharar* and the great powers behind them. The next king, **Tigranes IV** (r. ca. 8–5 BCE, 2 BCE–1 CE) followed the example of sibling marriages in the Parthian and Egyptian royal houses, marrying his half-sister Erato. Although Tigranes was a Roman client, he pursued a pro-Parthian policy, which is why Augustus nominated **Artavasdes III** (r. ca. 5–2 BCE) as king. He could not prevail, however, and **Tigranes IV** returned to the throne. Tigranes IV soon fell in battle, whereupon his queen and half-sister **Erato** (r. ca. 1–2 CE) reigned for a short time. Rome then intervened again, first installing two Median princes, **Ariobarzanes II** (r. 2–4) and **Artavasdes IV** (r. 4–6), followed by the Herodian **Tigranes V** (r. 6–12) and the Parthian **Vonones I** (r. 12–18), who had previously lived as a captive in Rome. In Parthia, to which he had returned first, Vonones (r. 8–12) had not been able to assert himself, since he was hated and despised because of his Roman education. Peace and stability were only restored in Armenia after the Roman commander Germanicus (15 BCE–19 CE) had installed the Pontic prince **Zeno-Artaxias III** (r. 18–34) as king.¹¹¹

When Queen Erato died, the Armenian Artaxiad dynasty died with her. By the same token, since Tigranes II's defeat at Tigranakert, Greater Armenia was mostly a Roman client-state, punctuated by phases of Parthian supremacy. This oscillation culminated in the Treaty of Rhandeia in 63, which turned Greater Armenia into a Roman–Parthian condominium.¹¹²

3.4 Roman client-rulers of Pontus

After his father Mithridates VI was forced to kill himself, **Pharnaces II** (r. 63–47 BCE) assumed power in the Bosporan Kingdom, though not in Pontus itself, as Pompey had merged it with Bithynia.¹¹³ Pharnaces' efforts to recapture Pontus from the Romans ended, after some early successes, in the devastating defeat at the hands of Julius Caesar at Zela. In the year 39 BCE, Mark Antony appointed **Darius** (r. 39–ca. 37 BCE), a son of Pharnaces II, client-king of the greatly diminished kingdom of Pontus. He was succeeded by **Polemon I** (r. about 37–8 BCE) after he had expelled a brother of Darius named **Arsaces** (r. as usurper 37 BCE), who had seized power without Roman consent.¹¹⁴ In 14 BCE, Polemon intervened at Rome's behest in the Bosporan Kingdom to overthrow the usurper Scribonius. He married Scribonius' widow, Queen Dynamis (ca. 67 BCE–8 CE), the daughter of Pharnaces II and sister of Darius. In the resulting personal union, the Bosporan Kingdom and Pontus were reunited, albeit as a client-state of Rome. After a few months, however, Dynamis left Polemon, who now married Pythodoris (30 BCE–38 CE), a granddaughter of Mark Antony. Polemon then occupied Colchis and fought against the Aspurgians, who captured and killed him.¹¹⁵

After Polemon's death, **Pythodoris** (r. 8 BCE–38 CE) ruled as queen of Pontus, Colchis and Cilicia, but no longer of the Bosporan Kingdom.¹¹⁶ She first ruled the inherited kingdoms alone and then, from 17 CE onward, with the help of her second son and successor **Polemon II** (r. 38–63/4),¹¹⁷ whose elder brother was Zeno-Artaxias III of Armenia. Strabo praised her as 'a wise woman capable of presiding over important affairs'.¹¹⁸ After her death, Polemon II, appointed by Emperor Caligula (r. 37–41), ruled until the year 63 or 64. Nero (r. 54–68) then forced him to abdicate from the Pontic–Colchic throne. While he was able to hold on to Cilicia, Pontus and Colchis came under direct Roman administration. As revealed by the looting and destruction of the port cities Pityus and Dioscurias in the middle of the first century CE, Polemon II was probably no longer able to keep in check the pirates operating in the south-eastern Black Sea or the predatory tribes of the western Caucasus mountains.¹¹⁹ The strategic importance of Colchis and the north-eastern Black Sea coast lay in their role as the final destination of trade routes with the east. They also acted as bulwarks against looting or invasion by 'barbarian' tribes from the north, as well as intervention forces against piracy. If Rome had any hope of protecting Asia Minor and the lucrative trade with Asia, the Black Sea needed to become the *Mare Romanum*.

VI

Roman–Parthian Condominiums in the South Caucasus

‘Mihrnerseh, Great Vizir of Iran and non-Iran, many greetings to Greater Armenia. You must know that every man who dwells under heaven and does not accept the Mazdaean religion is deaf and blind and deceived by the demons of Haraman [Ahriman, the principle of evil].’

Proclamation of SHAH YAZDGERD II (r. 438–457)¹

‘Vache, king of Albania, rebelled. [...] He decided that it was better to die in battle [as Christian] than to retain his kingdom as renegade.’

The Albanian king VACHE II (r. ca. 444–463/64) declares Albanian independence from Iran and returns to Christianity.²



104. According to mythology, the abandoned, fortified cave town of Uplistsikhe, Kartli, was founded by the legendary ancestor Uplos, a son of Mtskhetos. The plateau has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. The city was founded in the fifth or fourth century BCE and grew rapidly thanks to the trade route that connected the Caspian Sea with the Black Sea and beyond with Rome. The city was destroyed by the Mongols in the 1230s and was annihilated by Timur-e Lang at the end of the fourteenth century. The earthquake of 1920 caused further cave buildings to collapse. On the left of the picture are the entrances to a late Hellenistic hall, perhaps a palace, and to a late Hellenistic temple with a caisson ceiling; on the right, at the highest point of the plateau, is a church from the tenth century. Photo 2013.

The history of the Caucasus was marked by the rivalry between two supra-regional power blocs until the fateful battle of Manzikert in 1071. The opponents were the Roman Empire and, later, Byzantium in the west and Iran and the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates in the south-east. Both sought to control the flow of trade and military roads and to collect tribute payments. But the adversaries also had a common interest in preventing migrations and raids by nomadic peoples from the north. During this thousand-year period, three developments were of crucial importance for the South Caucasus: the Roman–Parthian condominium, the acceptance of Christianity, and Islamic supremacy. Based on these three historical events, the period can be divided into three epochs, which will define the subsequent chapters of this book.

1. Remarks on early historiography

The local ancient and medieval historiography of the Caucasus began only after its own scripts were introduced in the fifth century. At first, authors were content to write Christian hagiographies. In the sixth and seventh centuries, valuable histories covering limited time periods followed, such as the works of Łazar Parpetsi and Pseudo-Sebeos.³ When, however, supra-regional princely dynasties such as the Armenian and Georgian Bagratuni (Bagratids or Bagrationi) or the Armenian Mamikonian dynasties tried to legitimate their claims to leadership on the basis of genealogies reaching far back into the past – in the case of the Georgian Bagrationi even as far back as King David of Judah – they commissioned historians to write the corresponding works.

These writers of secular history wrote about events that often took place centuries earlier and in reference to which there were at best only oral traditions. Legends, traditions and biblical texts were

often handed down as factual historical reports, and episodes were freely invented.⁴ Among the most important local early and high medieval historians, we number the following:⁵

ARMENIA

Koriun (Koriwn) was the first Armenian historian and wrote the biography of his teacher Mesrop Mashtots (362–440), the inventor of the Armenian and perhaps also the Albanian alphabet, around the year 450. Koriun's *Life of St Mesrop* also records the second, state-ordered wave of missionary work in Armenia.⁶

Agathangelos is a Greek pseudonym that means 'messenger of good tidings'. The *History of the Armenians*, written by an unknown Armenian author, describes the conversion of King Trdat IV (r. ca. 298–330/31) to Christianity. The author claims to have been a contemporary of Trdat, but the original Armenian version was not written until around 460 and the Greek translation towards the end of the 460s.⁷

Pawstos (Faustos) is likewise the pseudonym of an unknown author. His report called *Buzandaran Patmutiwnk (Epic Histories)* concerning the period from the death of King Trdat to the Byzantine–Persian partition of Armenia around 387/90 is fairly erroneous; it was written in the 470s. The work glorifies representatives of the Mamikonian family and is hostile to the Arsacid kings Arshak II and Pap.⁸

Łazar Parpetsi, an Armenian monk, was also in the service of the Mamikonian dynasty, in the person of Vahan Mamikonian, who was *marzpan* (governor) of Persian Armenia under the Sassanids (in office 485–503/10). His *History of the Armenians*, written around the year 500, begins where Pawstos' *Epic Histories* leaves off and describes the history of Armenia up until the inauguration of his patron Vahan Mamikonian. In contrast to other historians, Łazar honoured his predecessors Koriun, Agathangelos and Pawstos.⁹ His work is positively distinguished from other histories due to his largely impartial approach.

Elishe (Yeghishe) based his *History of the Armenian War* on Łazar's history and focuses on the revolt of Vardan Mamikonian, an uncle of Łazar's patron Vahan Mamikonian, in 450–51. The work of the otherwise unknown Elishe from the end of the sixth century glorifies the Armenian rebels for their faith and self-sacrifice. It is formally modelled on the biblical books of Maccabees.¹⁰

Bishop Sebeos. The work traditionally attributed to an Armenian bishop named Sebeos, entitled *History of Heraclius*, consists of three parts written at different times. The oldest, most important part deals with the period between the seizure of power by the Sassanid King of Kings Khosrow II (r. 590–628) and that of the Umayyad Mu'awiya I (r. 661–80) and is attributed today to an unknown Pseudo-Sebeos. During this period, the Byzantines, allied with Western Turks,

vied with Persian Sassanids and Arabs for supremacy in the South Caucasus. Comparisons with other historical works confirm the reliability of the *History* of the Pseudo-Sebeos from the second half of the seventh century.¹¹

Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Khoren) claimed to have been a student of Mesrop and thus an author of the fifth century, but an analysis of his undisclosed sources shows that his *History of Armenia* is a work from the later eighth or ninth century.¹² Movses' book describes the history of the Armenians from their legendary progenitor Hayk, a great-great grandson of Noah, to the death of Mesrop in 440. Since Movses' patron was a prince of the Bagratids (Bagratuni), he put this dynasty of princes in the best possible light as defender of the True Faith, and at the same time disparaged members of the rival Mamikonian. In doing so, he did not shy away from either distortions or fabrications.¹³ Numerous sources of Movses are from the classical patristics, such as the *Chronicon* and the *Church History* of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea (ca. 260/64–339/40).¹⁴

Łewond continued the work of the Pseudo-Sebeos in his history written in the 790s and described the Muslim occupation of Armenia until 788 and the wars between Byzantium and the Sunni caliphates at that time.¹⁵

Yovhannes (Hovhannes) Draskhanakert'tsi, known as 'John V the Historian', was an Armenian Catholicos (in office 897–925) and historian of his era.¹⁶

Thomas Artsruni from the ninth–tenth century wrote a history of Armenia with an emphasis on the dynasty of the Artsruni, which was continued until the fourteenth century by anonymous authors. Thomas Artsruni incorporated a great deal from his predecessors Pawstos, Elishe, Sebeos and Movses Khorenatsi.¹⁷

Stepanos Taronetsi (10th/11th century), also known as **Stepanos Asotik (Asoghik)**, wrote a three-volume 'universal history'. The first two volumes are based on earlier sources, while the third depicts the ninth and tenth century in episodic form. The third volume also relied on works of past historians such as Movses Khorenatsi and Yovhannes Draskhanakert'tsi as well as Byzantine sources. The oldest preserved manuscript dates from the thirteenth century.¹⁸

Kirakos Gandzaketsi (ca. 1200/02–1271). The importance of his *History of Armenia* lies in its description of the invasions and destruction by Khwarazm Shah Jalal al-Din and the advancing Mongols in the thirteenth century.¹⁹

IBERIA

The sources on the ancient history of Kartli present greater challenges than those on Armenia. The early sources are:

Kartlis Tskhovreba, *The Life of Kartli*, is a collection of thirteen historical works, which is often inaccurately called *Georgian Royal Annals*, because it deals mostly with the history of Kartli. The first version was probably compiled by Bishop Leonti Mroveli (i.e. before 1103), although the six texts date from the eighth to eleventh century. This first corpus was translated into Armenian in the thirteenth century. Later, seven further historical works from the eleventh to fourteenth century were added; the oldest work preserved in Georgian language, the corpus of Anaseuli, was copied from an older manuscript between 1479 and 1495.²⁰ The first of the thirteen books, named *The Life of the Kings*, links Kartlos, the progenitor of all Kartveli, with the genealogies of the *Antiquitates Judaicae* of the Jewish historian Josephus and with the Armenian translation of the *Chronicon* of the Christian theologian Hippolytus of Rome from the years 234/5. The latter was, in turn, based on Genesis 10.²¹ In *The Life of the Kings*, an Iberian tradition was linked with an Armenian origin story and Judeo-Christian mythology. The significance of early Iberian historiography is further relativized by the fact that it ignores crucial interactions with the Roman Empire such as Pompey's campaign (66–65 BCE), the Treaty of Rhandeia (63 CE), the Treaty of Nisibis (298), the Roman withdrawal from Kartli (387), and the partition of Armenia (387/90).²²

ALBANIA

Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, written in Armenian, is the only medieval work that covers the history of Albania from the biblical creation to the tenth century. Although it is ascribed to a Movses Daskhurantsi or Katankatvatsi, it is in fact a compilation of various different ancient chronicles, whose final editing took place at the beginning of the tenth century. The text stresses the importance of Armenia for the development of Christianity in Albania.²⁶

Moktsevoy Kartlisay, *The Conversion of Kartli*, consists of six different texts, dating from the seventh to the ninth/tenth century. Two divergent manuscripts from the tenth century found in the St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai indicate that the original version (hypothetically) dates back to the ninth century.²³ Three of the works are royal lists, one is a mythological early history and two deal with the conversion of Kartli to Christianity. The most important text is *The Life of Nino* from the ninth/tenth century which recounts the conversion of the polytheistic kingdom of Iberia through the missionary work of the legendary saint, Nino; the earliest, shorter version probably dates from the seventh century.²⁴

There are also three hagiographies:²⁵

The Passion of Shushanik from the end of the fifth century is the oldest Georgian work and describes the conflicts between Christianity and Persian Zoroastrianism.

The Martyrdom of Evstati from the early seventh century similarly depicts the suppression of the rising Christianity by the Persian regime.

The Passion of the Nine Children of Kolay from the early sixth century is a legend about the spread of Christianity in Persian-dominated Iberia.

The **Tarikh al-Bāb wa Sharvān**, is a *History of Derbent and Shirvan* completed around the year 1106. Written in Arabic, the work was abridged, supplemented and translated into Turkish by Ahmad ibn Lutfullah (d. 1702). It was published in 1868.²⁷

2. The Kingdom of Kartli (Iberia) and Lazica

For centuries, the territory of Georgia was divided in two by the Surami Mountains: Egrisi in the west, which the Greeks called Colchis and the Romans called Lazica from the first century CE, and Kartli in the east, which the Greeks and Romans called Iberia. Iberia corresponded to the ancient kingdom of Kartli, which, according to some ancient authors, also included the present-day region of Kakheti. Georgia first appeared as a politically unified state in 1008, when King Bagrat III (r. 1008–1014) merged Kartli with Abkhazia and Tao-Klarjeti. The integration of the whole of east Georgia, however, was first achieved by David IV (r. 1089–1125) in the year 1122. Today's endonym for Georgia refers to the ancestral land of Kartli and denotes *Sakartvelo*, 'Land of the Kartvelians'. This name designating the united state of Georgia was not used in that sense until in the thirteenth century. In the seventh/eighth century, the name *Sakartvelo* designated Tao-Klarjeti, a region situated in the south-west of Georgia and north-east of Anatolia. In fact, after 650, many Kartvelians had

gone into exile here, fleeing from the invading Arabs, and founded this principality of 'New Kartli'.²⁸ For their part, the *Kart* originally formed a proto-Georgian tribe, whose ancestor the medieval hagiography calls Kartlos, a son of Targamos (Togarmah). The latter was supposedly a grandson of Japheth and a great-grandson of Noah, respectively. Kartlos was accordingly a younger brother of the Armenian progenitor Haos (Hayk).²⁹

The Kartvelian language forms the basis for today's Georgian (Kartuli), which, together with Mingrelian, Laz and Svanian, forms the autochthonous South Caucasian language group.³⁰ The Graeco-Roman exonym Iberia (or Hiberia) was probably derived from the Armenian name *Virk* or *Ivirk*, related to the Middle Persian name *Wirčān*; the latter means 'land of the wolves'.³¹ Today's exonym Georgia has no connection to the popular St George, the country's patron saint. It is instead derived from the Persian and Turkish *Gurj*, which again is related to the Armenian *Virk*.³² The mistaken derivation of the toponym Georgia from St George originated in the Western European Middle Ages. Bishop Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) thus wrote: 'These men are called Georgians because they especially revere and worship St George, whom they make their patron and standard-bearer in their fights with the infidels.'³³



105. South side of the mighty fortress of Gori, Kartli, Georgia. The fortress was known in the seventh century CE by the name Tontio, but archaeological investigations point to a significantly older fortress, which was probably built in the first century BCE. The present building dates from the seventeenth century. Photo 2018.



106. The eastern wall of the ancient city of Archaeopolis (Nokalakevi), which in ancient Georgian chronicles is called Tsikhe Goji, ‘Fortress of Kuji’. Kuji was a legendary prince of Colchis, who in the third century BCE allied himself with the equally legendary first king of Kartli, Parnavaz I, to drive out the Macedonian viceroy appointed by Alexander the Great (Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* (1996), 22–4, pp. 31–4). Archaeopolis was an important Colchian fortress that played a key role in the Lazic War between Byzantium and Persia. The Byzantine reconquest of Archaeopolis in 556 was the final blow in the Persian defeat. Photo 2018.

2.1 Legendary ancestors and the Parnavazids

In the Iberian mythological tradition, the personifications of important regions and cities of the South Caucasus are portrayed as ancestors. This is illustrated by Targamos’ eight sons: *Haos* (Armenian Hayk), ancestor of Hayastan (Armenia), *Kartlos* (whose name is derived from Kartli), *Bardos* (Pardav, today’s Barda in Caucasian Albania), *Movakan* (north-west Albania), *Lek* (the Lak in south Dagestan), *Heros* (Hereti in east Georgia and north-west Albania), *Kavkas* (several North Caucasian tribes), and *Egros* (Egrisi, Colchis).³⁴ Kartlos’ five sons also bore toponyms as names, specifically *Mtskhetos* (Mtskheta, west of Tbilisi), *Gardabos* (Gardabani, south-east Georgia), *Kakhos* (Kakheti, East Georgia), *Kukhos* (Kukhetia, south-east Georgia) and *Gachios* (Gachiani, south-east Georgia). The names of the three sons of Mtskhetos were also derived from toponyms: *Uplos*

(Uplistsikhe, Kartli), *Odzrkhos* (Odzrkhe, southern Georgia) and *Javakhos* (Javakheti).³⁵ This fictitious genealogy symbolizes the vision of *Sakartvelo*, a united Georgia. It reflects the territorial claim of Kartli around the year 800, which extended from the Black Sea to the Caspian, but excluded Armenia. According to *The Kings of Kartli*, the mythical, almost paradisiacal harmony rapidly disintegrated after Mtskhetos’ death. Odzrkhos and Javakhos rebelled against their older brother Uplos, resulting in a long period of foreign rule.³⁶

According to the traditional historiography of Iberia, the beginning of the Kartli monarchy is linked to Alexander’s destruction of the Achaemenid Empire. Kartli was part of the latter’s sphere of influence. As far as Armenia is concerned, we know that Mithranes, appointed by Alexander the Great as vassal king, was an intermediate step to a short-lived independence

that soon gave way to Seleucid sovereignty. In the case of Kartli, Alexander supposedly installed a Macedonian viceroy named **Azo** (Azon, Azoy). *Kartlis Tskhovreba* describes Azo as a Hellenized Macedonian and relative of Alexander with Macedonian occupation troops at his disposal.³⁷ According to *Moktsevey Kartlisay*, he was the son of a previous king of Aryan Kartli, i.e. Iranian Kartli. ‘King Alexander brought Azoy, son of the king of Aryan Karli, and bestowed on him Mtskheta as his seat.’³⁸ Although Azo is most likely a fictional character, according to Stephen Rapp, this nevertheless hints at the beginning of a small kingdom in Kartli.³⁹ On the other hand, the legend that Alexander appointed Azo, son of the king of Aryan Kartli in Mtskheta, does not support Heinz Fähnrich’s conclusion in 2010 that ‘a dynasty of native rulers of Iberia’ existed before Azo and that Azo’s successor Parnavaz renewed ‘a thousand-year-old tradition of Georgian state-formation’.⁴⁰ The two different traditions of the origin of Azo are in fact striking because they are emblematic of the tension between the Hellenistic–Roman–Byzantine world and the Iranian world, into which Iberia was integrated.

According to Iberian heroic tradition, a direct descendant of Uplou in the male line named **Parnavaz I**, who is said to have reached a biblical reign of 65 years (r. ca. 299–234 BCE), rebelled.⁴¹ He supposedly allied himself with Kuji, Prince of Egrisi, the legendary founder of the fortified city of Nokalakevi (Archaeopolis). He killed Azo and divided his kingdom into eight provinces, each of which was headed by an *eristavi*. He also appointed a *spaspet*, a military chief commander and kind of viceroy, to whom the eight *eristavis* reported. Since the *spaspet*,



107. Foundations of the Sassanid fire temple in Nekresi, which was used until the fourth/fifth century CE. Kakheti, Georgia. Photo 2013.

who was usually a member of the royal family, also ruled ex officio over Inner Kartli, which stretched from Mtskheta to Uplistsikhe, he also controlled the heartland of Kartli. Frictions thus developed with the king. Presumably, this rivalry between king and *spaspet* forms the background for the stories about an alleged, yet highly improbable, dual rule from 58 to 132 CE. Parnavaz is also credited with the invention of the Georgian script, more than six centuries before its historical introduction.⁴² Parnavaz’s son and successor **Saumarg** (r. ca. 234–159 BCE) is said to have ruled for as long as 75 years. When several *eristavi* plotted against him, he crushed the uprising with the help of the king of the Ossetians, a relative and a loyal *aznauri* (member of the middle nobility). Saumarg was succeeded by his Iranian adopted son **Mirian I** (Mirvan, r. ca. 159–109 BCE), who, according to *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, was a Seleucid vassal.⁴³ When Mirian’s successor **Parnajom** (r. ca. 109–90 BCE) promoted the Persian fire cult in Kartli and had a fire temple built at Nekresi in Kakheti, and at the same time disparaged the traditional deities, the majority of the *eristavis* rebelled and asked the Armenian king Tigranes for military support. The invading Armenian army defeated King Parnajom, who was supported by Persia, and Tigranes put the son of the former Armenian king Artavasdes I on the Iberian throne as **Artaxias I** (Arshak, r. ca. 90–78 BCE).⁴⁴

2.2 Iberia in Rome’s political orbit

The *coup d’état* mentioned in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* and the installation of Artaxias I as Iberian king show how Tigranes II downgraded his northern neighbour Iberia to an Armenian vassal state, installing a scion of the Armenian royal family as king. Like Artaxias, his son **Artag** (r. ca. 78–63 BCE) is also historically documented. He is identical with the Iberian king Artoces, mentioned by Appian and Cassius Dio, who was defeated by Pompey in the winter of 66–65 BCE.⁴⁵ As a consequence, Iberia became part of the Roman defence system in the South Caucasus, which also included Armenia and Albania as well as the Colchis protectorate. While the historicity of Artaxias I and Artag is undisputed and the beginning of Iberian kingship at the transition from second to first century BCE is also certain, their four predecessors remain controversial – not only because of their unrealistically long periods of rule, but especially because their biographies contain numerous anachronisms. At best, they might be described as semi-legendary. There very well could have been kings and princes in Kartli during the third and second centuries BCE, but no dynasty existed that was based on a relative of Alexander or an unknown ruler of Aryan Kartli.

As far as the historian Burkhard Meissner was concerned, the first four Parnavazids are fictions of the eighth century CE, a time when Kartli wanted to distance itself from Armenia. The deep rift between Georgia and Armenia was caused by the Armenian Church's excommunication of the Georgian Church and its followers at the Third Synod of Dvin in 607.⁴⁶ Since Armenia had claimed a certain religious and spiritual leadership role vis-à-vis Kartli up to this point, Kartli had to reposition itself after its exclusion from the former community. This included rewriting both the Christianization of Iberia and its ancient history. It was now unacceptable that the first Kartvelian royal dynasty was of Armenian origin. 'The Georgian [Kartvelian] king list was extended to show that indigenous rulers predated the Iberian Arsacids [Artaxiads], whom the tradition regarded as a foreign dynasty, imposed on Georgia [Kartli] by Armenian rulers.'⁴⁷ Since other traditionally listed kings are doubtful, Meissner compares *Kartlis Tskhovreba* with the German *Nibelungenlied*,⁴⁸ i.e. with an epic that freely rewrote, supplemented and embellished historical material. For this reason the present author abstains from further discussing rulers of doubtful historicity.⁴⁹

After the crushing defeat of the Roman triumvir Crassus in 53 BCE, Kartli regained sovereignty for a short time, until Publius Canidius Crassus defeated the Iberian king **Parnavaz II** (r. 63–32 BCE) in the year 36,⁵⁰ and reintegrated Kartli within the Roman sphere of influence.⁵¹ In contrast to Armenia, where Rome and Parthia directly vied for influence, Kartli (Iberia) enjoyed more room to manoeuvre. As a result, it skilfully expanded its sphere of influence in the South Caucasus. Towards this end, it pursued a pro-Roman policy, not least in order to regain the southern territories lost to Tigranes II of Armenia. The opportunity for revenge presented itself in the year 34 CE. The Parthian king Artabanus II (r. 13–38) put his own son Arsaces on the Armenian throne upon the death of King Zeno-Artaxias III, who had been installed in Armenia by Rome. Emperor Tiberius (r. 14–37) did not accept Armenia's withdrawal from the Roman system of alliances and encouraged King **Mithridates I** of Iberia (r. ?–ca. 34/5) to put one of his two sons, Pharasmanes or Mithridates, on the Armenian throne with Roman backing. As Cassius Dio reports:

The emperor [Tiberius] wrote to Mithridates [I] the Iberian to invade Armenia [. ...] Armenia fell into the hands of Mithridates,

108. Partially gilded silver bowl with the high relief of the goddess of fortune Tyche holding a horn of plenty, from Armaz-Tsikhe, second century CE. In the Roman Empire, magnificent vessels like this were used by leading officials such as prefects as valuable gifts of friendship. The discovery of such silver bowls in Harmozica indicates the close political and cultural relations between Rome and Kartli. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Vani Archaeological Reserve, Tbilisi.

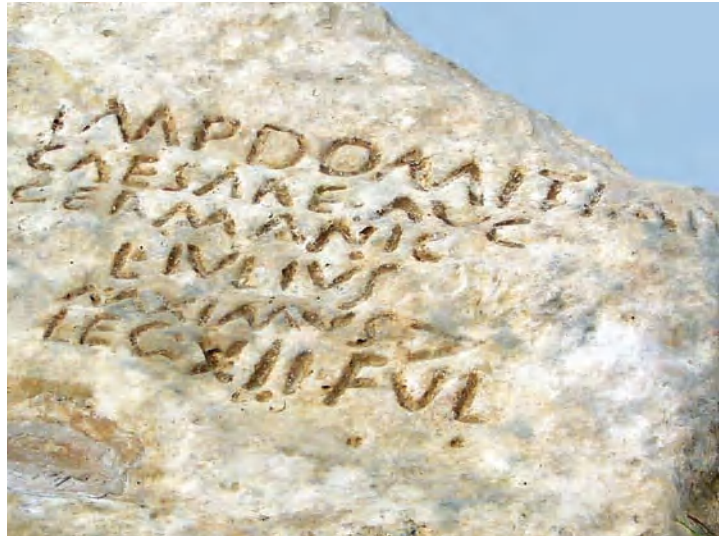


the son, as it would appear, of Mithridates the Iberian and the brother of Pharasmanes, who became king of the Iberians after him [Mithridates I].⁵²

Arsaces was killed and Mithridates (Mrdat, r. 35–37, 41–52), the younger brother of **Pharasmanes I** (r. ca. 35–before 75), ascended the Armenian throne thanks to the help of Sarmatian and Alanian mercenaries.⁵³ Two Parthian invasions failed miserably, as Pharasmanes opened the Darial Pass to his allies, the Sarmatians and Alans, who routed the Parthian invaders.⁵⁴ A Roman garrison installed in Gornea (Garni) near Artaxata secured Mithridates' rule over Armenia. Although Emperor Caligula (r. 37–41) had held Mithridates of Armenia captive for some years in Rome, after which Claudius (r. 41–54) sent him back to Artaxata, Armenia was now a Roman vassal state under Iberian control.

But when Mithridates of Armenia refused to support his brother Pharasmanes of Iberia in a victorious attack on Albania, Pharasmanes provided troops for his own son Rhadamistus of Armenia (r. ca. 52–54) to overthrow his uncle Mithridates. The latter capitulated and was executed by his nephew, without Rome intervening in this 'conflict among barbarians'. Two years later, the Parthian ruler Vologeses I (r. ca. 51–78) expelled the Iberians from Armenia, and Rhadamistus fled to Kartli,⁵⁵ where his father Pharasmanes I had his ambitious son executed for fear of an attempted *coup d'état*. This marked the end of almost twenty years of Iberian domination in Armenia. But Vologeses placed his brother Tiridates I (Trdat, r. 54–58, 62/63–72/75 or 88) as Armenian king on the throne, thereby founding the Parthian Arsacid dynasty of Armenian kings, which lasted until 428. Though the Roman commander Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo (d. 67), sent by Emperor Nero (r. 54–68), drove out Tiridates in the year 58, and Iberia recovered the areas it had lost to Armenia, Corbulo's successor in the command of Armenia, Caesennius Paetus, suffered a devastating defeat in the year 62. In 63, Rome and Parthia ended the stalemate with the Treaty of Rhandaia, which established a Parthian–Roman condominium over Armenia.⁵⁶ Iberia, however, lost its influence in Armenia. Since Armenia now belonged to the Parthian zone of influence, Iberia intensified its relations with Rome. This move did not prevent the Iberian rulers from using their control over the Darial Pass as a means of applying pressure on Rome. According to Pliny, this situation induced Emperor Nero to plan a military expedition over the Darial Pass to Alania (Ossetia) in 68 to avert the Alanian threat.⁵⁷

The period from 58 to 132 CE is notable for an alleged dual sovereignty, with five pairs of kings, listed by *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.



109. Inscription of the centurion Lucius Julius Maximus of the Legio XII Fulminata, who was stationed at the Caspian Sea under Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96), Gobustan, Azerbaijan. The text reads: 'Imp(eratore) Domitiano / Caesare Aug(usto) / Germanic(o) / L(ucius) Iulius / Maximus (centurio) / Leg(ionis) XII Ful(minatae)'. Photo 2016.

One king ruled in the established capital Harmozica (Georgian Armaz-Tsikhe), which was located on the right bank of the Kura, and the other resided in the emergent city of Mtskheta, across the river on the left bank.⁵⁸ This particular episode is a fiction not mentioned by any Roman author. The alleged diarchy apparently reflects conflicts between the king and *spaspet* or between the two cities. What is certain, however, is that Iberia allowed an Alanian army to march to Atropatene and Armenia in 72. Emperor Vespasian then sent military engineers and probably legionaries to Iberia in the year 75 to strengthen the defences at Harmozica, perhaps even further north. In doing so, he made it impossible for raids from the north to gain access to the plain of the Kura river. A Greek inscription discovered near Harmozica calls **Mithridates II** (r. before 75–ca. 106/10) 'friend of Caesars and king of Rome-loving Iberians'. Other inscriptions in the Armazian script, the Iberian adaptation of the Aramaic script, confirm that Mithridates II was the son of Pharasmanes I, and that around the year 150 the Iberian king was called Khsefarnug.⁵⁹ Vespasian's initiative was a continuation of Nero's strategy to secure militarily the north-eastern border of the Roman sphere of influence from the Black Sea to the Caspian. For that reason, Rome already maintained fortresses in Sebastopolis (Dioscurias), Phasis (Poti) and Apsaros (Gonio) before the year 77. Commander Flavius Arrianus, the governor of Cappadocia (in office 131–137) who had inspected the Roman positions around the Black Sea in about the year 131, reported in his *Periplus Ponti Euxini* that in the 130s there

were 400 men stationed in Phasis, while in Apsaros, which was 4.7 hectares in size, there were even five cohorts, i.e. 2,400 soldiers.⁶⁰ Lastly, a Roman military unit was located on the Caspian Sea 70 km south-west of the present-day city of Baku, as can be seen from the epigram of the centurion Lucius Julius Maximus of the Legio XII Fulminata, who was stationed there under Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96).⁶¹ Rome now demonstrated military presence in Colchis, in Gornea (Armenia), Harmozica (Iberia), and in Caucasian Albania on the Caspian Sea. Its military engagement in the Caucasus reached a climax under Emperor Trajan (r. 98–117), when he transformed Armenia into a Roman province in the year 114. Iberia, however, supported Trajan militarily. This is evidenced by the death of Amazasp, the brother of the Iberian king **Mithridates III** (r. ca. 106/10–?),⁶² Amazasp fought on the Roman side and died in 115 or 116 at Nisibis.⁶³

Emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138) was afraid of overextending the empire. He abandoned Trajan's furthest conquests and defined the Euphrates as the eastern border. The Iberian king **Pharasmanes II** (r. ?– after 141) took advantage of Rome's decreasing military presence to achieve full sovereignty for Kartli. In doing so, he extended his sphere of influence beyond the traditional borders of Kartli westwards into Colchis as far as the Black Sea. On his tour of inspection, Arrian noticed that south of the Lazi, whose Roman client-king was Malassas, the people known as Zydretae were subject to the Iberian king Pharasmanes.⁶⁴ The unusually strong Roman garrison of the fortress of Apsaros, which stood immediately north of the Zydretae, was probably responsible for protecting the Rome-friendly Lazi from Iberian attacks. The estrangement of the Iberian king from Rome was expressed in a demonstrative manner when Pharasmanes refused to participate in the conference Hadrian called with allied rulers and provincial governors in Satala, Cappadocia in 131. When tensions with the neighbouring Caucasian kingdom of Albania escalated a few years later, Pharasmanes encouraged the Alans to cross the Iberian-controlled 'Caucasian Gate', the Darial Pass, and to invade Albania. The Alans subsequently marched through Albania, Media Atropatene and Armenia, plundering and causing mayhem, whereupon they attacked Roman Cappadocia.⁶⁵ In 135, Arrian mobilized the Legio XV Apollinaris and a *vexillatio* (division) of the Legio XII Fulminata. Starting from Erzurum or Apsaros, he then confronted the Alans. As he describes in his treatise *Ektaxis kata Alanon* (*Battle Order against the Alans or Alanica*), Arrian's challenge was to neutralize the Alanian armoured cavalry, which preferred disorderly frontal attacks. He chose a purely defensive strategy. Instead of dividing the legionaries into smaller, mobile

units such as maniples or cohorts as usual, he set them up as a tightly -knit phalanx eight men deep to cordon off the small plain he had chosen as the battlefield. Mounted archers and divisions of elite infantry secured the hills and ridges to thwart enemy flanking manoeuvres. The front infantry rows were armed with long lances and the rear ones with throwing spears; the lance-bearers aimed at the enemy horses, the spear-throwers at their riders. In front of the infantry stood another line of mounted archers. With this unorthodox strategy, Arrian wanted to break the momentum of the enemy frontal attack with the superior firepower of arrows, lances and spears, and put the Alans on the run so as to avoid engaging in close combat. The Roman cavalry was then supposed to pursue and massacre the enemies fleeing in disarray. The exact course of the battle is unknown, but it seems that it went according to Arrian's script, with the Alans fleeing after their foiled and unsuccessful attack.⁶⁶

If, like C.E. Bosworth, one follows the account of the Eastern Roman philosopher Themistius (ca. 317–after 388), Arrian pursued the fleeing Alans to the Darial Pass and established the border between Iberia and Albania.⁶⁷ Arrian's victorious campaign forced Pharasmanes to return to the Roman zone of influence and to agree to the stationing of a Roman *cohors quingenariae*.⁶⁸ Around the year 141/2, Pharasmanes sealed the rapprochement with Rome with his visit to Emperor Antonius Pius (r. 138–161). At the same time, the emperor appointed one Pacorus as king of the Lazi. The numerous finds of Roman silverware and gems made in and around Harmozica, probably mostly diplomatic gifts, testify to the close exchange between Rome and Kartli in the second century CE (fig. 108).⁶⁹ After Iberia had returned to the Roman sphere of influence, peace seems to have been established between Kartli and Rome. The kingdom practically disappeared from the Roman historiography, until the third century when it was caught up in the maelstrom of the Roman–Sassanid conflicts. Nevertheless, the coastal region of Colchis remained unsettled due to pirates and raids by mountain tribes. For this reason, the fortress of Pityus (Pitsunda) was built or expanded in the middle of the second century, where a *vexillatio* of the Legio XV Apollinaris was stationed.⁷⁰ By the middle of the third century, however, the pressure of 'barbarian' peoples also increased in Colchis, as suggested by the attack of the Borani on Pityus. The Borani, living between Maiotis and Caucasus, probably belonged to a Sarmatian tribe and were allied with the Ostrogoths. They seized Bosporan ships and made a first unsuccessful attack on Pityus around the year 254. Two years later, they succeeded in conquering the port city, whereupon they sailed further west and also took Trapezus

(Trabzon).⁷¹ While the sources of that time are silent about Apsaros' fate, stratigraphic analysis suggests that the fortress was abandoned around the year 300.⁷² David Braund, on the other hand, contradicts this finding, reading from the archaeological material a 'significant reconstruction' of Apsaros. He dates the construction of the powerful fortress of Petra to the same period in which the co-emperor Galerius (r. 293–305 under Diocletian, as eastern Augustus 305–311) drove the Sassanids out of Armenia.⁷³ The renewed withdrawal of the Roman garrisons, at the latest during the Hun invasions in the last quarter of the fourth century, made the rise of the kingdom of Lazica possible.⁷⁴

The succession of Pharasmanes is unclear. A bilingual Greek–Armenian inscription from Harmozica mentions an otherwise unknown king **Khsefarnug** (r. middle of the second century), mentioned above, whose name sounds Alanian. If Khsefarnug was identical with the king **Ghadami** mentioned in

Iberian sources, he could hypothetically have been followed by **Pharasmanes III** and **Amazasp II**. Furthermore, only Iberian sources give information about the next four kings of Kartli. They include **Rev Martali** (Rev the Just, r. ca. 189–216), who is said to have founded the dynasty of Arsacid kings of Iberia, followed by **Vache I** (r. ca. 216–234), **Bakur I** (r. ca. 234–249) and **Mihrdat II** (r. ca. 249–265?).⁷⁵ Since in the second half of the third century an Arsacid dynasty also took power in Caucasian Albania with Vachagan I, Parthian Arsacid dynasties ruled in all three South Caucasian kingdoms. The information on the Iberian king lists remains doubtful, however, as do the reigning years hypothetically assigned by Cyril Toumanoff.

The overthrow of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty by the Sassanid Ardashir I (r. 224–242) in the year 224 led to a change of dynasty in Iran, which would have dramatic repercussions for Rome and the South Caucasus. The Sassanids were warlike



110. Interior of the southern wall of the Roman–Byzantine military camp of Apsaros, called Gonio by the Venetians and Genoese. The castellum mentioned by Pliny the Elder was founded in the later 60s under Emperor Nero and had a 2,400-man garrison under Emperor Trajan (Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, 19 (2003), pp. 57, 63. Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.4 (2014), p. 347). After the Byzantines had torn down their own fortress of Petra, further north, for tactical reasons in 552, they rebuilt the neglected army camp of Apsaros. The uppermost masonry with the battlements dates from the Ottoman period, sixteenth/seventeenth century. Photo 2018.



111. Anthropomorphic stone figure, fourth–first century BCE. Open-air museum near the Maiden Tower (Qiz Qalasi), Baku, Azerbaijan. Photo 2016.

rulers. The first two King of Kings, Ardashir and his son Shapur I (r. 240/42–270), did everything they could to reconquer the north of Mesopotamia, which had been annexed by Emperor Septimus Severus (r. 193–211) in the late 190s, and to force the Romans back behind the Euphrates. That Armenia and Iberia would be caught up in the wars was inevitable.⁷⁶ At the same time, the Roman Empire suffered an extended period of internal weakness. The trilingual *Great Inscription of Shapur I* from the year 262 provides key information about the Iranian–Roman conflicts; it is engraved on the outer walls of the *Ka'bah-e Zardusht* of Naqsh-e Rostam near Persepolis (fig. 59). In 244, Shapur defeated and

killed the Roman emperor Gordian III (r. 238–244), whereupon Emperor Philip the Arab (r. 244–249) had to pay a high ransom and renounce sovereignty over Armenia. Nine years later, Shapur destroyed another Roman army; and, in 260, he decimated the army of Emperor Valerian (r. 253–260) and took him prisoner. In the inscription, Shapur boasts, among other things, of his Caucasian possessions:

And I hold the lands [...] Ādurbāyagān [Azerbaijan], Armenia, Wiruzān/Wručān [Kartli], Sigān [Machelonia in the Greek version = Mingrelia, part of Colchis], Ar[r]ān [Caucasian Albania], Balāsagān [the Mughan Steppe in southern Azerbaijan and in north-western Iran] up to the Caucasus Mountains and the Gate of the Alans.⁷⁷

Thus the southern Caucasus was now largely within the Persian zone of power.

An interesting distinction is made by the proclamation of the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, written towards the end of the 280s and affixed to the *Ka'bah-e Zardusht*.⁷⁸ Not only does he boast of his missionary efforts to spread the Zoroastrian fire cult, but he attributes Ādurbāyagān (Azerbaijan) to Ērān, the Iranian ancestral land that was directly under the King of Kings. He further ascribes Armenia, Wirzan, i.e. Kartli, Albania and the Mughan steppe up to the Gate of the Alans to Anērān or 'non-Iran'.⁷⁹ States like these did not belong to the heartland, but were ruled by vassal kings such as **Amazasp III** (r. ca. 260–265?) in Iberia, of whom Shapur's inscription thus says they 'lived under my rule'.⁸⁰ Little is known about the king **Aspagur I** (r. ca. 265–284), who is only mentioned in Iberian sources, except that he fled to Ossetia after a Sassanid attack on Kartli and died there.⁸¹ In any case, Iberia was a Persian protectorate from the year 262 at the latest, and probably already from the later 250s, until the year 298. The Sassanid sovereignty over the South Caucasus is confirmed in the bilingual Middle Persian/Parthian Paikuli inscription of ca. 295. Here, Shah Narseh (r. 293–302, the former viceroy of Armenia from 273/4–293) enumerates the vassal kings liable to tribute, among others the kings of Mskytan (the Moskhoi/Meshki/Mesketia), of Kartli/Iberia, Sigān (Mingrelia) and King Tirdād (of Armenia).⁸² What is especially noteworthy about this enumeration is the separate listing of the kings of Mesketia and Mingrelia directly beside the ruler of Kartli, indicating that these two regions were independent from Kartli at the end of the third century. It is also remarkable that besides Narseh two other kings of kings served as *marzpan* in South Caucasus before their

accession to the throne, namely Hormizd I and Khosrow II. Later on, under the early Muslim Abbasids, the four caliphs al-Mansur, al-Mahdi, Harun al-Rashid and Amin likewise first served as governors of Armenia and Albania.⁸³

Emperor Diocletian (r. 285–305), however, did not tolerate the loss of northern Mesopotamia and the South Caucasus. After stabilizing the imperial administration and introducing the tetrarchy in 293,⁸⁴ he ordered his Caesar (co-emperor) Galerius to launch a counter-offensive when Narseh invaded western Armenia in 296. After an initial bitter defeat, in the spring of 298 Galerius inflicted a crushing and decisive blow to Shah Narseh in what was then Armenia, east of Erzurum. The Persian army was completely wiped out. Narseh's retinue and harem fell into the hands of the Romans, while Narseh himself only narrowly escaped. The Byzantine civil servant Petros ho Patrikios (Peter the Patrician) (d. after 565), who must have had access to archives, describes the Roman terms at the Peace of Nisibis in 298 as follows:

*Galerius and Diocletian met at Nisibis, where, after they had deliberated, in common sent an envoy to Persia, Sicorius Probus. [The conditions were]: With respect to the eastern region, the Romans hold Intelene with Sophene and Arzanene with Cardyene and Zabdicene; and that the Tigris River be a boundary of each of the two states; and that with respect to Armenia, Zintha, the base situated in a border zone of Media [Atropatene], mark the boundary; and that the sovereign of Iberia owe to Rome the insignia of his realm; and that Nisibis – the city situated besides the Tigris – be the place of their transactions.*⁸⁵

In return, Narseh received his wife and children back. The southern border of the areas granted to Rome lies on a line that stretched from Malatya in the west to Amida (today's Diyarbakır) and from there along the Tigris up to about Cizre in the east.⁸⁶ Persia recognized Rome's sovereignty over Iberia through the Treaty of Nisibis, which remained in force until about 378.⁸⁷ As for Armenia, it mutated from the status of a Persian vassal to that of a semi-sovereign state within the Roman zone of influence. To secure Roman dominance in Armenia, Diocletian appointed King Trdat (Tiridates) IV.⁸⁸ Diocletian avoided overextending the empire, however, by not converting the five territories north-west of the Tigris ceded by Persia into Roman provinces. Instead, he left their administration to Armenian nobles loyal to Rome.⁸⁹ The designation of Nisibis as the only place of transshipment between the two empires subsequently secured Rome the corresponding import duties. Albania, though, remained a Persian protectorate.

The Treaty of Nisibis was a 'modern' agreement in that it linked security issues with trade regulations. The agreement also once again revealed the limited room for manoeuvre of South Caucasian states in the face of the superiority of their neighbours, Rome and Persia. The return of Armenia and Iberia to the Roman zone of influence and the containment of Persian influence as well as Persia's Zoroastrian missionary efforts ultimately paved the way for the Christianization of the South Caucasus.



112. A 14-centimetre-high gold figure of a man holding a small ibex on his shoulders, first century BCE, Lankaran (Lankaran), southern Azerbaijan. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

3. Caucasian Albania in pre-Islamic times

The territory of the kingdom of Albania and the south-eastern part of Dagestan around Derbent roughly correspond to present-day Azerbaijan. In the course of time, the borders changed and in the south they alternated between the rivers Kura and Araxes, so that Utik (Uti) and Artsakh by turns belonged to Armenia and Albania. Albania bordered local North Caucasian peoples and Alans to the north, Kakheti to the west, Armenia to the south-west, Media Atropatene to the south and the Caspian Sea to the east. Albania did not always reach the sea, however. Furthermore, the course of the coastline also varied as a result of the fluctuations in sea level. The Greek and Latin name *Albania* is an exonym; the proper name is unknown.⁹⁰ The Armenians called the country *Ałuank*, the Parthians *Ardhan*, the Sassanids *Arran* and the Arabs

ar-Rān.⁹¹ Since Albania had no written records before the fifth century and only sporadic contact with Rome, the source material is poorer than in the case of Iberia. The only reasonably comprehensive medieval historical work is the above-mentioned *History of the Albanians*, which is attributed to a Movses Daskhurantsi or Kałankatvatsi.⁹²

According to Strabo, at the beginning of the first century BCE the region of Albania was divided into 26 peoples with their own different languages.⁹³ One of the languages of the Caucasian Albanians was Old Udi, an autochthonous Caucasian language, which also served as the church language of the Albanian Orthodox Church. Today, there are still about 10,000 people who belong to the Udic ethnic group, of which about 8,500 speak the modern Udic language.⁹⁴ At the turn of the seventh to the eighth century, the Udis living in Artsakh and Utik came under pressure due to an increasing Armenization



113. The south-facing entrance gate to the ancient capital of Albania at Qabala (Qəbələ), also called Chukhur Qabala, Azerbaijan. The city mentioned by Pliny was founded in the fourth century BCE (Chaumont, 'Albania', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 1/8 (1985), pp. 806–10); it kept its importance even after the construction by the Sassanids of the future capital Perozabad (Partav, Bərdə) around the year 461. Chukhur Qabala served as the first bishop's see of Albania, which was moved to Chor near Derbent around the year 463/4. The city was occupied by the Khazars in the seventh century and then fell to the Arabs. In 1120 the Georgian King David IV conquered and plundered Qabala (Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* (1996), 339, p. 330). One century later the city again suffered the same fate from the Mongols. Qabala was abandoned in the eighteenth century. The entrance gate and the city walls date from the fifth/sixth century CE and were reconstructed in the tenth/eleventh century. Photo 2016.

policy promoted by the Umayyad conquerors and their caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 685–705). They emigrated north-east to the region of Nij, where Qabala (Azerbaijani Qəbələ), the capital of Albania mentioned by Pliny, was located.⁹⁵ About half of today's Udis live in the area of Nij. According to tradition, in the first Christian centuries, the Albanian Church was sporadically under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church.⁹⁶ In the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, the majority of the Albanians converted to Islam, which contributed to the rapid decline of the Udic language. According to Ibn Hawqal (d. after 978), in the tenth century Udic Albanian was still the vernacular in the region of Partav/Barda.⁹⁷

In the sixth century BCE, Albania may well have belonged to the empire of the Medes; thereafter, it was certainly part of the empire of the Achaemenids. The region formed the Minor Satrapy of Lesser Media or, perhaps more precisely, belonged to Herodotus' XI Satrapy.⁹⁸ According to Arrian, Albanians fought in the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE in the army division of the Medes, which was commanded by Atropates, the future founder of the kingdom of Media Atropatene.⁹⁹ Afterwards, Albanian tribes probably came under the influence of the Seleucids. Long before Pompey, who (as we saw) turned back three days before reaching the Caspian coast, Greeks and Seleucids were familiar with the trade route that led from India to the River Oxus and further onward across the Caspian Sea to Albania, Iberia and the Black Sea. It is uncertain whether there was a united Albanian kingdom already in existence at the beginning of the first century BCE when Tigranes II subjugated that country. With the defeat of Tigranes by Pompey in 66 BCE, Albania gained sovereignty for several months. The first king of Albania known by name, **Oroeses**, however, suffered two defeats in battles against Pompey in 65 BCE.¹⁰⁰ After the devastating Roman defeat at Carrhae in 53 BCE, Albania came under Parthian sovereignty for a short time. The campaign of Publius Canidius Crassus in 37/36 BCE nevertheless forced the Albanian king **Zober** to again acknowledge Rome's supremacy. As the epigram of the centurion Lucius Julius Maximus of the Legio XII Fulminata reveals, Rome maintained a small garrison on the Caspian Sea under Emperor Domitian (r. 81–96 CE). Shortly thereafter, as the Roman historian Rufus Festus records, Emperor Trajan appointed a king in Albania.¹⁰¹ In 135, Alans plundered Albania and Atropatene, and King Vologeses III had to pay dearly for their departure. In the 250s, Shapur I conquered Albania, and the country remained under Sassanid sovereignty even after the Persian defeat of 298. In the *Great Inscription* of Naqsh-e Rostam from 262, Shapur I boasts that



114. Excavation of Salbir, a part of Qabala 800 m north of the city gate, dating from the first to the tenth century CE. The water conduit made of clay pipes in the rear centre of the picture, the ovens and the household pits date from the ninth century. Photo 2016.

his sphere of influence extends as far as the 'Gate of the Alans', though it remains uncertain whether this meant the narrow passage of Derbent or the Darial Pass.

Like other Armenian and Iberian authors of the Middle Ages, Movses Daskhurantsi traces the family tree of the Albanian kings back to Japheth and Targamos/Togarmah, then listing ten much later kings.¹⁰² If we may assume that the first king **Vachagan I** (r. late third century CE) came from the widely ramified Arsacid family, then nominal pan-Arsacid rule was established over Albania, Armenia and Iberia. Nonetheless, the representatives of the three Arsacid dynasties of the South Caucasus pursued purely national interests and there was no pan-Arsacid strategy in the South Caucasus. Little is known about Vachagan and his successor **Vache I**. Still, it cannot be excluded

that in the first half of the fourth century the kingdom was only weakly united and that the ‘Mazkutk’ advancing from the north, who were presumably related to the Massagetae, occupied the coastal region south of Derbent and thus cut Albania off from the sea.¹⁰³ We are better informed about the historical events during the reign of King **Urnayr** (r. before 359–after 387). In the year 359, he participated as a henchman of Shapur II (r. 309–379) in the siege of the Eastern Roman city of Amida (Diyarbakır), which proves that Albania was subjugated to Persia.¹⁰⁴ In 372, Urnayr attacked Armenia at Bagavan north of Lake Van with Persian backing, but was defeated by the Armenian *sparapet* Musheł (Mushegh) Mamikonian (d. ca. 378). The *sparapet*, however, had been warned of the forthcoming attack by the pro-Sassanid prince Meruzhan Artsruni. As a Zoroastrian, the latter resisted a forced conversion to Christianity and was therefore in the Albanian–Sassanid camp. Mamikonian set a trap for the Albanian army, but deliberately allowed the fleeing Urnayr to escape. The Pseudo-Faustos reports:

*He (Musheł) caught up with Urnayr, king of Ałuank, who was fleeing, and struck him over the head with many blows of the shaft of his lance, saying: ‘Be grateful that you are a king and wear a crown, for I will not kill a king.’ And he allowed him to escape.*¹⁰⁵

Soon afterwards, Urnayr showed his gratitude to Musheł by warning him of an imminent Persian attack, which Shapur II would command personally. The behaviour of the three protagonists Meruzhan Artsruni, Musheł Mamikonian and Urnayr illustrates that the Armenian princes were by no means united in their support for their putatively Christian nation, personified in the figure of the king, and that loyalty to the king or overlord had limited validity.

Although Urnayr’s loyalty had proved questionable, King Shapur III (r. 383–388) transferred the areas of Artsakh, Utik, Gardman, Kolt and Sakasene south of the Kura river to his Albanian vassal after the Roman–Sassanid division of Armenia in 387. The question as to whether these regions, now disputed between Armenia, the Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan belonged to either Armenia or Albania ‘from time immemorial’ is impossible to answer. On the one hand, the argument is misplaced, as there was no sovereign Armenian state before King Artaxias I and no Albanian state before the first century BCE. On the other hand, it is no longer possible to reconstruct which tribes ‘originally’ lived in these areas. Ancient or early medieval Albanian historical sources are non-existent,

while the Armenian ones are often biased and the Roman authors disagree on the affiliation.¹⁰⁶ According to Strabo, Artaxias I captured Caspiane and Phaunitis (Syunik?) and Basoropeda (Parspatunik,¹⁰⁷ a southern part of Artsakh) from the Medes after 189 BCE. However, Strabo mentions neither Utik nor Artsakh directly, nor the Albanians.¹⁰⁸ In terms of geographical borders, Pliny,¹⁰⁹ Ptolemy¹¹⁰ and Cassius Dio¹¹¹ defined the Kura river as the Armenian–Albanian border, while Plutarch¹¹² and Strabo¹¹³ assigned areas south of the Kura river to Albania. The disputed territories were returned (or assigned) to Albania at the latest upon the Roman–Persian peace treaty of 363, whereupon Musheł Mamikonian reconquered them for a short time around the year 370. According to Pawstos,

*he attacked the land of Artsakh in a great war. [...] He made war on the land of Ałuank and [...] took away from them many districts that they had seized: Uti, Šakašēn, the Valley of Gardman, Kolt and other surrounding districts bordering on them. They set the border between the land of Ałuank and their own land on the Kur River, as it had been before.*¹¹⁴

For the Persians, the territorial expansion of Albania in 387 was advantageous, because it became a bulwark against mountain and steppe peoples advancing from the north. The new border tripled the Albanian territory, but as a ‘by-product’ a strong Armenian minority suddenly emerged within Albania.



115. Burial objects in the Yonjali necropolis in the village of Fazil, not far from Chukhur Qabala, Azerbaijan. The pre-Christian cemetery dates from the seventh/sixth to third century BCE, the latter period belonging to the Yaloylutepe culture. The dead, who were buried in a foetal position, had been given numerous ceramic vessels, occasionally also 30-cm-high female clay figures. The woman on the left in the picture carries the figure of a wolf or dog on her chest. Photo 2016.



116. The medieval Church of the Redeemer, also called Church of St Eliseus (Elisha), in Nij, Azerbaijan, located about 45 km south-west of Qabala. Today, half of those Christian Udi who still speak the contemporary Udi language, which is derived from ancient Albanian, live in the Nij district. During the renovation works in 2004–5, it appears that three Armenian inscriptions came to light, one of which claimed that the church was built in 1823. This is highly unlikely, however, as the church building is certainly older. It can be assumed that the Armenian inscription was only added after the abolition of the Albanian Church in 1836 by the Russian Tsar Nicholas I, when Albanian churches were transferred to Armenian dioceses. The Armenian inscriptions were removed during the renovation and the church was consecrated in 2006 by the Russian Orthodox Bishop of Baku, Alexander. Photo 2016.

Together with the slow Christianization of Albania, which started from Armenia after the year 372, this contributed to the gradual Armenization of Albanian culture. According to a legend handed down from Movses Daskhurantsi, King Urnayr was converted by the Armenian Gregory the Illuminator. This is impossible, however, for Gregory died around the year 331.¹¹⁵

According to Movses Daskhurantsi, Urnayr's three sons **Vachagan II**, **Mrhavan** and **Satoy** ruled after him around the beginning of the fifth century. They were followed by their mother **Asay**, who was possibly of Sassanid descent.¹¹⁶ Their Armenian contemporary Koriun relates how the next king, **Arsuaġĕn** (r. ca. 424–444) welcomed the Albanian bishop Eremia and Mesrop Mashtots (362–440), inventor of the Armenian and allegedly also the Albanian script. Jointly, 'both the king and

the bishop willingly agreed to accept the script [...] and to create classes and schools'.¹¹⁷ Bishop Eremia then had the holy scriptures translated into Albanian using the new alphabet, which contained 52 letters, and King Arsuaġĕn 'strenuously' decreed the conversion of his people to the new faith. There are numerous indications that in Albania, as in Armenia and Kartli, the actual missionary work only took place in the first half of the fifth century through the efforts of Mesrop Mashtots. Thanks to translations into the respective national languages, people who did not speak either Greek or Syriac could understand the Bible and the liturgy.¹¹⁸ Mesrop Mashtots' meeting with King Arsuaġĕn took place in the Albanian capital of Qabala, where the bishop's see was located. After the forced abdication of the rebellious King Vache II in 463/4, the bishop's see was moved to the northern periphery to



117. Ruins of the Albanian tetraconch church of Lekit, located between Qakh and Zaqatala in northern Azerbaijan. The ground plan of the church, which was connected to a palace complex, is similar to that of Zvartnots in Armenia; it was probably built in the second half of the seventh century. Photo 2016.

Chor, near Derbent. Ninety years later, around 552, it was moved again to Partav, today's Barda (Bərdə). From this point onwards, the head of the church bore the title of Catholicos.

Like the ruling princes of Armenia and Iberia, Arsuaŕēn's successor **Vache II** (r. ca. 444–463/4) was forced to contend with the decree by Shah Yazdgerd II (r. 438–457) that all Christians of the South Caucasus had to adopt the official Zoroastrianism.

*Mihrnerseh, Great Vizir of Iran and non-Iran, many greetings to Greater Armenia. You must know that every man who dwells under heaven and does not accept the Mazdaean religion is deaf and blind and deceived by the demons of Haraman [Ahriman, the principle of evil].*¹¹⁹

Those who did not convert were threatened with persecution, deportation, torture and death. When the persecutions reached Albania around the year 449, Albania joined the uprising led by the Armenian prince Vardan Mamikonian. Since some Armenian princes such as Vasak, Prince of Syunik,¹²⁰ had adopted Zoroastrianism and fought on the Persian side, the uprising also resembled a civil war. Although in the autumn of

450 the allies achieved several victories in Albania,¹²¹ in May 451 they suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of Avarayr. King Vache II subsequently capitulated and converted to Mazdaism.¹²² Around the year 461, at the behest of the new King of Kings Peroz I (r. 459–484), he built in Utik the city of Perozabad, the later capital Partav.¹²³ Shortly afterwards, Vache rebelled. He declared Albania's independence and returned to Christianity. Movses Daskhurantsi reports: 'Vache, king of Albania, rebelled. [...] He decided that it was better to die in battle [as Christian] than to retain his kingdom as renegade.' After initial successes, he allied himself with the Mazkutk and opened the Gate of Cholay (Derbent). Unable to quell the uprising, Peroz joined forces with the Huns; he 'opened the Alan Gates, and bringing a large force of Huns, battled for a whole year against the king of Albania. A great part of the country was laid to waste.' To put an end to the devastation, Vache abdicated and retired as a monk.¹²⁴

Albania was now transformed into a Sassanid *marzpanat* (border province), headed by a viceroy (*marzpan*). Around 475, Peroz appointed the apostate Varsken, prince of Gogarene (r. 470–482), as *marzpan* of Albania after he had returned to the

religion of his father, Zoroastrianism. As an additional reward, Peroz gave his daughter to Varsken as a bride. Because his Christian wife Shushanik, a daughter of Vardan Mamikonian who had been killed at the Battle of Avarayr, steadfastly adhered to the Christian faith, Varsken tormented her to death around the year 473. She was canonized by the Church of Iberia, and her hagiography is the oldest literary work of Georgia.¹²⁵ With Peroz's consent, Varsken attacked the defiant kingdom of Iberia in 482. However, the Iberian king Vakhtang I Gorgasali (r. ca. 439/43–502) took him prisoner and had him executed.¹²⁶ The joint uprising of Vakhtang and the Armenian Vahan Mamikonian ultimately failed because of the resistance of the Persian *marzpan*, Shapur Mihran. At the same time, the death of Peroz in the war against the Hephthalites of Central Asia in 484 brought a turning point to the South Caucasus. As the new Shah Balash (Valakhsh, r. 484–488) needed peace on the north-west front and the support of Armenian cavalry to rebuild the Persian army, he came to terms with the insurgents and agreed to major concessions. Firstly, he granted freedom of religion to the Christians of the South Caucasus and prohibited Zoroastrian missionary work; secondly, all high dignitaries had to be recruited from the local nobility; and thirdly, the local princes would from then on have direct access to the Grand King. Vakhtang and Vahan Mamikonian

were allowed to return from their exile. Vakhtang remained king, while Vahan was appointed *marzpan* of Armenia. The Albanian princes finally elected **Vachagan III the Pious** (r. ca. 485–510), a nephew of Vache II, as their new king, whom Balash then confirmed.¹²⁷ The new king immediately took pains to again strengthen Christianity. He commanded the apostates to be rebaptized and prohibited the local pagan or Zoroastrian customs and rites (according to Strabo, the Albanians had previously worshipped the sun, Zeus and especially the moon, to which they offered human and animal sacrifices each year).¹²⁸ Vachagan then 'discovered' several relics, including those of St Grigoris, an early, semi-legendary Catholicos of the Albanian Church. He had his bones reburied in the monastery of Amaras in what is now the 'Republic' of Nagorno-Karabakh. Around the year 487, Vachagan convened a synod at Ałuën, near the now abandoned Azerbaijani border town of Ağdam. All the nobles also participated in the synod. The assembly regulated the demarcation between secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction and defined the taxes and fines that lay people, peasants and nobles, must pay to the church. One of the many provisions read as follows:

A noble and a member of the royal family shall in the course of his life give with his own hand for his soul a horse, saddled and harnessed, and



118. Derbent Fortress in Dagestan, which guards the narrow passage between the eastern foothills of the Great Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. This bottleneck was the gateway for invaders from the north such as Western Turks, Khazars, Mongols and Russians and from the south the Arabs. Photo 2016.

*whatever else he can afford. If he should not give this in his lifetime, his family shall give it after his death.*¹²⁹

As indicated by the purpose of the imposed gifts, i.e. ‘for his soul’, they also served as penance for committed sins.

After the death of Vachagan III, the Sassanids abolished the Albanian monarchy and placed the princes under the authority of the *marzpan*, who resided in Partav. This caused the splintering of the former kingdom. As Annegret Plontke-Lüning notes, from this point onward references to Albania’s political history are lacking for almost a century.¹³⁰ The absence of a king also facilitated the gradual assimilation of the Albanian Church to the Armenian Church, as well as the advance of the Armenian language and script. The Albanian language and script declined as a result. At the Synod of Dvin in Armenia in 506, the Armenian, Georgian and Albanian churches had still jointly rejected the Chalcedonian Creed and adopted the Henotikon of Emperor Zeno (r. 474–475, 476–491).¹³¹ But when Emperor Justin I (r. 518–527) revoked the Henotikon in the year 519 and Justinian I (r. 527–565) indirectly reconfirmed the Chalcedonian Creed between 533 and 553, it shattered the unity of the South Caucasian churches. The Iberians, Albanians, and Armenians of Syunik welcomed the return to the Chalcedonian Creed, while the Armenian Church emphatically rejected it several times between 555 and 607.¹³² The Albanian Church then came under the pressure of the Armenian Catholicos John II (in office 557–574), who wrote the following to the Albanian Catholicos Abas (in office 552–596) and all Albanian bishops:



119. The fortress of Çıraq Qala stood east of the present-day Azerbaijani town of Guba and was part of the Gilgilchay defence system. Photo 2019.

*We have heard a terrible rumour to the effect that certain ravening wolves in sheep’s clothing entered your country [...] who now saw the evil tares of the accursed Nestorius and the council of Chalcedon.*¹³³ [...] *Drive such as they from your borders, and do not listen to their deadly teaching.*¹³⁴

When an Albanian legation in Constantinople asked Emperor Justin II for military support around the year 575, the Albanian bishop Abas asked the Orthodox patriarch John III Scholastikos (Scholasticus, in office 565–577) for help in order to consolidate the autonomy of the Albanian Church, which had been in existence since the 560s. The diplomatic mission failed, but the Albanian Church obtained the right to elect its bishops independently, whereupon Syunik entered into union with the Albanian Catholicosate.

Nonetheless, in 607 the Armenian *marzpan* Smbat IV Bagratuni (in office with interruptions from 607 to 617) succeeded in declaring the Miaphysite Creed as binding for all three churches at the ‘Persian Synod’ of Dvin with the backing of Shah Khosrow II (r. 590–628).¹³⁵ According to Sebeos, the King of Kings Khosrow II ordered: ‘All Christians who are under my authority should hold the faith of Armenia.’¹³⁶ The Iberians resisted and confirmed the Chalcedonian Creed of the imperial church, prompting them to be excommunicated by the Armenian Church two years later. The Albanian Catholicos Viroy (in office ca. 596–630) was politically in a much weaker position than the Catholicos of Iberia, Kyrion I (in office 595–610). He relented in view of the excommunication of his church and clergy pronounced by the Armenian Catholicos Abraham I (in office 607–615). He recognized the Miaphysite confession of Armenia and the authority of the Armenian Catholicosate.¹³⁷ Given Albania’s political fragmentation, the Albanian Church would have been the only institution that could have provided a platform for establishing one Albanian nation. Viroy was powerless, however, and in the event of a union with Constantinople he undoubtedly would have been removed by Khosrow II, as happened to Catholicos Nerses Bakur a century later. If we are to believe Movses Daskhurantsi, Catholicos Viroy and the Albanian nobles actually made an attempt to win sovereignty later on, but in this they failed.¹³⁸

In the seventh century, Albania, like Armenia and Iberia, was caught up in the vortex of political and military conflicts between Byzantium, the Sassanids and the Western Turks coming from Central Asia. In the winter 623/4 or 624/25, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–641) wintered in Utik, Albania during his first counter-offensive against the Sassanids.

The Sassanids had previously won a series of spectacular victories over Byzantium. On the occasion of his second offensive of 627/8, Heraclius appointed **Varaz-Grigor** of Gardman (r. ca. 628–636) as presiding prince of Albania.¹³⁹ Since Varaz-Grigor belonged to the Albanian Church and was a Miaphysite, Heraclius had him baptized for the second time to solidify his conversion to the Chalcedonian imperial church. Catholicos Viroy disapproved of this measure. As the history of the Georgian Sumbat Davitis-dze, completed around 1030, reports: ‘And [Heraclius] came to Ghardabani, to Varaz-Grigoli’s [estate...] and baptized Varaz-Grigoli and all of his people.’¹⁴⁰ Heraclius not only strove for a decisive victory over the Sassanid arch-enemy, but he also wanted to bind the South Caucasian countries Lazica, Iberia, Armenia and Albania to the empire by appointing presiding princes and to return the Albanian and Armenian churches, which in his view were secessionist, to the embrace of Chalcedonian churches.¹⁴¹

Heraclius owed much of his military success in the South Caucasus to his Western Turkish allies under the leadership of their khan Tong Yabghu Khagan (r. ca. 617–630). In the year 626, they broke through the Sassanid bulwark of Derbent, which Shah Khosrow I (r. 531–579) had erected in place of an earlier mud-brick wall. Two parallel defensive walls 3,600 m in length running from west to east protected both the town and the hill fortress against enemies advancing from the north or south. The walls stood 350 to 450 m apart and reached into the sea. At the south-western corner of the wall, the defence system intersected with a wall more than 40 km long and 18 to 20 m high, running westwards to the forested mountains. This wall was further fortified with 73 massive towers. Derbent was the northernmost of the three defensive systems, each running from east to west, which the later Sassanid rulers had built along the west coast of the Caspian Sea to protect Iran. South of Derbent was the defensive system of Gilgilchay, which included the fortresses of Çıraq Qala and Shabran, and further south was the line of defence of Beshbarmak, which protected the Absheron Peninsula against attacks from the north.¹⁴²

The Khazars, who originated from the Western Turks, controlled Derbent until 642/3, when they were ousted for the first time by the Arabs under the command of Surāqa Ibn ‘Amr.¹⁴³ Derbent, however, remained contested for a long time between Arabs and Khazars and served the Arabs as a base for launching campaigns northwards into the Khazar Empire.¹⁴⁴ Tong Yabghu Khagan returned to Central Asia around the year 628 and left the command of the Western Turkish troops, supposedly to his son. Movses Khorenatsi calls him Shat, which is not a proper name



120. Bronze figure of the Albanian king Juansher (r. ca. 637–80), who was successively a Sassanid, Byzantine and Arab vassal. Copy in the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

but rather corresponds to the transliteration of the Western Turkish title *shad*. A *shad* was a prince or commander ranking below the Khagan. The commander nominated by Yabghu Khagan was Böri shad, who plundered in Albania and called on *marzpan* Sema Vshtnas to surrender. When Sema Vshtnas refused and fled, Catholicos Viroy took responsibility for subordinating himself and his territory to the Western Turks.¹⁴⁵

If we follow the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Varaz-Grigor’s son and successor **Juansher** (r. ca. 637–680) managed to hold on to power for more than forty years by changing allegiances multiple times. At the time of the last Sassanid ruler Yazdgerd III (r. 632–651) – who was eight years old when he ascended the throne and a pawn of nobles and military leaders – Juansher fought as a *sparapet* of the Albanian troops on the



121. The fortress of Shabran, built in the middle of the 6th century by Shah Khosrow I, was part of the bulwark of Gilgilchay, like Çıraq Qala. Ibn Khordadbeh called it Bab al-Sabiran, 'Gate of the Sabirs'. Either the settlement area of the Sabirs temporarily reached as far as Shabran or Sabirs captured in a war were forced to settle here. The fortress was destroyed several times: in the 730s by the Arabs, around 968 by northern hill tribes, in the 1230s by the Mongols, in 1583 during a Persian–Ottoman war and finally in 1721 by the anti-Persian, Lezgian rebel Hajji Davud (Khalilov, Mubariz C., 'Lost city of Shabran' (2013), www.visions.az/en/news/470/8063066b). Photo 2019.

Persian side against the Arab invaders. He fought in 636 in the devastating Persian defeat of al-Qādisiyya, in which the Armenian princes Musheġ Mamikonian III and Gregory (Grigor) II of Syunik met their demise. He also took up arms in the failed defence of the Persian capital Ctesiphon in 637. Juansher recognized the military weakness and political discord within the Sassanid camp, which led him to break away from the Sassanids before 642. A Persian army then immediately invaded Albania, occupied Partav, and captured Juansher's father Varaz-Grigor. Juansher, however, defeated the Persians, inducing the Byzantine Emperor Constans II (r. 641–668) to appoint him *patrikios*, a high honorary title.¹⁴⁶ Constans attempted to restore Byzantine sovereignty in the South Caucasus against the advancing Arabs. A key role was

played by the Armenian *sparapet* and former *marzpan* of Armenia, Theodore (Theodoros) Rshtuni (d. 655), who commanded a distinguished military entourage. In the years 642–3, he inflicted two defeats on attacking Arabs and was also awarded the title of *patrikios*. But Governor Mu'awiya I, the future first Umayyad caliph (r. 661–680), persuaded him in 652/3 to change sides when he presented him with a favourable vassal treaty.¹⁴⁷ Emperor Constans went on to march to Dvin, where he spent the winter of 653–4, while Theodore retreated to the island of Altamar (Aghtamar) in the south-east of Lake Van. Juansher was most likely on Theodore's side at this time, or else had taken a wait-and-see approach. No sooner had Constans left Armenia than Theodore drove out the Byzantine garrisons with the help of

Arab troops and was confirmed in 654 as 'Prince of Armenia, Iberia, Ałuank' and Siunik, as far as the Caucasus Mountain and the Pass of Chor [Derbent]'.¹⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, however, he went into exile in Damascus, probably against his will.¹⁴⁹

In the winter of 659–660,¹⁵⁰ Emperor Constans took advantage of the power struggle raging in the Caliphate to restore supremacy in the South Caucasus. He marched to Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin) in Armenia. Along the way, he received the homage of Juansher, whom he had summoned to his side and who had quickly acquiesced to the emperor's show of force. To retain the loyalty of the Albanian prince and Byzantium, he gave Juansher a piece of the 'True Cross'.¹⁵¹ But again, the Byzantines were not able to gain a foothold. Constans was again forced to leave Armenia and Caliph Mu'awiya, who had prevailed in the internal Arab power struggle, compelled the Byzantine clients, with the help of the Armenian Prince Grigor Mamikonian, to again recognize Arab sovereignty. Juansher also submitted to Mu'awiya in 662, after Albania had been invaded by the Khazars.¹⁵² In 680, Juansher was murdered by a nobleman. He was succeeded by his brother **Varaz-Trdat I** (Tiridates, r. ca. 680–705).

Varaz-Trdat, like his predecessor, had to contend with the Khazars' raids. He tried to blunt their antagonism by means of Christianization. He sent Bishop Israel in a diplomatic-missionary legation to the Khazar prince Alp Ilitver (Alp Ilutuer), who resided north of Derbent. According to the *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, they revered *Kuar* (in Alanian 'Sun') and worshipped a god whom Movses Daskhurantsi called *Tengri Khan* (in Turkish 'Khan of the Sky'), or *Aspandiat* (in Middle Persian *Spenta Armaiti*, 'Wisdom of Ahura Mazda' or *Aspa*, 'Horse'). Horse sacrifices were offered to Aspandiat.¹⁵³ Like other ancient Turkic peoples, the North Caspian Khazars had a custom of mutilating themselves at the funerals of high-ranking personalities and of conducting ritual duels.¹⁵⁴ It appears that Bishop Israel converted Alp Ilitver and the Khazar nobility. He then built churches and felled a divinely revered tree, from whose wood he constructed a large cross. But when Alp Ilitver requested that Bishop Israel remain with his Khazars – which would have extended the influence of the Albanian Church and thus also of Varaz-Trdat to the north of the Great Caucasus – the king and Catholicos Eřizar surprisingly refused. It is conceivable that their political overlords resisted the proposal.

After an Armenian uprising in 682 and a Byzantine offensive in Cilicia, Caliph Abd al-Malik and Emperor Justinian II (r. 685–695, 705–711) agreed on an armistice and the division of

tax revenues from Cyprus, Armenia, Iberia and probably also Albania. Indeed, the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* mentions that Varaz-Trdat had to pay taxes to the Khazars as well as to the Byzantines and the Arabs.¹⁵⁵ After a further Byzantine advance into Armenia around the year 689/90, Justinian II appointed Varaz-Trdat and the Armenian Nerses Kamsarakan as *patrikioi*, which again brought both countries under Byzantine sovereignty.¹⁵⁶ Most likely, however, the Byzantines doubted the loyalty of Varaz-Trdat or wanted to force him to bring the Miaphysite Albanian Church back into line with the imperial church. After all, towards the end of the century, Varaz-Trdat and his two sons were imprisoned in Constantinople.¹⁵⁷ During this period, Queen Spram and Catholicos Nerses Bakur made an attempt to leave the union with the Armenian Church and enter into one with the imperial church in Constantinople. The Armenian Church thwarted the attempt, however. The Armenian Catholicos Elijah of Archesh (in office 703–717) immediately accused his Albanian counterpart of political treason to Caliph Abd al-Malik:

*He who is now catholicos of Albania and has his throne in Parthaw has come to an agreement with the emperor of Greece, mentions him in his prayers and forces the land to adopt his faith. [...] Order those who wish to sin against God to be punished upon your great authority as their deeds deserve.*¹⁵⁸

The caliph had the Albanian church leader arrested and deported to Baghdad in 705, and forced the Albanian bishops and nobles to swear allegiance to the Armenian Church and the Miaphysite Creed under penalty of death. 'If any of them were found to have become diophysites [Chalcedonians], they might be destroyed by the sword.'¹⁵⁹ With this decree, the Armenian patriarch succeeded in eliminating his Albanian coreligionist by instrumentalizing the Muslim caliph. Soon after Varaz-Trdat's return to Albania, the Umayyads abolished the Albanian monarchy.¹⁶⁰ With the simultaneous abolition of the Albanian monarchy, the subordination of the Albanian Church to the Armenian hierarchy and the beginning of a campaign of Islamization, the caliphate undermined the foundations of a national Albanian culture and national consciousness. This contrasted with the development in Armenia and Kartli. When Varangian (as the Vikings living in medieval western Russia and Ukraine were called by the Rus and Byzantines) pirates sailed up the Kura river from the Caspian Sea in 943 and plundered the city of Partav for the second time after 914, the Albanian rump state collapsed.¹⁶¹

4. Armenia

Armenia's history was dominated for 1,100 years by the conflicts between the leading Western empire, Rome and later Byzantium, and the predominant Middle Eastern empire, first the Parthians, followed by the Sassanids and then the Muslim caliphates. For the great powers on both sides, the importance of Armenia, Iberia, Lazica and Albania lay not in their modest economic potential, but rather in their strategic geographic location. Transcontinental trade routes passed through the South Caucasian states, and the latter three states controlled the passes over the Greater Caucasus. Here, steppe and mountain peoples undertook raids and migratory movements. Armenia Major, for its part, was important as a transit route for the attacking Roman or Persian armies. This was especially true in regard to Roman infantry units, which preferred slightly mountainous terrain to flat plains where they could be harassed by enemy mounted archers.

4.1 Armenia as a Roman–Parthian condominium

Between the years 2 and 34 CE, Rome had succeeded in installing the kings in Armenia and in curbing Parthian influence.¹⁶² Parthia, however, still harboured the claim to determine Armenian policy. When King **Zeno–Artaxias III** died in the year 34, the Parthian king Artabanos II, with a large army, put his eldest son **Arsaces** (r. 34–35) on the Armenian throne. In response, Emperor Tiberius enlisted the help of Iberia and Pharasmanes I installed his brother **Mithridates (Mrdat)**, r. 35–37, 41–52). At the same time, the Roman governor of Syria, Lucius Vitellius (d. 51), who commanded four legions, threatened Artabanos with an invasion of Mesopotamia, which forced the latter to quickly withdraw from Armenia and to recognize King Mrdat. The lynchpin of Iberia's client-king Mrdat's strength was the Roman garrison stationed in Gornea (Garni) (fig. 122). After Emperor Caligula had detained Mrdat in Rome for about three years and Parthia had again taken control of Armenian territories, Emperor Claudius sent Mrdat back to Armenia along with the prefect Caelius Pollio. However, when the Iberian Pharasmanes sent his son **Rhadamistus** (r. 52–54) with an army to Armenia, Pollio decided to take a bribe. He handed over Mrdat without a fight to the aggressor, who immediately had his uncle executed.¹⁶³ The obvious weakness of the Roman military presence in Armenia prompted the Parthian king Vologeses I to occupy Armenia, to force the Roman garrison to withdraw, and to install his own

brother **Tiridates (Trdat) I** (first reign 54–58, second reign 62/63–72/75 or 88) as Armenian king. Vologeses and Trdat I thus founded the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia, which was able to survive until the year 428. With this gambit, Vologeses seemed to have secured Parthian dominance over Armenia. Yet Emperor Nero did not relent. He commissioned Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, governor of the province of Asia (western Anatolia) to restore Roman sovereignty. Corbulo was an experienced army commander who used rigorous training and discipline to constitute the legions of the east, enfeebled due to an extended period of peace, into a fresh fighting force. In the year 58, Corbulo marched to Armenia with the legions III Gallica, IIII Scythica, VI Ferrata, and a division of the Legio X Fretensis. He forced Trdat to flee, set the capital Artaxata on fire and installed **Tigranes VI** (r. 58–61/62), restoring Roman sovereignty over Armenia.¹⁶⁴ But Tigranes was careless and attacked the Parthian vassal state of Adiabene in 61, which for Vologeses constituted grounds for war. He invaded Armenia and besieged Tigranakert. The Romans and Parthians subsequently concluded an armistice: Rome withdrew its troops from Armenia, and Vologeses broke off the siege of Tigranakert. Tigranes, however, lost his crown. Nero now divided the existing command; Corbulo remained responsible for the security of Syria and Caesennius Paetus was appointed governor and imperial legate for Cappadocia, with Armenia as one of his areas of authority. Paetus, though, was an incompetent and cowardly commander. He suffered an ignominious defeat in 62 at Rhandaia on the eastern bank of the Euphrates with the legions IIII Scythica and XII Fulminata. To compel Vologeses back to the negotiating table, Nero assigned Corbulo command of four new legions and additional detachments (*vexillationes*). In the spring of 63, the dreaded Corbulo threatened Parthia, which is why Vologeses accepted his compromise proposal.¹⁶⁵ As Cassius Dio tells it:

*Corbulo and Tiridates held a conference at Rhandaia. Indeed, the proceedings of the conference were not limited to mere conversations, but a lofty platform had been erected on which were set images of Nero, and in the presence of crowds of Armenians, Parthians, and Romans, Tiridates approached and paid them reverence [... and] he took off the diadem from his head and set it upon them.*¹⁶⁶

According to the treaty, Parthia had the right to nominate for Armenia an Arsacid ruler related to the king of Parthia, but who received his crown and insignia from the Roman emperor. Formally, Armenia was a Roman client-state but de facto it was a Partho-Roman condominium, in which Parthian influence

dominated and Rome could only approve or reject kings designated by Parthia.¹⁶⁷ But a Roman rejection of a Parthian candidate had to be backed up by a demonstrative readiness for war to be effective. Indirectly, the Treaty of Rhandeia recognized the upper course of the Euphrates as the imperial border, which was affirmed by the construction of numerous fortresses between Syria and Trapezus (Trabzon). In addition, Emperor Vespasian (r. 69–79) continued the construction of a network of roads that connected the legionary camps stationed here. Even in the mountains, the roads were eight metres wide, allowing heavy infantry to pass through in four columns.¹⁶⁸ To further secure the eastern border, Vespasian annexed the client states of Commagene and Armenia Minor in the year 72.

In 66, Tiridates travelled to Rome, where he was officially crowned by Nero. Cassius Dio reports:

*Tiridates knelt upon the ground, and with arms crossed called him [Emperor Nero] master and did obeisance. [...] These were his words: 'Master, I am the descendant of Arsaces, brother of the kings Vologases and Pacorus, and thy slave. And I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras. The destiny thou spinnest for me shall be mine; for thou art my Fortune and my Fate.'*¹⁶⁹

Nero also offered the new king a great sum of money and provided Roman architects to rebuild Artaxata, which had been destroyed by Corbulo. The capital was renamed Neronia for a short time.¹⁷⁰ Ten years later, around the year 77, the garrison town of Gornea was also rebuilt.¹⁷¹ Apart from the Alanian invasion in 72, during which King Trdat narrowly eluded capture, peace seems to have reigned in Armenia under Trdat and his rather unknown successor **Sanatruces I** (r. ca. 72/75 or 88–110).¹⁷² When the Parthian king



122. The Hellenistic mausoleum in the Roman garrison town of Gornea (Garni) east of Yerevan, Armenia. The mausoleum was probably built for the Armenian king Sohaemus (r. 164–ca. 180). Older interpretations attribute the construction of the temple to King Trdat (Tiridates) I (r. 54–58, 62/63–72/75 or 88). An earthquake caused the temple to collapse in 1679; it was rebuilt in 1966–76. The two-tiered, circular construction at the bottom left of the picture formed the foundation of the tetraconch Sioni Church from the seventh century, which was never rebuilt. Photo 2015.



123. The gorge of the Tetri Aragvi, White Aragvi river, a few kilometres south of the 2,371-metre-high Cross Pass on the Georgian Military Road. North of the Cross Pass is the Darial Gorge, which leads to Vladikavkaz, the capital of the Russian Republic of North Ossetia–Alania. To the south the road leads to Mtskheta and further to Armenia. Photo 2013.

Osroes (Chosroes) I (r. 109–116, 117–129),¹⁷³ arbitrarily put **Axidares** (r. ca. 110–113), a son of the Parthian king Pacorus II (r. in Atropatene 51–78, in Parthia ca. 78–105), on the Armenian throne as the successor of Sanatruces, he incurred the wrath of Emperor Trajan. For Trajan, the enthronement of Axidares without Roman consent was a breach of the Treaty of Rhandaia and thus a *casus belli*. Although the emperor initially tolerated Axidares' rule, he marched east in the autumn of 113. A Parthian envoy met him in Athens to inform him that Osroes had removed Axidares and asked him to acknowledge his brother **Parthamasiris** (r. 113–114) as successor. But Trajan, who was determined to go to war, flatly refused, remarking 'that friendship is determined by deeds and not by words'.¹⁷⁴ Trajan continued his march to Armenia in 114. Parthamasiris came to meet him near Erzurum and asked to be recognized. But Trajan once again refused to accept a *fait accompli* and had Parthamasiris removed. He then annexed Greater Armenia and incorporated it into Cappadocia and Armenia Minor. They formed the province of Cappadocia–Armenia, which he

entrusted to Catilius Severus. An inscription of the Legio IIII Scythica recalls the renewed occupation of Artaxata.¹⁷⁵ Two years later, Trajan conquered the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon and sailed on the Tigris to the Persian Gulf. He then established the new province of Mesopotamia, shifting Rome's eastern border from the Euphrates to the Tigris.¹⁷⁶ This brought the empire to its greatest extent in history. For a very short time, it stretched from northern England to the Persian Gulf and from Mauritania almost to the Caspian Sea.

But the Roman military presence was too weak, and uprisings broke out which proved difficult to crush, even in Armenia. Trajan died on the march back from Mesopotamia, and his successor Hadrian realized that the available legions in the east were dangerously overextended. Unsustainable costs loomed. He withdrew the eastern border from the Tigris to the Euphrates and transformed Greater Armenia back into a client-state. Indeed, the Roman security strategy in the east clearly distinguished between the 'hard' imperial border, which was secured by fortification systems and stationed legions, and the 'soft' outer border,

which included the zones of influence. There were no legions here, nor for that matter a Roman administrative apparatus. Rome ultimately expected its client-states, such as Armenia and Iberia, to enforce Roman policy in their respective spheres of influence. Depending on the initial situation, Rome would send military architects and advisors or stationed *vexillationes* to bolster one of its appointed monarchs. Such garrisons did not need to be large in terms of numbers, since attacks directed against them usually meant war with Rome. As for the Parthians, and to an even greater extent the Sassanids later on, their drive westward towards Syria and finally to the eastern Mediterranean posed an ongoing threat to Rome. It was for this reason that Rome always responded to Persian provocations with war – provided its leadership was capable of taking action. Besides, in the eyes of Roman emperors they achieved their greatest glory by defeating Persia and conquering the capital Ctesiphon.

Hadrian confirmed **Vagharsh** (Vologeses) I as king of Armenia (ca. 117–140), who founded or expanded the city of Vałarshapat (Vagharshapat, Etchmiadzin). The Alanian campaign of marauding, which also affected Armenia and was stopped by Arrian, coincided with his reign.¹⁷⁷ After Vagharsh's possibly violent death, Emperor Antonius Pius (r. 138–161) confirmed, some time between the years 140 and 144, either **Sohaemus** of Emesa (Homs) (r. ca. 140/44–161) or **Pacorus** (Aurelius Pacorus, r. ca. 140/44–161) as the new king of Armenia.¹⁷⁸ Sohaemus was most likely not an Arsacid; he held the offices of consul and senator before his coronation. When Emperor Antonius died in 161, the king of Parthia, Vologeses IV (r. ca. 147–191) believed that he could, with impunity, violently depose the king of Armenia (whether Sohaemus or Aurelius Pacorus). A Parthian army invaded Armenia and forced the monarch to flee. It then advanced westwards and defeated a Roman army near Erzurum. It is possible that Vologeses installed **Pacorus** (r. 161–163?) as the new king of Armenia.

Like Trajan before him, Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180) answered the Parthian defiance of the Treaty of Rhandaia with war. Under no circumstances could Rome allow a Parthian base in Armenia, which might serve as bridgehead for enemy campaigns to Cappadocia or Syria. In 162, the emperor sent his co-emperor Lucius Verus (r. 161–169) to Syria, where his attempts to negotiate with the Parthian Vologeses failed. The outcome was war. The experienced general and provincial governor Marcus Statius Priscus was appointed as the new military commander. In the year 163, he captured Artaxata and appointed or reinstated **Sohaemus** (r. 164–ca. 180). Apparently,

a division of the Legio I Minervia crossed Kartli (Iberia) and proceeded on a reconnaissance march over the Darial Pass to the Terek river in the North Caucasus – a remarkable logistical feat.¹⁷⁹ Priscus then had Vałarshapat expanded to become the future new capital of Caenepolis/Kainepolis (Greek for 'new city'). There, he posted two *vexillationes* of the legions XII Fulminata and XV Apollinaris.¹⁸⁰ Despite the Roman garrison, around 172 a pro-Parthian 'satrap' named Trdat succeeded in driving out Sohaemus. But the Roman governor of Cappadocia, Martius Verus, quickly crushed the coup and put Sohaemus back on the throne. He later declared Vałarshapat the new capital.¹⁸¹ Vałarshapat was destroyed around the year 363 by Persian invaders, but then rebuilt; after the abolition of the monarchy in 428 the city lost its standing in favour of Dvin. Since Emperor Trajan's campaign, Rome was clearly not only willing to enforce the rights defined in the Treaty of Rhandaia through military means, but also to establish a protectorate over the region. Rome's seemingly repeated coronation of Sohaemus, who was not an Arsacid on his father's side, was a breach of the Rhandaia Treaty. King Sohaemus died around the year 180 and was probably buried in Garni. The Ionian mausoleum there was built in his honour.¹⁸²

Roman information for the third century is few and far between. Moreover, the Armenian medieval sources, especially the history of Movses Khorenatsi, contain many anachronisms. Whether a **Vagharsh** (Vologeses) II. (r. ca. 180–191?) succeeded Sohaemus, as Toumanoff assumes, remains open to question. Most likely, the youthful Arsacid **Chosroes I** (r. ca. 180–214/16), father of the future king Trdat II, followed Sohaemus.¹⁸³ Once Chosroes had grown into an adult, Emperor Septimius Severus (r. 193–211) recognized him; in the winter of 199–200, he accompanied Septimius Severus on his journey to Egypt. Emperor Caracalla (r. 211–217) wanted to continue the offensive strategy of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. Toward this end, he ordered Chosroes to Rome around the year 214/16 and then took him captive.¹⁸⁴ It seems that Caracalla intended to secure his northern flank in his planned offensive against Parthia by transforming Armenia into a province. Caracalla's plan failed, however, since Chosroes II's son **Trdat II** (r. 217–252) rebelled. Caracalla commissioned the Roman prefect Theocritus – whom Cassius Dio mocks for having been a dance teacher and a favourite of Caracalla – to put down the uprising. Trdat, however, caused him to flee.¹⁸⁵ Months later Caracalla was assassinated by the later Emperor Macrinus (r. 217–218), who immediately confirmed Trdat as King of Armenia and sent him a crown as a sign of recognition.¹⁸⁶

4.2 Armenia between Sassanid and Roman sovereignty

The year 224 was fateful for Armenia and Rome. The Persian sub king Ardashir toppled his Parthian overlord and founded the new Sassanid Dynasty, which was characterized by an offensive foreign policy geared towards expansion. Almost at the same time, after Caracalla's death, a sixty-year period of political weakness began in Rome that would continue until the accession of Diocletian (r. 284–305). Several feeble emperors followed Caracalla. Each only ruled for a short time and they often simultaneously feuded with each other over the imperial title. Their only basis of power was their armies.¹⁸⁷ As a result of this period of debilitation, Armenia no longer received Roman military assistance in the face of Persian threats. Armenia repulsed the first Sassanid attack with the help of Alanian mercenaries in 227/8. Three years later, Armenia supported the failed campaign of Emperor Severus Alexander (r. 222–235) to Mesopotamia.¹⁸⁸ But in 252, it lost its sovereignty. After the inexperienced Emperor

Gordian III was killed in 244 in the devastating defeat of Mesiche, his successor Philip the Arab had to renounce the Roman right of intervention in Armenia. This, in turn, implied a nullification of the Treaty of Rhandaia.¹⁸⁹ In 252, Shapur invaded Armenia and forced Trdat to flee to the Roman Empire. Shapur now put his own son **Hormizd-Ardashir** (r. ca. 252–272) on the Armenian throne. When Hormizd I ascended the Persian throne as King of Kings (r. ca. 272–273), his brother **Narseh** (Narses, r. ca. 273/4–293) then followed him as King of Armenia. Given the continuing military weakness of the Roman Empire, the Persian protectorate over Armenia seemed unchallenged. However, in 283, the victorious campaign of Emperor Carus to Ctesiphon signalled that Rome had regained its military strength. Still, the campaign was ultimately fruitless, as Carus died immediately after his victory, most likely having been assassinated.

The royal succession in Armenia in the last quarter of the third century is fiercely debated. Renowned historians subscribe to the partitioning that is mentioned only by Movses



124. The St Stepanos cross-domed church from the seventh century, above Kosh, Aragatsotn province, Armenia. Photo 2015.



125. Exterior relief on the cathedral of Nikortsminda, Racha region, Georgia. The unifier of the realm King Bagrat III (r. 1008–14) built the cathedral, which has a hexagonal interior with five apses. In the centre of the eastern exterior facade is the Transfiguration of Christ, on the left the equestrian Saint George defeats the dragon, on the right the equestrian Saint Theodore kills the Roman persecutor of Christians, Emperor Diocletian. Photo 2013.

Khorenatsi, namely that Armenia in 279/80 was divided into a western half, where a Chosroes II (r. 279/80–87?) was allegedly installed by the Roman Emperor Probus, and an eastern half, which was under Narseh's control. Nonetheless, this division cannot be verified and seems very unlikely.¹⁹⁰ Even the peace between Diocletian and Vahram II (r. ca. 276–293) of the year 287/88 did not result in a division of Armenia. The inscription of Paikuli provides information about the events that followed. Here, the King of Kings Narseh (r. 293–302) describes his successful battle against his nephew Vahram (Varahran) III (r. 293) for the Sassanid throne. Narseh begins his proclamation with these words: 'Narseh, King of Armenia, was staying in Armenia when Warahran II, King of Kings of Iran died [...] His son, Warahran [III] [...] was crowned, [...] but Narseh was not informed.' It therefore seems that Narseh was still king of Armenia in 293. Towards the end of the inscription Narseh, now King of Kings of Iran, lists those kings who supported him, *inter alia* 'King Tirdād'.¹⁹¹ Although there were already two kings known by this name before 293, this Tirdād, who is

not further specified in the inscription, should most likely be identified as King **Trdat** (Tiridates) **III** (r. ca. 293–298). This Trdat III was a henchman of the Persian King of Kings and surely not identical with King **Trdat IV** (r. 298–ca. 330/31), who was appointed by Diocletian after the Treaty of Nisibis.¹⁹² Trdat IV was loyal to Rome and is historically significant for Armenia because of his conversion to Christianity around the year 314. It is possible that Trdat IV was a nephew of his predecessor Trdat III.¹⁹³ Rome now controlled the entire South Caucasus, with the exception of Albania, which remained under Persian sovereignty, and a part of Lazica's interior.

It is worth reflecting on a problem that arises from Ammianus Marcellinus' remark that 'Narses had in fact [in 296] begun the conflict [with Rome] by seizing Armenia, which was under Roman jurisdiction'.¹⁹⁴ This assertion contradicts the fact that Narseh had appointed his faithful servant Trdat/Tiridates III as Armenian king three years earlier. Did Trdat III switch sides in the meantime, putting himself under Roman protection? Or was Armenia actually divided, with Narseh attacking the western,

Roman part? Or, finally, did Ammianus really mean a part of Cappadocia that was also called ‘Armenia’? After exploring this question, Erich Kettenhofen concludes thus: ‘A really satisfactory reconstruction of the events in Armenia after 293 probably cannot be offered due to the state of the sources.’¹⁹⁵

As a Roman client-king, Trdat IV depended on Rome protecting him and Armenia against Sassanid incursions. The possibility can therefore be discounted that he converted to Christianity as early as the year 301.¹⁹⁶ This contradicts the official view of the Armenian Church,¹⁹⁷ as well as the proclamation inscribed at the cathedral of Ani from the beginning of the eleventh century.¹⁹⁸ At the time, Christianity was forbidden. In February 303, Diocletian issued a far-reaching edict of persecution that forbade Christian worship, ordered the destruction of churches, and provided for capital punishment in cases of non-compliance. In the eastern half of the empire, Galerius, co-emperor and, from 305, Emperor of the east, strictly enforced the edict together with his Caesar (co-emperor) Maximinus Daia. In the west, it was applied more loosely. Maximinus Daia continued the persecution of Christians even after Galerius’ Edict of Toleration from 311. He only accepted the latter after the Edict of Milan and shortly before his crushing defeat by the new Augustus in the east, Licinius (r. 313–324) on 30 April 313. For these reasons, it is not plausible that Trdat, who relied on Galerius and Daia, would start propagating Christianity just as his militarily powerful overlords were persecuting Christians. The fact that Trdat dutifully implemented Diocletian’s persecution edict in Armenia is symbolically hinted at by the two legends of the thirteen-year-long torture and imprisonment of Gregory the Illuminator, the missionary of Armenia, and of the martyrdom of the Christian virgin Rhipsime and 36 other virgin nuns.¹⁹⁹ It is also confirmed by Agathangelos. Thus Trdat allegedly promulgated the following edict during the reign of Diocletian:

Trdat, king of Greater Armenia, to the magnates, the nobles, the princes, the officials [...] to everyone together, greeting. [...] May there be [...] prosperity by the help of the gods, abundant fertility from noble Aramazd, protection from Lady Anahit, valour from noble Vahagh [...] may there be the wisdom of the Greeks [Romans]. [...] Therefore the kings [Diocletian and Galerius] of that land [Rome] instilled fear in men to be assiduous in the cult of the gods. Lest someone [...] scorn the cult of the gods, a strong command was issued by the kings that the nobles in each one’s sphere of office should extirpate and remove (such people) ... [ordering] the threats of the death penalty. [...] We particularly command in you in the matter of the sect of the Christians, that if any are found, [...] because they are an insuperable

*obstacle to the worship of the gods, that if such people be found and immediately exposed, those who reveal them will be granted gifts from the royal treasury. But if anyone does not reveal such people but hides them and he be discovered, then let such one be accounted among those condemned to death.*²⁰⁰

While the wording of the edict is apocryphal, Trdat was undeniably also a loyal follower of Diocletian and Galerius in religious matters.

But the religious–political situation would change dramatically. The major turning points were Constantine’s victory over his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in October 312, when the emperor attributed his triumph to the help of the Christian God, and the Edict of Milan between Constantine and Licinius in February 313. The accord did not privilege Christianity, but guaranteed freedom of worship for Christians and all other religions throughout the Roman Empire. When King Trdat converted to Christianity around the year 314 or 315, he carried out the religious policy of the victors Constantine and Licinius, albeit perhaps only reluctantly, as the *Epic Histories* calls him ‘King Trdat, who – willingly or not – became worthy of being the first to acknowledge the Christian faith’. Be that as it may, Trdat proceeded to institute the new religion more radically than the two Roman emperors.²⁰¹ The Armenian king had both foreign and domestic reasons for adopting Christian monotheism. In terms of foreign policy, he sought a clear demarcation from the Sassanids, who aggressively promoted Zoroastrianism. Domestically, Christian monotheism offered Trdat the opportunity to position himself above the powerful nobles as a secular instrument of the one and only God in Armenia. As explained earlier, the Arsacid kingdoms of Armenia and Kartli were hardly monolithic states.²⁰² Consisting of about fifty small principalities belonging to about thirty family dynasties, they resembled much more a confederation of states led by a king.²⁰³ Now, kings could supplement the Christian dogma of ‘one God in heaven’ with the axiom of ‘one state ruler’. Additionally, the henceforth Christian king was able to confiscate the possessions of recalcitrant *nakhharar*, who did not want to conform to the new God-given state order. As described in the following chapter, the Christianization of Armenia was not without resistance and persisted for about a century. The Armenian and Iberian kings moreover had to contend with a powerful counterpart in the institution of Catholicos, which at times greatly restricted their room to manoeuvre.

VII

The Introduction of Christianity as a State Ideology and the Division of the South Caucasus

'Khosrow I Anushirvan commanded: 'Let each hold his own faith, and let no one oppress Armenians. [...] Let them serve us with their bodies; but as for their souls, only He knows who judges souls.'

Edict of the King of Kings KHOSROW I (r. 531–579)¹

1. The legends of apostolic missionary work

The ancient and medieval historiography of the Christianization of Armenia, Iberia, Albania and Lazica was recorded locally over a period of several centuries. It was influenced by the political conditions in the respective kingdoms and principalities as well as by the relations and conflicts between the ethnically defined church organizations. The ethnically oriented historiography of local authors largely ignored the early missionary efforts of the third century both from Syria and Mesopotamia and from Cappadocia. The hagiographies initially concentrated on the Christianization at the time of Emperor Constantine. In these works, Armenia claimed a pioneering role for itself and presented the missionary work of the whole South Caucasus as an initiative of the national saint Gregory the Illuminator (d. 330/31). Later, when national conflicts and disputes broke out both with

the Byzantine imperial church and among the ethno-national churches about church autocephaly and the ‘true’ creed, the churches claimed their own apostolic roots. An alleged apostolic foundation was supposed to ensure equality with the imperial church and a privileged position over local rivals. This gave rise to a kind competition as to which church had been founded by the most prestigious apostles. Needless to say, these stories of apostolic conversion have the character of legends and sagas.

Armenia

In the *History of the Armenians*, attributed to the pseudonymous Agathangelos, Gregory the Illuminator is presented as the one who converted King Trdat IV and the Armenian people (fig. 126). The hagiography was written around the year 460, but is based on an older *Vita Gregorii*, which was probably composed after the year 435. The legend of Gregory bears similarities to the older Syrian legend about the healing and conversion of King Abgar



126. The main entrance to the Patriarchate complex of Etchmiadzin, Armenia. On the dexiosis relief King Trdat (Tiridates) IV (r. ca. 298–330/31) and St Gregory the Illuminator extend their hands. Photo 2015.



127. The Albanian Church of St Eliseus of Kiş west of Shaki (previously Nukha), Azerbaijan. (The archaeologist Bjørnar Storfjell, who researched the church at Kiş, believes that it was originally intended as a Dyophysite church and later redesigned for the Monophysite liturgy. This would mean that Kiş was built either as an Albanian church, when it was aligned with the Chalcedonian Creed, or as a Georgian church: Kerimov and Storfjell, *Kiş* (2003), pp. 161f.) The church is now a museum and the construction dates from the eleventh–twelfth century. Archaeological investigations under the present church floor revealed that a cultic site where animal sacrifices were offered had been located here since the Early Bronze Age, around 3000 BCE. Graves were placed in the nave either during or after the construction of the church. The investigations, however, did not yield any indications that a Christian church existed here before the tenth/eleventh century (*ibid.*, pp. 155, 159, 163–73). Photo 2016.

of Edessa by Thaddaeus (Syriac: Addai), one of the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples of Jesus. In both legends, an apparently incurably ill king is miraculously healed and converted by a foreign saint.² In contrast to King Abgar, who presumably fell ill through no fault of his own, the illness of King Trdat is interpreted as divine punishment for his wickedness. Trdat, after all, not only ordered the thirteen- or fifteen-year-long imprisonment of St Gregory in a pit, but he was transformed into a raging boar because he orchestrated the martyrdom of the Virgin Rhipsime and her companions.³ But in the *Epic Histories* from the 470s, the apostle Thaddaeus is mentioned as the first missionary of Armenia.⁴ After converting many people, Thaddeus is said to have suffered martyrdom at the hands of King Sanatruces I (r. ca. 72/75 or 88–110). In this saga,

Gregory the Illuminator is considered to be the consummator of Thaddeus' work rather than the apostle of Armenia.⁵ The legend of the apostle Thaddeus operating in Armenia is a fairly blatant adaptation of the Syrian King Abgar narrative. According to another saga, Bartholomew was also active in Armenia, where he likewise suffered martyrdom.⁶ As Jean-Pierre Mahé explains, the later Catholicos Yovhannes Draskhanakert'tsi, (in office 897–925) instrumentalized the apostolic foundation of the Armenian Church in order to affirm the autocephaly of his church vis-à-vis Constantinople.⁷ Nonetheless, the Byzantine church historian Sozomen (ca. 450) does not mention either Gregory or an apostle, but rather attributes the conversion of Armenia solely to King Trdat.⁸



128. The church dedicated to St Simon the Canaanite, Anacopia (Novy Afon); Abkhazia. According to tradition, the apostle Simon suffered martyrdom here and his bones lie under the church altar. The triapsidal church dates from the ninth/tenth century. It was decorated with murals in the fourteenth century and restored in 1876–82 and in the 2010s. De facto Republic of Abkhazia, de jure Georgia. Photo 2018.

Albania

The famous legend of the Christianization of Albania is linked to the apostle Thaddeus. After Thaddeus' death, his disciple Elisha informed the apostles living in Jerusalem of his passing.

Thereupon he [Elisha] was ordained in the Holy Spirit by St James, the brother of Our Lord, who was the first patriarch of Jerusalem. [...] The holy patriarch [Elisha] came to Gis [present Kiş], he founded a church there and offered up bloodless sacrifices.⁹

The *History of Caucasian Albanians* then reports how at the beginning of the eighth century the Albanian church

emphasized the alleged priority of its apostolic foundation over the non-apostolic roots of the Armenian Church.

For your St Gregory was consecrated archbishop in Caesarea [...] but [...] a certain apostle who came in ancient times to Albania, Elisha by name, one of the disciples of the Lord, who was consecrated by James, brother of the Lord, and who preached there and built a church before there was one in Armenia, namely the church of Gis, the first mother church of the east.¹⁰

In seeking to establish its autocephaly vis-à-vis the Armenian Church, the Albanian Church claimed to be the oldest church in the Orient, descending directly from James the Just. Gregory the Illuminator, by contrast, was consecrated only by an Eastern Roman prelate 250 years later.

Lazica

As far as Lazica, Svaneti and Ossetia are concerned, the apostles supposedly drew lots among themselves on the day of Pentecost for the countries to be missionized. Western Georgia was assigned to the Mother of God. The Byzantine legend from the eighth or tenth century further relates that when Christ appeared to his mother in a vision, he instructed her to delegate the responsibility to St Andrew. During the reign of King Pharasmanes I, Andrew is reported to have spread the gospel in Lazica on his way to the Scythians, first alone and later accompanied by Simon the Canaanite. They both also conducted missionary work in Tao-Klarjeti, Svaneti, Ossetia and Abkhazia. In Nikopsia, near Anacopia (Novy Afon) (fig. 128), Simon suffered a martyr's death;¹¹ Andrew, however, continued his missionary work in Mingrelia and with the 'Scythians', i.e. the Alans in the northern Caucasus.¹²

Iberia

Iberia also claimed that its Christianization was initiated by the Mother of God. Initially, the Georgian Church was content with an alleged Christianization by Gregory the Illuminator and a deepening of religious faith through the work of the Armenian monk Mesrop Mashtots.¹³ Concurrent with this legend, propagated by the Armenian Church, the Roman church historian Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–411/12) reported that he met the Iberian prince Bacurius in Jerusalem in the 390s. Bacurius told him the following tale: there lived a captive woman in Kartli who cured the ailing queen; she then became devout. Shortly

afterwards, the king lost his way in a dark forest during a solar eclipse and called upon the captive's god for help. When daylight returned, he also converted. He let the anonymous captive indoctrinate him 'and he became the apostle of his nation'.¹⁴ According to Rufinus, then, the Iberian king was the apostle of his nation, and not the anonymous captive. This particular tradition hints at what actually motivated the Iberian king Mirian III to adopt Christianity around the year 334 or 355.¹⁵ With the new religion, he not only followed his Armenian neighbour Trdat IV in adopting the preferred faith of his Roman patron Emperor Constantine, but, by establishing monotheism, he positioned himself as the sole earthly representative of the one God. In this way, he hoped to keep the often insubordinate nobility in check.

After the rupture with the Armenian Church in 607 at the latest, the idea of an alleged Christianization by the Armenian Gregory the Illuminator was considered untenable. Alternative narratives were therefore necessary. To start with, the missionary work in Kartli was attributed to St Andrew. In the early ninth century, Rufinus' anonymous captive, who appears in Armenian tradition as a companion of St Rhipsime, transformed into St Nino. This saint not only converted the historically uncertain King Mirian and his wife Nana at the behest of the Mother of God, but was elevated to the status of the female apostle and evangelist of Iberia.¹⁶ As the *Life of Nino* relates:

*The Holy Mother of God appeared to Nino in a vision and said to her: 'Depart into the land of the north and preach the gospel of my Son, and I will guide and protect you.'*¹⁷

According to legend, after she had converted almost all of Iberia and Kakheti and shortly before her death, Nino received a letter from St Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine. In it, 'Queen Helen [...] calls her an apostle and evangelist'.¹⁸ The Nino legend was established in Iberia from the ninth century onwards.¹⁹ Queen Tamar (r. 1184–1213) continued to vigorously promote the Nino cult in order to substantiate her own legitimation as Queen of Georgia.²⁰ The Georgian Catholicos Nikoloz I Gulaberidze (in office 1150–1178) had written a justification a few years before Tamar's accession to the throne that explained why Georgia was Christianized by a woman: God had chosen the Mother of God as the evangelist of Georgia, who had entrusted the task to Nino. In addition, women had been privileged witnesses of the Resurrection.²¹ However, the Armenians disliked the new Iberian hagiography, which is why Movses Khorenatsi embedded the Nino legend in the Armenian hagiography. Nune (Nino)

is thus downgraded to one of the companions of St Rhipsime; and after the miraculous rescue of King Mirian from the dark forest she now, in her helplessness, needs to turn to Gregory the Illuminator for advice on what to do.²² With this fresh embellishment, Movses sought to subordinate Nino to St Gregory and hence the Georgian Church to the Armenian Church. The various narratives on the Christianization of the South Caucasian countries demonstrate just how much local historiography served power-political interests.

2. Armenia and the tradition of Gregory the Illuminator

2.1 Syrian-Mesopotamian and Greek-Cappadocian influences

The Christianization of Armenia proceeded from two directions. First, in the course of the third century, Christian missionary work had its origins in Syria, probably the region of Edessa. It first reached Arzanene, which lies south-west of Van and thus occupies the south-western tip of the Armenian cultural area. In this regard, the church historian Eusebius Pamphili (d. ca. 340), bishop of Caesarea, tells of an Armenian bishop Meruzanes (Meruzhan) and a letter that Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (in office 248–264/5) addressed to him at the beginning of the 250s.²³ These early efforts at Christianization were carried out by itinerant monks and took place without state support. To be successful (i.e. to convert people), they depended on the individual monks' powers of persuasion. The early Syrian-Mesopotamian form of Armenian Christianity had a popular orientation. It was thus less conducive to establishing strict hierarchies or instrumentalization by secular rulers. The legend about the missionary activities of St Thaddaeus in Armenia is tied to the Syrian–Armenian tradition. Also belonging to the realm of legend is the report in the Sogdian language from the second half of the third century in which a Manichaean missionary named Gabryab converted a Christian king of Armenia to Manichaeism around the year 250.²⁴ There was neither a Christian king in Armenia at that time, nor did an Armenian king ever espouse Manichaeism. The identification of the Sogdian toponym 'ryβ'n (rēvān)' with Yerevan is also dubious.

At the beginning of the fourth century, a second missionary campaign took place in Armenia. It was ordered by the Armenian king and even enforced militarily. Starting in the Van

region, where the first episcopal cathedral was built in Ashtishat, it then extended to the whole kingdom. The missionaries came from Cappadocia and espoused the Graeco-Roman form of Christianity, which favoured church hierarchies. The tradition of St Gregory the Illuminator came from the Cappadocian Christian tradition, with its seat in Caesarea. The history of the Christianization of Armenia suggests that the resistance to the new state-imposed religion intensified the greater the distance from the Syrian-Mesopotamian cultural border. Simply put: the Syrian-Mesopotamian missionary work exemplified a kind of popular Christianity, the Cappadocian one an imperial Christianity.

Soon, in both Byzantium and the Armenian region, there were denominations of Syrian origin that were classified as heretical by the imperial church. Among them was **Adoptionism**, which taught a strict monotheism: God the Father is the only God,

whereas Christ was born a mere mortal and was adopted by God the Father at baptism. In the fourth century, some currents began to spread of the **Eustathians**, named after Eustathius, bishop of the then Armenian city Sebasteia (today's Sivas). They rejected ecclesiastical and secular hierarchies, authorities and norms and taught strict asceticism. The faith was condemned in the middle of the fourth century at the Synod of Gangra in Paphlagonia.²⁵ According to Koriun, between the years 415 and 423 St Mesrop, who represented the official Greek imperial church, mercilessly fought the **Borborites**, a group close to the Eustathians and also influenced by early Syrian-Christian ideas. He had the deviants severely punished, tortured and expelled from Armenia.²⁶ Early Syrian Christianity, which was egalitarian and rejected hierarchies, remained even during the second half of the first millennium a source of inspiration for anti-imperial movements and



129. Murals in the Church of St Gregory, donated around 1215 by the merchant Tigran Honents in Ani, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. At that time, Ani belonged to the fiefdom of the Mkhargrdzeli brothers (Armenian Zakarian), the most powerful feudal lords of Georgia at the turn of the twelfth to the thirteenth century. The Mkhargrdzeli/Zakarians were of Armenian origin, and while Zakare Zakarian kept the Armenian denomination, Ivane Zakarian converted to the Chalcedonian Georgian Church. Although traditionally it was not forbidden, it was nevertheless frowned upon in the Armenian Church to paint large areas inside churches; but under the Zakarian brothers, the painting of churches spread in the Armenian territories belonging to their fiefdom, as here in the Church of St Gregory of Ani (Eastmond, *Tamta's World* (2017), pp. 35f, 54). In the picture, the still-pagan king Trdat (Tiridates) IV meets the future Illuminator and asks him to offer a flower sacrifice to the goddess Anahit. Gregory refuses and compares idol-worshippers with donkeys, whereupon Trdat subjects him to torture (Thierry, in Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), pp. 137f). The man standing behind the king on the right holds the key to the dungeon in his hand. Photo 2016.



130. The medieval monastery of Khor Virap south of Yerevan, Armenia. The fence in the background marks the Armenian–Turkish border. According to tradition, King Trdat kept St Gregory imprisoned for thirteen years in a dungeon that stood on the hill of the later church. The entrance to the presumed dungeon is located among the trees near the rear wall of the monastery. Photo 2015.

rebellions within the Byzantine Empire. This was all the more the case in the military province of Armeniacon (the Armeniac Theme), today's north-eastern Turkey, where in the seventh and eighth centuries the heterogeneous group of the **Paulicians** emerged.²⁷ Robert Thomson has pointed out that traces of the dual missionary origin are evident in the Armenian ecclesiastical language. Basic words such as 'priest', 'monk', 'preach' or 'fast' come from Syriac. By contrast, terms referring to a hierarchically organized church, such as 'bishop', 'Catholicos' or 'patriarch' are derived from Greek.²⁸

2.2 King Trdat IV and Gregory the Illuminator

Trdat (Tiridates) IV (r. 298–ca. 330/31) was a Roman client-king who followed the official religious policy of Rome, which was hostile to Christianity, in Armenia until 313. His abrupt reversal, in which he mutated 'from Saul to Paul', was adapted into legendary form in the traditions of the Armenian national saint **Gregory the Illuminator** (in office as church leader ca. 314–325, d. ca. 331).²⁹ According to Agathangelos, Gregory was a son of the

Arsacid prince Anak, who had murdered the (probably legendary) Armenian king Chosroes II at the behest of the Sassanid Shah Shapur I.³⁰ While on his deathbed, Chosroes ordered the extermination of Anak's family, but young Gregory managed to escape to Caesarea, where he received a Christian education. Around the year 300, Gregory fled to Armenia to escape the persecution of Christians by Emperor Galerius, who had already been suppressing Christians in the years 299–301, i.e. even before Diocletian's edict of 303.³¹ To atone for the fact that his father Anak had murdered the father of the now-reigning Armenian king Trdat, Gregory entered into the latter's service. However, when the Christian Gregory refused to offer sacrifices to the goddess Anahita and Trdat learned of Gregory's true identity, Trdat had Gregory tortured and thrown into a dungeon infested with snakes and scorpions. The monastery of Khor Virap, whose name means 'deep pit', was later built over this prison (fig. 130). Thus, like Daniel in the lion's den, the saint survived more than a dozen years as a captive with God's help. At this point in the tale, a new element in the Gregory legend appears in the figure of



131. The tomb of St Rhipsime, who, according to tradition, died in Vagharshapat at the beginning of the fourth century. The Church of St Rhipsime built over the tomb was consecrated in 618; Etchmiadzin, Armenia. Photo 2015.

St Rhipsime. In response to Emperor Diocletian's advances, the beautiful female Christian and alleged nun Rhipsime fled from Rome via Jerusalem and Edessa to Armenia, together with her teacher Gayane and some 36 other nuns. When Rhipsime also refused the demands of King Trdat, she was martyred, along with Gayane and the other attending nuns. One week after Rhipsime's death, however, King Trdat was thrown to the ground by a demon when he set out to hunt with his chariot. He then met the same fate as King Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible,³² being transformed into a wild boar and forced to live as a grazing animal in the pasture. The legend of the flight and martyrdom of St Rhipsime may have originated as follows: the Christian women escaped to Armenia in response to the persecutions of Diocletian and Galerius; their martyrdom then may have occurred during the anti-Christian pogroms of Maximinus Daia in the years 311–313.

The legend continues in the following manner: after Trdat followed his sister's advice to release the captive Gregory and

ordered the construction of funeral chapels for St Rhipsime and Gayane and their companions, the saint healed him (fig. 126). The king and his family subsequently converted to Christianity. Immediately after his conversion, Trdat ordered Gregory to convert Armenia and to destroy the pagan temples, to which end he mobilized his army.

Then straightaway the king by sovereign edict [...] entrusted blessed Gregory with the task of obliterating and extirpating the former ancestral deities of his forefathers, falsely called gods. Then the king in person hastened with all his army from the city of Vagharshapat and came to Artashat in order to destroy the altars of the deity Anahit.³³

Agathangelos lists other pagan temples that Gregory and Trdat destroyed and whose possessions they confiscated, including the shrines of the oracle god Tir, the weather god Barshamin, the creator god Zeus–Aramazd, the wisdom and war goddess

Nanē, the sun and truth god Mihr, along with other temples of Anahit. The violent destruction of the temples must have met with fierce local resistance. According to Agathangelos, hordes of heavily armed demons tried in vain to stop the advance of Gregory and Trdat. Those demons, i.e. pagan priests, who refused the decreed change of religion, fled to the mountains of the Great Caucasus.³⁴ Agathangelos also describes in his effusive language how the destruction of the tripartite temple of Ashtishat led to fierce battles between soldiers and defeated followers of the pre-Christian religion, who were massacred. 'And numberless men who were associated with the cult and pagan priesthood in that place [Ashtishat] were slaughtered and no trace left of their bones.'³⁵ Gregory's 'conversion by the sword' in Ashtishat was not an isolated case. Wherever Gregory met with resistance, the royal troops accompanying him destroyed the pagan temples and confiscated their possessions, which he then used to construct churches. Gregory and Trdat's ruthless action was far more radical than the religious policy of Emperor Constantine. It resembles the violent conversion efforts of the Zoroastrian Sassanids and later Muslim rulers.

As Gregory had not yet been ordained as a priest, he went to Caesarea, where he was consecrated by Bishop Leontius. As a matter of fact, in 314, a synod was held in Caesarea under the leadership of Bishop Leontius with twenty participants. Leontius of Caesarea has been historically verified, having participated in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325. It is quite conceivable, therefore, that Gregory was consecrated as bishop in 314, although certainly without the designation of *Catholicos*.³⁶ The title *Catholicos* is borne in several eastern churches by the head of the church and it implies autocephaly. It was introduced in 410 by the Church of the East at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where the church organized itself into six 'Metropolitan Provinces' (archbishoprics) and granted the title of *Catholicos* to Bishop Isaac. The *Catholicos* designation was adopted by the Armenian Church in the 430s, in Kartli in the 460s/70s by *Catholicos Peter I* (in office 468–75 or 484–91), and in Albania in a similar period.³⁷

Due to the consecration of the first bishop of Armenia by the metropolitan Caesarea, the Armenian Church had to defer canonically to the Greek imperial church. This subordination lasted until the death of Nerses I (in office ca. 353–373), who was the last head of the Armenian Church to be consecrated in Caesarea. From then onward, the Armenian Church considered itself independent, and the canonical subordination of Ashtishat to Caesarea or the imperial church began to relax.³⁸ Gregory, however, did not return with his attending Greek monks to the

royal capital Vagharshapat, but rather to the western Armenian province of Taron. Here, he had the famous triple temple of Ashtishat, dedicated to Vahagn, Anahit and Astlik, razed to the ground. In its place, he built the first religious centre of the Armenian Church, which became the *Surb Karapet Monastery*. The building was subsequently destroyed by Turkish soldiers in 1918. While Agathangelos stresses the importance of the first chapels built by Gregory in Vagharshapat and attributes the construction of the cathedral there to a divine vision of Gregory, the *Epic Histories* of the Pseudo-Faustos emphasize that the Church of St John the Baptist in Ashtishat was the first 'mother church' of Armenia and the first seat of the Armenian Church.³⁹ It seems that Gregory chose Ashtishat as the first church residence because Taron was close to the Byzantine border and Christian communities of Syrian origin already existed there. As throughout Armenia, where the possessions of the closed pagan temples were handed over to the newly built churches, the rich temple lands of Ashtishat, including the associated villages and serfs, were also appropriated by the Armenian Church, which quickly grew into a powerful feudal landowner. Insofar as the office of the supreme bishop of the Armenian Church remained hereditary until the death of Sahak I the Saint (in office 387–428, d. ca. 439), except for three interruptions,⁴⁰ the family of the Gregorids became one of the most powerful noble dynasties in Armenia and rival of the kings. When Sahak died without a male heir, the Gregorids' extensive property was not transferred to the church but to the *sparapet* Hamazasp Mamikonian, who was married to Sahak's daughter Sahakanoysh. Thanks to this patrimony, which was actually church property, the House of Mamikonian rose to become the most powerful family dynasty in Armenia.⁴¹ It was not until now that the glorification of Gregory the Illuminator, who eclipsed the merits of King Trdat in the Christianization of Armenia, began to take place. Namely, this occurred after the fall of the Armenian Arsacids in 428 and the death of Sahak, when the Mamikonians positioned themselves as successors in the Gregorid female line.⁴² Ashtishat remained the seat of the Armenian head of the church until 484, when it was moved to Dvin. As a result, the autocephaly of the Armenian Church was established once and for all.⁴³

After Gregory's return from Caesarea, King Trdat travelled with a large convoy from the capital to Taron. There, Gregory baptized him, his family, the dignitaries, officers, and thousands of soldiers accompanying him, in the Euphrates. If we accept Gregory's ordination on the occasion of the synod of 314 as a reference, Trdat's baptism and the proclamation of Christianity as Armenian state religion can be dated towards the

end of 314 or the beginning of the year 315. In any event, Gregory travelled tirelessly in Armenia and commissioned itinerant monks, whom Agathangelos anachronistically calls bishops, to spread Christianity until he retired as a hermit around 325; he died around 331.⁴⁴ In his youth the national saint had married a Christian woman named Julitta,⁴⁵ so among the bishops Gregory ordained were his two sons Aristakes and Vrtanes.⁴⁶ Like other Eastern churches, the early Armenian Church did not apply the commandment of celibacy for the higher clergy, as long as the marriage took place before ordination. Gregory consecrated his son Aristakes as bishop in the later 310s and appointed him as his designated successor. He subsequently sent Aristakes to the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, which confirmed the canonical subordination of the Armenian Church under the metropolitan bishop of Caesarea.⁴⁷ Aristakes brought back the Nicene Creed and the Canons, making them public, albeit with Gregory's amendments.⁴⁸ **Aristakes I** (in office ca. 325–333), who never married, took over the presidency of the church from his father upon his return to Ashtishat. According to Movses Khorenatsi, when Aristakes was murdered, apparently by a noble from Fourth Armenia (Soplene),⁴⁹ his older brother **Vrtanes I** (in office ca. 333–341) took his place. Chief prelate Vrtanes narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by followers of the pre-Christian religion in the fortified cathedral of Ashtishat, highlighting the conflict-ridden Christianization process in Armenia.⁵⁰ Following the principle of hereditary succession, Vrtanes' son **Husik I** (Yusik, in office ca. 341–347) was ordained in Caesarea as the new chief prelate of Armenia,⁵¹ while his brother Grigoris (d. ca. 337), according to the Pseudo-Faustos, was ordained bishop of Albania and Iberia at the age of fifteen.⁵² He suffered martyrdom during an attempt at missionary work among the Mazkutk (presumably Massagetae) south of Derbent, when he was bound to the tail of a wild horse and dragged to death. Albania's first attempt at Christianization accordingly failed.⁵³ Presumably, there was no incentive for the Mazkutk, who were at a far remove from the Roman Empire, to adopt the emperor's new religion.

2.3 Peculiarities of early Armenian Christianity

King Trdat's religious strategy demonstrates that he was a shrewd proponent of realpolitik. First, he loyally implemented the anti-Christian policy of Rome. Then, he took advantage of Constantine's shift in position to distance himself, as patron of the new, monotheistic religion, from the recalcitrant *nakharar*. At the same time, he moved to consolidate the unstable confederation into a stable monarchy using a novel ideology. The abolition of the

pagan temples also offered an opportunity to confiscate their rich lands and extensive possessions and to divide them between the state treasury and the evolving church. In doing so, Trdat probably hoped to win the loyalty of the emerging priesthood he had been fostering. Similar to the Roman and Byzantine emperors, however, Trdat and his successors had to deal with the fact that the hierarchically organized Christian clergy, which invoked the authority of the one God, was becoming a dangerous counterweight. Not only did it not submit to worldly power, but, as soon as it took hold as the state religion, it aspired to worldly power itself.

King Trdat needed to make compromises in the process of Christianization. At times, he offered dynasties of pagan priests, who were closely linked to noble families, the chance to continue their profession as Christian priests of the newly built churches. Bishops were recruited among the *nakharar*, the lower clergy among the lower nobility (the *azat*). An exemplary case of a partial preservation of traditional rights was the dynasty of bishops of the House of Aghbianos of Ashtistat: it supplied three chief prelates and, until their conversion to Christianity, its members had been priests of the tripartite temple.⁵⁴ To ensure the succession of clerical offices, the Synod of Gangra excommunicated those who condemned priestly marriage and rejected the Eucharist administered by married priests.⁵⁵ When the bishops were finally subject to celibacy, the succession within the noble families took place from uncle to nephew. Thus church offices and possessions remained bound to certain noble families. These now enjoyed two instruments of power: one secular, one ecclesiastical. The feudalization of the Armenian Church had several consequences. First, since the *nakharar* were a landed aristocracy, the Armenian bishops did not represent cities or – as metropolitan bishops – whole provinces, as was the case in the Roman Empire. Instead, they acted on behalf of feudal dynasties and their large estates. Roman bishops were decidedly urban, Armenian bishops rural. Second, the continuity of personnel from a pagan to a Christian clergy encouraged the maintenance of pre-Christian rituals. Some saints were assigned attributes and powers that previously belonged to local deities,⁵⁶ while customs such as animal sacrifices were perpetuated. The Canons from the seventh century attributed to St Sahak I state that St Gregory had allowed the former pagan priests, who feared for their livelihood, to continue to perform animal sacrifices.⁵⁷ The animal sacrifices, called *matagh*, were ostensibly performed in honour of the dead. But the real intent was to atone for their sins through an offering. The advocates of animal sacrifices also hoped that their own sins would be passed on to the sacrificed

animal.⁵⁸ The priest thus uttered the following accompanying prayer: ‘And grant the request of them that present this offering, and vouchsafe remissions of their sins.’⁵⁹ The Armenian practice of animal sacrifice repeatedly attracted criticism from Greek Orthodox theologians, who condemned them as Old Testament ‘Jewish blood sacrifices’.⁶⁰ The medieval Armenian Tondrakians also mocked the superstition of the founders of animal sacrifices by directing their plea at the animal: ‘O wretched animal, if he [the sinner] went astray and deserved death, what sin have you committed to die for him?’⁶¹

The new offices and vocations of a Christian priest or monk also offered young men the chance to avoid compulsory military service. King **Pap** (r. 369–374) therefore closed down numerous supposedly charitable institutions and monasteries in order to recruit the young men there into the army.⁶² A similar phenomenon occurred around the same time in distant China, where young men entered Buddhist monasteries to escape military service or punishment. Like King Pap, Chinese rulers enacted laws to limit

the number of monasteries and monks, and forbade monks to live independently outside monasteries.⁶³ To respond to the royal disapproval, chief prelate Bishop **Zawen** (in office *ca.* 377–381) ordered priests to wear military clothing. Moreover, the Synod of Dvin adopted a rule in 645 that stipulated that monks should be permitted to do military service for three years.⁶⁴

The presence of a parallel church organization alongside the state structures and the intermingling of secular and religious interests led to irreconcilable conflicts and unholy alliances in Armenia. Besides the existing tensions between the royal family and the nobility, there were also tensions between the royal family and the church. On the one hand, the kings aspired to a centralized form of government based on the model of urban Constantinople, which is why they and the few urban centres pursued a Rome-friendly strategy. On the other hand, the land-bound aristocracy preferred the decentralized state organization based on the model of Persia. This caused many aristocratic dynasties (implying also the dioceses) to pursue an anti-urban, pro-Sassanid policy. The



132. The Armenian Basilica of Yererouk near Anipemza, Shirak Province, Armenia. The three-nave basilica has Syrian influence and is located not far from Ani; it is on the left bank of the River Achuryan, while Ani is 8 km further north on the right bank. The basilica was built in the fifth or sixth century over the ruins of a destroyed pagan temple and, despite having been rebuilt three times, has undergone little architectural change. The basilica was severely damaged by the powerful earthquake of 1679. Photo 2015.



133. The open city of Arshakavan, built by the Armenian king Arshak (Arsaces) II (r. ca. 350–68) and destroyed by an alliance of nobility and church, is presumed to have been located near the eastern Anatolian city of Doğubayazıt. The photograph shows ruins of the Ottoman fortress; the Urtian or early Achaemenid rock tomb is left of the centre. Photo 2016.

tensions between the royal house and the church were further fuelled by the Arian controversy. The Armenian kings loyally supported the pro-Arian church policy of some Eastern Roman emperors, while the upper Armenian clergy firmly rejected the teachings of Arius. Arianism was a theological doctrine that went back to the priest Arius (ca. 260–327). Proceeding from a strict monotheism, he rejected the essential correspondence between God the Father and the Son, as recognized in the Nicene Creed, for it contradicted the definition of monotheism. The Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinate to God; God was unborn and eternal, whereas there was also a time when the Son did not yet exist. The controversy tested the endurance of the church and the Roman state throughout the fourth century. In Armenia, however, the state collapsed under the weight of these various conflicts and contradictions no later than 428. During this time, Shah Vahram V deposed the Armenian Arsacid royal dynasty in Persian Armenia and placed the country under a *marzpan*.

2.4. A power struggle between kings and church leaders, and Armenia's division

It is difficult to reconstruct the succession of King Trdat IV, who died around 330/31. Of those kings listed by the Pseudo-Faustos, only Arshak II is mentioned in Roman historiography, by Ammianus Marcellinus, in the guise of Arsaces (r. ca. 350–368). According to Pseudo-Faustos, Trdat was succeeded by his son **Khosrow (Chosroes) II** called Kotak, 'the Small' (r. ca. 330/31–338/9).⁶⁵ During his reign, resistance towards the rapidly growing church remained, which caused the ranks of pro-Persian circles to swell. Nevertheless, it seems that the assassination of chief prelate Bishop Aristakes occurred without the king's involvement. Khosrow built the new royal residence in Dvin around the year 335, which served as the seat of the Sassanid *marzpan* from 428. After Khosrow's death, the client-crown probably passed to his son **Tiran (Tigranes VII)**, r. ca. 338/39–350). Following a period of unrest triggered by a

Persian attack, he was appointed or reinstated by the Eastern Roman Emperor Constantius II (r. as co-emperor in the East 337–353, as sole ruler in the empire 353–361).⁶⁶ In Sassanid Iran, Shah Shapur II (r. 309–379, de facto ca. 325–379) determined Persian foreign policy for more than half a century. The goal of the latter was to abolish the Treaty of Nisibis of 298, which was unfavourable to Persia, to reconquer the ceded territories, and to destroy the Roman bridgehead in the Caucasus. Shortly before the death of Emperor Constantine I in 337, Shapur initiated a fifty-year conflict with Rome that ended with the partition of Armenia in 387. The lion's share fell to Persia. As a Roman client-state, Armenia was often at the centre of conflicts, and the Sassanids, for their part, did not hesitate to plot with the Armenian *nakharar* against their king. King Tiran tried unsuccessfully to counter the superiority of the recalcitrant nobles. His attempt to implement the Arian-friendly policy of his patron Constantius II in Armenia also failed due to the

resistance of chief prelate Bishop Husik I, whom he ordered to be beaten to death. Husik's successor **Daniel I** the Syrian (in office 347) suffered the same fate, while the next chief prelate Bishop **Pharen I** (in office ca. 348–352) proceeded more cautiously so as not to provoke the king's anger.⁶⁷ It appears that towards the end of the first Perso-Roman war (337–350), King Tiran fell into Persian hands as a result of treason. After being blinded, he abdicated. In the wake of Shapur's third failed attempt to conquer the heavily fortified garrison city of Nisibis, Emperor Constantius enthroned Tiran's son Arshak as Armenian king.

Arshak II (r. ca. 350–368) pursued a successful see-saw policy between the two neighbouring great powers during the first years of his reign. He strove to promote urban development and reorganized the state administration by establishing significant new offices. When his nephew Gnel Arshakuni made a claim to the royal title and surrounded himself with discontented *nakharar*, King Arshak had him executed. At



134. Tiara of the Catholicos of the Armenian Church; in the medallion, the Lord's Supper, nineteenth century. Etchmiadzin Museum, Armenia.

Map 8. The partitions of the southern Caucasus between the Roman/Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire of 387 and 591 CE, and the Arab conquest under the Umayyad Caliphate





the same time, he sought to curb the growing power of the Armenian Church and to limit its wealth. On the one hand, he was met with the nobility's and the church's unyielding hostility when he ignored the hereditary claims of the aristocratic houses when filling the highest state offices, assigning them instead according to merit and capability. On the other hand, following Roman and Hellenistic models, he founded the city of Arshakavan as the future royal power base and new trading centre. The city, whose ruins have been provisionally located south-west of the Great Ararat at what is today's Doğubayazıt,⁶⁸ was 'open', i.e. it was neither subject to nobility nor church and anyone could settle there, even fugitive serfs (fig. 133). Near the city there was also an ancient Urartian or early Achaemenid rock tomb of a king or prince.

Since the new city threatened the rural-oriented alliance of church and nobility, chief prelate Bishop St **Nerses I** (in office 353–373) condemned it as cesspool of sin and a manifestation of predation and greed.⁶⁹ During the Perso-Armenian war of around 364–8, in which powerful *nakharar* fought on the Persian side, Arshakavan was razed to the ground together with the cities of Tigranakert and Artaxata. The unholy alliance of pro-Persian nobles, church hierarchy, and Sassanid expansionist politics put an end to Armenia's urbanization. It was not until the tenth century that a large city would flourish again on Armenian soil, in the form of Ani.

When the Perso-Roman Wars came to a head again in 358, King Arshak sided with Constantius. The following year, Shapur conquered the Roman border town of Amida with heavy losses. Arshak sent Bishop Nerses, who strongly criticized the Arian-friendly church politics of Constantius and Arshak, into exile. In the year 363, Emperor Julian (r. 361–363) undertook a counterattack on the Sassanid Empire in order to eliminate the Persian threat at the eastern border. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Arsaces (Arshak) offered troops to the Romans. After some initial successes, the campaign culminated in catastrophe. Julian was killed in action, and the commanderless Roman army was nearly annihilated. Emperor Jovian (r. 363–364), who had been appointed by the soldiers, ultimately obtained an unimpeded retreat by means of a humiliating peace treaty. Rome had to withdraw from the areas east of the Tigris, vacate the strong garrison cities of Nisibis and Singara (today's Sinjar in northern Iraq), and surrender its protectorate over Greater Armenia. The historian and officer Ammianus Marcellinus, who had served under Constantius II and Julian, strongly condemned Jovian's hastily concluded Treaty of Dura:

A further and shameful condition was that once the treaty was signed we should never give any help to our consistently faithful friend Arsaces. [...] The ultimate consequence was that Arsaces was taken prisoner [by Shapur II], and that in the quarrels and confusion that ensued Artaxata with a great tract of Armenia bordering on Media was seized by the Parthians [Persians].⁷⁰

The Treaty of 363 anticipated the partition of Armenia from 387.

Shapur was quick to take advantage of the tipping of the scales in the South Caucasus. He attacked Armenia with the obvious aim of bringing it under Sassanid control. Although Arsaces waged a tenacious defensive war for four years, Shapur managed to persuade several leading *nakharar*, including Vahan Mamikonian and Meruzhan Artsruni, to convert to Zoroastrianism and betray King Arshak. Ammianus Marcellinus and the Pseudo-Faustus both report that Shapur invited the weakened Arsaces to negotiations in 368 and initially promised him safe conduct, but then captured and blinded him.⁷¹ Arsaces died in captivity soon thereafter. Shapur, however, added to his victory over Armenia by defeating the Iberian king Sauromaces II and replaced him with Aspacures II (Varaz-Bakur I).⁷² After the capture of Arshak and the Persian depredations, another member of the Mamikonian dynasty named Mushegh (Mushe) I (d. ca. 378) rallied the pro-royal forces around him. Moreover, around the year 369 the Eastern Roman Emperor Valens (r. 364–378) sent Arshak's son **Pap** (r. ca. 369–374), who lived at the Byzantine court, to Armenia. He was accompanied by Roman legionaries under the command of Terentius, who held the positions of *comes et dux Armeniae*.⁷³ Terentius and Mushegh Mamikonian succeeded after several battles in largely driving the Persians out of Armenia and regaining some of the territories lost in 363. At this, Rome recognized Pap as client-king. At the same time, the army commander Flavius Arinthaëus reached Armenia in order to prevent another Persian attack and also to exert control over King Pap, whose loyalty to Rome was questionable. Shapur II immediately demanded the observance of the treaty of 363, which Emperor Valens promptly rejected. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Terentius marched to Iberia with twelve legions to reinstate Sauromaces, who had been overthrown by the Persians.⁷⁴ In 370 or shortly thereafter, Romans and Persians agreed on the partitioning of Iberia: the Roman client-king Sauromaces received the south-western half of Iberia and Lazica; Varaz-Bakur received eastern Iberia.⁷⁵

Like his predecessors Tiran and Arshak II, King Pap failed in his attempt to curb the power of the autocratic and

exceedingly wealthy church, which owned about 15 per cent of the kingdom. He neither reduced the number of monasteries, nor dissolved the ostensibly charitable foundations founded by Bishop Nerses. When the conflict with Nerses escalated, Pap had him killed. He then arbitrarily appointed **Sahak I** of Manzikert (in office 373–77), also known as Husik II, from the priestly dynasty of the Aghbianos as the church's new head. This marked the break with the Archdiocese of Caesarea, as Archbishop Basil, who defended the Nicene Creed and strictly rejected Arianism, refused to confirm Sahak's election.⁷⁶ With this, the step towards autocephaly of the Armenian Church was effectively completed. Shortly afterwards *dux* Terentius, who was a close friend of Bishop Basil, plotted against Pap with Emperor Valens, and the Emperor had Pap assassinated.⁷⁷ With Pap's death, the conflict between the weakening royal dynasty of the Arsacids and the dominant aristocratic dynasty of the Mamikonians, who traditionally provided the *sparapet*, came to a head. Emperor Valens appointed Pap's nephew **Varazdat** (r. 374–378) as the new client-king. However, in view of the violent mass immigration of Gothic tribes into the empire in autumn 376 and subsequent revolts, he was forced to withdraw the troops stationed in Armenia. The imprudent Varazdat had Mushegh Mamikonian murdered shortly afterwards, whereupon Manuel Mamikonian (d. ca. 385/86) returned from Persia and seized the family's hereditary office of *sparapet*. Manuel was war-tested and had fought in Persian service at the eastern border. He defeated Varazdat and forced him into Roman exile. He then rose to become the true ruler of Armenia by appointing Pap's widow Zarmandukht as nominal regent for her underage sons **Arshak III** (r. ca. 378–387) and Vagharshak.

Manuel at first pursued a pro-Sassanid strategy and accepted a member of the Persian Suren dynasty as *marzpan*. Rome was unable to respond at this time, as it had suffered a calamitous defeat against the immigrated Goths at Adrianople (today's Edirne) in August 378, with Emperor Valens falling in battle. Manuel Mamikonian changed sides soon thereafter; he expelled the Persians and sought out closer proximity to the vigorous Roman emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–395). But after Manuel's death several nobles rebelled and demanded a new king from Shah Ardashir II (r. 379–383). Ardashir sent **Khosrow (Chosroes) III** (r. in Persarmenia, that is Persian-controlled Armenia, ca. 387–392, 414–415 or 417–418), escorted by Persian troops. Khosrow prevailed in eastern and central Armenia, while Arshak III retreated far to the west to Akilisene, a region along the upper Euphrates. He had hoped for Roman aid, but Rome was

tired of the unreliable and disruptive protectorate. Instead of waging war again, the two great powers agreed in 387 to divide Armenia on the basis of the current balance of power. As the *Epic Histories* emphasizes, Theodosius and Shapur III wanted to prevent Armenia from further inciting them against each other.⁷⁸ The division of Armenia confirmed the current status quo: Khosrow III ruled as client-king of Persia in central and eastern Armenia, which made up about four-fifths of Greater Armenia, with Shapur III assigning the eastern territories of Artsakh, Utik, Gardman, Kolt and Sakasene to the Albanian king Urnayr.⁷⁹ The loser, Arshak III, was left with western Armenia. The border ran from east of Erzurum in the north to Tigranakert (Martyropolis) in the south, roughly along 41 degrees longitude. Following the death of King Arshak, Rome did not appoint a successor. Instead, it placed Armenia Major under the authority of a native *comes Armeniae* with its seat in Theodosiopolis (Erzurum). The Roman legions there, in any case, were not under the latter's control. Located to the west of Armenia Major were the Byzantine provinces Armenia I, with Sebasteia (Sivas) as capital, and Armenia II with Melitene (Malatya). Yet the border between Roman Western Armenia and Persian Armenia remained quite open, since the great noble families often owned land in both halves of Armenia.⁸⁰ In retrospect, it was the *nakharar* who caused the political division of Armenia. They were relentless in playing Rome and Persia off against each other in an effort to weaken their own king and to prevent the establishment of a strong state. In 428, the nobles took the ultimate step in Persian Armenia, when they demanded from the Sassanid shah the abolishment of their own monarchy.

2.5 The third missionization of Armenia and the end of the monarchy

The intrigues of the Armenian *nakharar* against their king continued even under Sassanid sovereignty. Around the year 392, before Shah Vahram IV (r. 388–399), they accused Khosrow III of conspiring with Byzantium. The shah then arrested him and replaced him with his brother **Vramshapuh** (Vahram Shapur, r. ca. 393–414 or 417). In the beginning of his reign, around the year 395, the Huns crossed the Great Caucasus and plundered Armenia.⁸¹ Vramshapuh acted as loyal client-king of the Sassanids and maintained peaceful relations with the Armenian chief prelate **St Sahak** (Isaac; in office 387–428, d. 439), son of Bishop Nerses I. Unlike his predecessors, Vramshapuh was not under political pressure to promote Arianism in Armenia, which the Armenian bishops rejected. Undoubtedly the most significant milestone of



135. The Armenian National Library, the Matenadaran, built in the 1950s; in front of it, the seated figure of Mesrop Mashtots, the originator of the Armenian alphabet, and before him kneels his disciple Koriun. Yerevan, Armenia. Photo 2015.

his reign was the development and introduction of the Armenian script by the monk Mesrop Mashtots, who enjoyed the support of King Vramshapuh and Bishop Sahak.⁸² Vramshapuh was succeeded by his brother **Khosrow III** (r. 414–415 or 417–418). He again ascended the Armenian throne after more than twenty years of captivity, only to die a year later. Shah Yazdgerd I (r. 399–420) appointed as next ruler his eldest son **Shapur** (r. 415 or 418–420), who tried in vain to convert the leading nobles to Zoroastrianism. When Yazdgerd was murdered, Shapur rushed back to Iran, where he died as a result of a conspiracy. Shah Vahram V (r. 420–438) designated Vramshapuh's eighteen-year-old son **Artaxias IV** (r. 422–428), following a two-year interregnum. He was to be the last Arsacid king of Armenia.

Artaxias lacked experience, however. He was unpopular among the leading *nakhharar*, who refused to continue to be subordinated to him and sought direct access to the shah via a *marzpan*. Against the explicit advice of Bishop Sahak, they called upon Shah Vahram not only to depose King Artaxias, but to abolish the Arsacid monarchy altogether. According to Łazar

Parpetsi, a delegation went to the shah together with a priest named Surmak. They concluded their indictment by saying:

*What further need is there for a king? Let a Persian prince come for a while to be our governor. [...] When Vram [Vahram] with the nobles heard this, he greatly rejoiced. Then he ordered that Artashes (Artaxias) should be deprived immediately of the throne, and likewise Sahak of the domains of the Catholicos, and that he should be kept at [the Persian] court.*⁸³

As new *marzpan* of Armenia, the shah appointed the officer Veh Mihr Shapur (in office 428–442), and as new chief prelate the priest **Surmak** (in office 428–429), who was recommended by the nobles. The Armenian nobles, who were able to count on the support of their family-related bishops, managed to put an end to two dynasties: that of the episcopal Gregorids and that of the royal Arsacids. The latter development reified Armenia's political fragmentation.

The removal of the incumbent chief prelate and the arbitrary appointment of a new church leader by the Persian Shah

resulted in the break of the Armenian Church hierarchy with the Byzantine imperial church. The Armenian Surmak belonged to the pro-Syrian wing of the Armenian clergy; he was replaced after one year by the Syrian **Berkicho (Brkishoy)**, in office ca. 429–432). Berkicho did not manage to arrive at an agreement with the bishops, who continued to recognize the deposed Sahak as the chief prelate. Shah Vahram consequently replaced him with another Syrian named **Samuel** (in office 432–437). Since both the Armenian bishops and the nobles were divided into two factions, Vahram tried to find a compromise. Samuel would have responsibility for the political, juridical and secular affairs of the church, while Sahak

would handle the spiritual, especially episcopal ordinations.⁸⁴ Vahram warned Sahak not to interfere in political affairs:

I bid you swear by your faith to remain loyal to our service and not to plan rebellion, not to be deceived into an acceptance of the erring faith of the Greeks;⁸⁵ [in that case] you [would] become the cause of destruction to Armenia at our hands.⁸⁶

When Bishop Samuel died in 437, **Surmak** (in office 437–444) was appointed for a second time, followed by **Hovsep I (Joseph)**, in office ca. 444–452).⁸⁷

Mesrop Mashtots and the invention of the Armenian script

From the moment of its founding, the Armenian Church faced the challenge of spreading its doctrine in a cultural space that lacked a script for its national language. The Armenian missionaries and priests had to use Greek or Syriac texts, which were incomprehensible to most Armenians; the same applied to the liturgy, which was celebrated in Greek or Syriac. An Armenian alphabet was not only needed for these reasons, but also to ‘Armenize’ Christianity and to bridge the discord between Cappadocian and Syrian orientations. The honour of having developed the Armenian script and thus making an invaluable contribution to Armenian culture belongs to the monk Mesrop, also called Mashtots by his disciple and biographer Koriun (d. ca. 450). **Mesrop Mashtots** (ca. 362–440), from Taron, enjoyed a classical Greek education. He served first in the Armenian army as an officer, then in the royal administration (figs. 135, 137). When Mesrop became a monk in 396, he decided to develop a suitable script for the Armenian language, since earlier attempts with Greek and Syriac, and probably also with Middle Persian lettering, were unsuccessful.⁸⁸ After he had secured the backing of King Vramshapuh and Bishop Sahak, he made a first attempt with an Armenian alphabet which the Syrian Bishop Daniel had derived from Syriac Aramaic.⁸⁹ After two years, Mesrop came to the conclusion ‘that it was impossible through these letters to render accurately the syllables of Armenian words in a satisfactory way’.⁹⁰ Mesrop then went to Amida and Edessa in Syria to study the Greek and Syriac scripts. In the city of Samosata, he invented a new Armenian alphabet based on the Greek letters with the help of a Greek calligrapher, Rufinus (fig. 136). Koriun compares Mesrop’s achievement in returning to Armenia with the new alphabet to Moses’ descent from Mount Sinai, when he brought the God-given Ten Commandments his people.⁹¹ Certainly, in the Middle Ages religious manuscripts were highly esteemed, their veneration

resembling that of icons in the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church. The alphabet that was completed around the year 406 counted 36 letters: 28 consonants and eight vowels. Two letters were added in the twelfth century, giving today’s alphabet of 38 letters. Mesrop’s script, known as *erkatagir* or ‘ironclad letters’, was used in medieval manuscripts and epigrams. From the twelfth/thirteenth century the round script *boragir* and the cursive *notragir* were added, and from the eighteenth century the cursive writing *shelagir*. The majority of today’s typography uses the round script.⁹² Although the Armenian alphabet bears some similarity to the Middle Persian, it also demonstrates important commonalities with Greek. Accordingly, it is a phonetic alphabet with vowel signs, runs left to right, and the sequence of letters is similar to the Greek alphabet.⁹³ The first Bible translation took place in two stages: while the initial translation was done from mixed sources in Syriac and Greek, the second was prepared after the Council of Ephesus in 431 from a purely Greek version between 433 and 436.⁹⁴ Thanks to the Armenian script, the church received a powerful instrument. It not only could Armenize liturgy and doctrine, thereby distinguishing itself from the Byzantine imperial church, but it could also gain control over Armenian culture. Over time, Armenian culture defined itself along Christian parameters. As the axioms of the Church were recorded and written down in its Christology, it exerted a decisive influence on the Armenian national consciousness. To put it bluntly: ‘whoever refused to adhere to this [Armenian cultural religious] creed did not have the right to be called an Armenian.’⁹⁵

After the development of the script, Mesrop worked in the context of the third campaign of Christianization as a zealous missionary. He did not shy away from using military force and torture, as once St Gregory had done, in order to ‘persuade’ unruly heathens and alleged heretics. At the same time, Mesrop, along with Bishop Sahak, campaigned for the implementation of the decisions



136. Open-air monument of the Armenian alphabet near Oshakan, Armenia. Photo 2008.

of the Council of Ephesus. There, the main agenda item was the condemnation of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (in office 428–431). On the question of the nature of Jesus Christ, which at that time was a hotly contested issue, Nestorius took a Diophysite position. It was close to the later Chalcedonian Creed, but fiercely opposed by the eloquent Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril (in office 412–444), who advocated a Miaphysite interpretation. Pursuing a rigorous application of the two-natures doctrine, Nestorius did not call Mary Theotokos (Mother of God) but Christotokos (Mother of Christ’s human nature), which enraged the followers of the widespread Marian cult. In 432, the Miaphysite bishop Acacius of Melitene (in office *ca.* 430–after 438) sent a letter to Sahak, warning against the spread of Nestorian ideas. ‘We fear that people might be found [in your country] who follow the teaching of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the pernicious venom of Nestorius.’⁹⁶ Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428/29) was the pioneer of the Diophysite two-natures doctrine. Sahak promised in his reply to Acacius ‘to bring them [the heretics] under heavy punishment’.⁹⁷ Koriun reports on Mesrop and Sahak’s measures:

*Sahak and Mashtots with their truth-loving diligence removed them [the books of Theodore of Mopsuestia] away and rejected them by casting them out of the frontiers of their country so that no diabolic smoke be added to [their] luminous doctrine.*⁹⁸

Koriun, who probably came from Kartli and was later bishop there, mentions that Mesrop also developed the Georgian and Albanian alphabets. While the first is unlikely and probably represents a subsequent embellishment, the second is plausible.⁹⁹ The first written form of Iberian, i.e. Georgian, called *asomtavruli*, a name which means ‘capital letters’, was created during the continued Christianization of Kartli. The mosaic inscription of Bir el-Qutt near Jerusalem, dated around 430–50, is considered the oldest written document in Iberian, followed by the stone inscription of Bolnisi, Lower Kartli, dating from 493/4 (fig. 138).¹⁰⁰ The left-to-right *asomtavruli* had 38 letters. Though individual letters show similarities with the Greek and Middle Persian alphabets, *asomtavruli* cannot be derived from either of these. In the ninth century, the cursive script *nuskhuri*

was developed. In contrast to the two older ‘priest’s scripts’ *asomtavruli* and *nuskhuri*, today’s *mkhedruli*, called ‘knight’s script’, counted forty characters, seven of which are no longer in use.¹⁰¹ *Mkhedruli* emerged first at the end of the tenth century and was mostly used in non-religious documents; there is no difference between lower case and capital letters. As in Armenian, in earlier times the letters also had significance as numbers.

The Albanian-Caucasian script, together with Georgian, was one of the two indigenous scripts developed for an autochthonous Caucasian language. As in Armenia and Iberia, the Albanian alphabet was created in the course of Christianization in the fifth century. It remained in wider use until the eighth/ninth century, after the Albanian Church had been absorbed by the Armenian Church in the eighth century.¹⁰² Few documents written in Albanian survive. Among them are a stone inscription from Mingachevir from the year 557 and two Albanian-Georgian palimpsests from the St Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai. Mount Sinai and the monastery were a popular pilgrimage destination for Albanian, Armenian and Georgian pilgrims after their visit to Jerusalem. Altogether, the two palimpsests number 242 pages, on which the parchment manuscripts originally written in Albanian were later overwritten with Georgian. The first Albanian text is a Gospel of John from 669, the second a lectionary from the eighth/ninth century. The alphabet of that time probably counted 52 letters and codified an early form of today’s Udi language. Because of the similarity of individual Albanian letters to their Armenian equivalents and their position within the alphabet, it is quite possible that the Albanian script was partly derived from the Armenian script.¹⁰³



137. (upper image) The tomb of Mesrop Mashtots (ca. 362–440) in Oshakan, Aragatsotn Province, Armenia. The present Mesrop Memorial Church was built in the nineteenth century above the burial chamber from the fifth century. Photo 2015.

138. (lower image) The second of the two second-oldest preserved Georgian inscriptions, dating from 493/4, on the eastern side of the Sioni church of Bolnisi, Georgia. The translation reads: ‘Jesus Christ, have mercy on David the bishop and those who built this church for your worship.’ Photo 2018. (Copy; the original is in the Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.)

3. Kartli: From King Mirian III to the abolition of the monarchy

3.1 The legend of St Nino and the Christianization of Kartli

With the Treaty of Nisibis, Kartli, which had been under Persia's control since the later 250s, was brought back under Roman patronage. The succession of the last Arsacid king Aspatur I (r. ca. 265–284) is shrouded in mystery, however. According to *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the next king was **Mirian (Mihran) III** (r. ?–ca. 361), a Persian prince and son of a shah named Khosrow, who was married to Aspatur's daughter.¹⁰⁴ The dynasty founded by Mirian is consequently called 'Chosroid' by Cyril Toumanoff and Stephen H. Rapp; moreover, it is said to have been a branch of the Persian noble family of the Mihranids.¹⁰⁵ According to *Moktsevat Kartlisay*, Mirian was the son of Lev.¹⁰⁶ Neither version is very likely, though, as the first Sassanid shah with the name Khosrow did not rule until the sixth century and Lev

(Rev) is otherwise unknown. It is believed that Mirian III founded a local dynasty that sought to enhance its prestige by claiming Persian descent. Furthermore, the recorded reign of Mirian III (r. 284–361) is extraordinarily long at 77 years, although it is possible that his 'reign' was estimated from his birth, as with Shah Shapur II. If we accept the identification of Mirian with the Iberian king Meribanes mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, to whom Constantius II sent a legation in 360/61, the result is a *terminus post quem*. For this reason, the present author indicates for Mirian's reign the dates '?–ca. 361'.¹⁰⁷

King Mirian's importance in the assessment of traditional Georgian historiography lies in his introduction of Christianity as a state religion. This occurred a few decades after the similar decision by his Armenian neighbour Trdat. Also as in Armenia, Christianity in Georgia encountered a cultural area with its own living religion. Not only did natural phenomena and trees command veneration, but there was even a seven-member pantheon with obvious connections to the Iranian world of gods. The *Kartlis Tskhovreba* lists six deities individually:



139. St Nino is in the lower middle of the picture. Her cross consists of two vine trunks, which she has tied together with her own hair. Above, her patron, the Mother of God. Left of Nino are the apostles Peter and Paul, on the right Christ and the apostles. Modern mural painting in the northern side chapel of the Monastery of the Martyrs of Martvili, Mingrelia, Georgia. Photo 2018.

Armazi, who was introduced by King Azo. His large statue located at Armaz-Tsikhe was 'a man of bronze standing; attached to his body was a golden suit of chain-armor, on his hand a strong helmet; for eyes he had emeralds and beryls, in his hand he held a sabre glittering like lightning.'¹⁰⁸ Armazi was considered the supreme deity of Kartli; he was either a god of war, his name being derived from Ahura Mazda,¹⁰⁹ or he was the moon god Arma, who had been adopted from the Hittites.¹¹⁰ As Rapp rightly notes, however, Armazi could also have been a syncretistic god who fused Iranian and Hittite elements.¹¹¹

The statue of Armazi was flanked on his right by the golden figure of **Gatsi** and on his left by the silver figure of **Gaim**. Although both deity statues are described as male, Rapp, along with Armazi, interprets them as appropriations of the Zoroastrian trinity of Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Anahita.¹¹² According to Christian tradition, these three statues of gods standing at Armaz-Tsikhe were destroyed by a storm conjured up by St Nino.¹¹³

Aynina and **Danina** were two goddesses who probably corresponded to the Iranian goddesses Anahita and Nana.¹¹⁴

The sixth deity of Kartli was **Zadeni**, whom Rapp associates with the Anatolian god of war and weather Sandon, and Michael Shenkar with Ahura Mazda.¹¹⁵

Worth mentioning is a remark by Queen Nana, Mirian's wife, in *The Life of St Nino*: 'This Armazi and the god of the Chaldeans, **Itrushana**, have ever been enemies.'¹¹⁶ Thus in Kartli there was a deity who rivalled the local deities taken from the Achaemenid and Anatolian imaginary. Rapp derives the name Itrushana from *druj*, the Mazdaean concept of chaos and lies, Shenkar more convincingly from the Parthian word *ataroshan*, which means 'fire altar'.¹¹⁷ The hostility Queen Nana declares between Armazi and the embodiment of the Persian fire cult points to the resistance of the Iberians against the efforts of the Sassanids to establish the 'orthodox' fire cult. As mentioned above, Kartli's nobles had already rebelled against the spread of the fire cult initiated by King Parnajom around the year 90 BCE.¹¹⁸ This antagonism emerged again on the occasion of the legendary installation of King Mirian by the Sassanid ruler, when he reassured the *eristavi*: 'My son will observe both religions, the fire-worship of our fathers and the worship of your idols.'¹¹⁹ We may conclude from this that local polytheism was well-established in Kartli and that the cult of fire was imposed by the Persian occupying forces.

According to the Georgian tradition, the final version of which was edited in the course of the ninth century, St Nino's initial missionary work in Kartli took place in the 320s and 330s. However, the historicity of this account is still notably weaker than that of St Gregory. Thus, while the consecration of Gregory on the occasion of the Synod of 314 offers a point of reference, a similar indication is missing in the Nino legend and the available references are not plausible.¹²⁰ For instance, Nino's uncle is said to have been the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Juvenal (d. 458), and yet he lived a century later than Nino: Nino's death is recorded around the year 338.¹²¹ Rufinus, the church historian, then mentions only one 'woman captive', who healed the queen and showed the lost king the way back to familiar terrain.¹²² The insertion of the missionary, now called Nino (Nune), into the tradition of St Rhipsime and her companions is a subsequent Armenian fiction. Its purpose was to demonstrate the subordinate position of the Georgian Church vis-à-vis the Armenian.¹²³ Finally, the definitive record of *The Life of Nino* was written in the era of the Bagratids of Tao-Klarjeti after 813.¹²⁴ Here, Nino is portrayed as the Cappadocian daughter of a Christian Roman commander and as the niece of a patriarch, who searches for the tunic of Christ and receives a cross made of vine wood from the Mother of God.¹²⁵ The alleged healing of the queen is also extraneous historically, for the healing of a member of a non-believing royal family is a common, unspecific topos in the

context of Old and New Testament stories. In the final analysis, it is highly unlikely, given the prevailing social conditions at the time, that a king and his family would have allowed themselves to be converted by a female prisoner and then have imposed the new faith on their own people.

The guarantor Bacurius whom Rufinus mentions is historically documented, however. He was a Roman *comes domesticorum* (guard commander), whose mother was allegedly the daughter of King Mirian III. He fought on the Roman side at the Battle of Adrianople, where, as commander of Iberian archers, he launched an impetuous attack only to then hastily retreat. Afterwards, he served as *dux Palaestinae* until 394 and met Rufinus, who lived in Jerusalem.¹²⁶ After the year 394, he was appointed *bidakhsh* (or *vitaxa*, a dynastic military governor) of the Iberian-Armenian frontier region of Somkhiti-Gugark.¹²⁷ It thus cannot be ruled out that Bacurius' report has a historical basis and that an unknown missionary played a certain role in Mirian's change of religion. However, it is also conceivable that Rufinus wanted to please his long-time patron Melania the Elder (342-409) with the story of an ascetic female missionary active in Iberia. Melania was a tremendously wealthy Roman Christian woman who had met Rufinus in Egypt in the early 370s. In 380, he followed her to Jerusalem, where she founded and financed a monastery for him. Nonetheless, the labelling of the anonymous



missionary as ‘prisoner’ can also be interpreted differently in a Georgian context: Françoise Thélamon draws a parallel between the Christian prisoner and the traditional shamans of Georgia, called *kadag*. The female and male *kadag* were possessed by a deity and functioned as its mouthpiece in their dealings with humans. These *kadag* were not priests and could not perform any rituals, but they had to live in abstinence and observe taboos. They were in effect prisoners of their deity. From this, Thélamon concludes that the anonymous missionary was not a prisoner of war, but a female *kadag* who, as Christ’s prisoner, served as his mouthpiece. As soon as the converted king had founded the first church in Mtskheta and Bishop Ioane arrived with his priests to baptize the converts, Nino receded into the background. Iberian Christianity then developed in ‘customary’ ways.¹²⁸

Regarding the time frame of the Christianization of Kartli, Toumanoff follows the Iberian tradition. This account dates it back to the time of Constantine I and traces the conversion of Mirian to a solar eclipse. He places Nino’s arrival in Kartli in 328, the conversion of King Mirian in July 334 and the decree of Christianity as a state religion in 337.¹²⁹ For his part, Donald Rayfield puts Mirian’s conversion in the year 317, since an eclipse in Kartli was supposedly visible only at that time.¹³⁰ Korneli Kekelidze links the king’s conversion to the solar eclipse of 355, which took place during the reign of Constantius II.¹³¹ According to the data published by NASA, the date of 317 can be excluded because the solar eclipse of December 20 was not visible in Kartli. On 17 July 334, the solar eclipse was 49 per cent visible, on 28 May 355, 81 per cent.¹³² It thus follows that the official Christianization of Kartli may have begun around 334 or 355. Although the solar

eclipse of 334 in Kartli was less visible than that of 355, the present author prefers the earlier date, which is closer to the beginning of Christianization in the neighbouring country of Armenia.

According to the tradition, Emperor Constantine I sent Bishop Ioane (John, d. ca. 363), two priests and three deacons to Mtskheta to convert Kartli.¹³³ According to the traditions of the Georgian Orthodox Church, there is an unbroken line of chief prelates from Ioane I to the present Catholicos Ilia II. From a canonical point of view, the new Georgian Church was subordinated to the Patriarchate of Antioch; at the same time, it established close relations with the Jerusalem diocese, from 451 the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Under King Vakhtang Gorgasali (r. ca. 449–491/502), there was a far-reaching church reform at the end of the 460s or in the middle of the 480s, after a dispute had broken out between chief prelate Archbishop Michael, and the king. The archbishop refused to recognize the royal supremacy over church affairs envisaged by Vakhtang. Vakhtang sent the Greek Michael back to Constantinople and demanded the consecration of his candidate Peter. Since the Iberian Church was still formally controlled by Antioch, the patriarch there consecrated Peter as the first Catholicos of Iberia. At the same time, the patriarch consecrated Archbishop Samuel and twelve other bishops for the Iberian eparchies.¹³⁴ Thus Vakhtang had succeeded in deploying church personnel approved by himself, which effectively meant the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. From this point, the king himself chose the Catholicos; it was only from Catholicos Saba I (in office ca. 523–552) onward that exclusively Iberian chief prelates were appointed.

*The Catholicos Chirmagi died, and this King Parsman VI (r. nominally ca. 561–?) installed Saba. Henceforth no more did they bring a Catholicos from Greece, but Kartvelians were installed – kin of the nobles.*¹³⁵

Kartvelic now became the language of the liturgy. Nevertheless, the archbishop of Lazica, where the liturgical language was Greek, was subject to Constantinople until the beginning of the eleventh century, and not to Mtskheta.

Presumably, Mirian pursued a similar strategy to Trdat in Armenia. As a Roman client-king, he emulated Armenia’s change of religion and adapted to the imperial religious policy. At the same time, he sought to crush the power of the established nobility and confiscate the property of the pagan temples. The confiscated goods were then transferred to the treasury, the church, and faithful followers and nobles. As in Armenia, the bishops lived at the residence of the most important nobles,

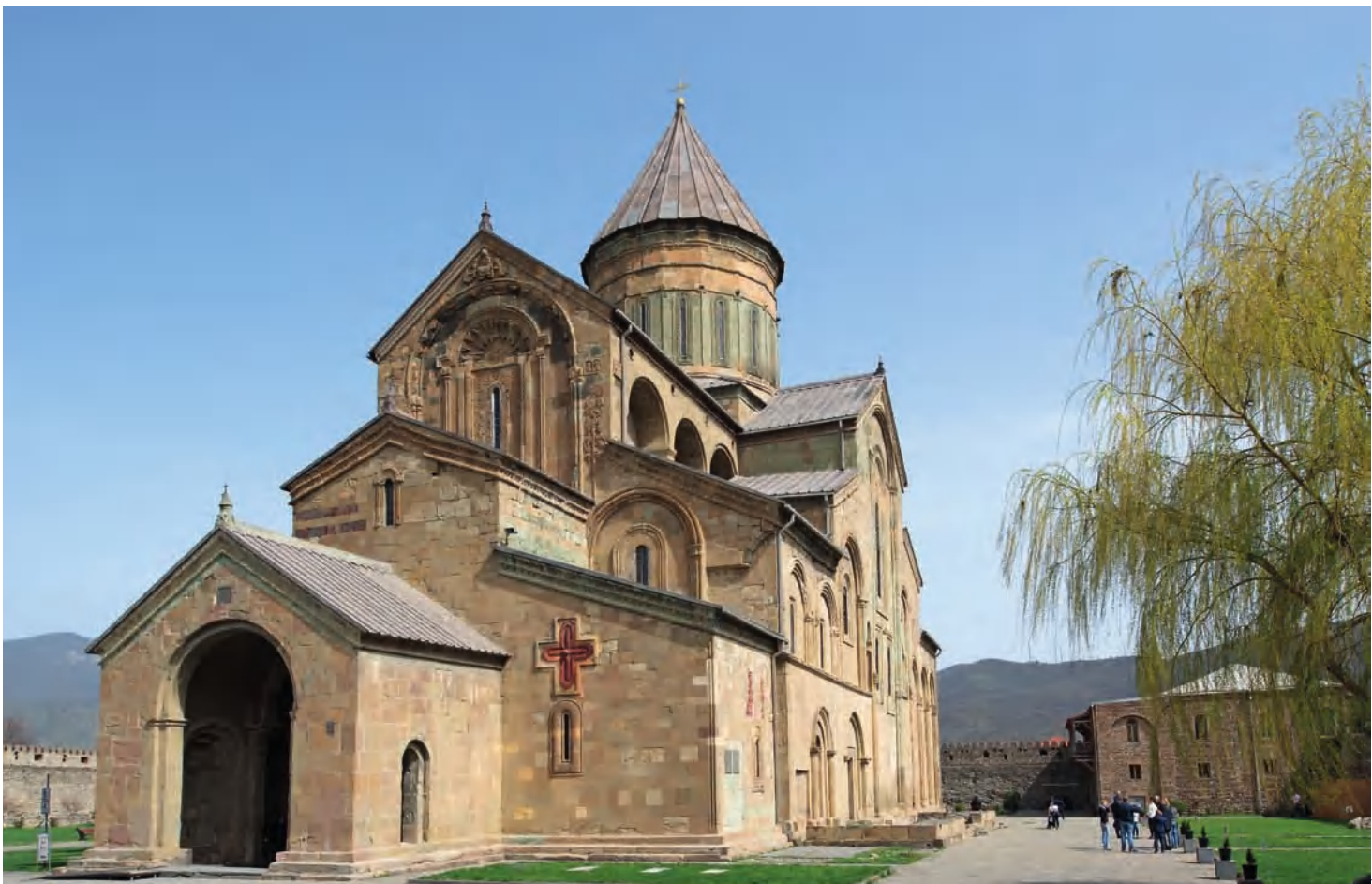
140. (upper image) During a hunt, Christ appears to the hunter Placidus in the antlers of the pursued stag. According to legend, Placidus was a Roman commander under Emperor Trajan. This vision inspired Placidus to be baptized and he was given the name Eustace. The legend of St Eustace is well known in Georgia, as it recalls the tradition of King Mirian, who lost his way in a forest while hunting and, in his distress, invoked the Christian God. Mural from the thirteenth century in Sapara Monastery, Georgia. Photo 2013.

141. (lower image) The three-nave Sioni Church in Bolnisi, Kvemo Kartli (Lower Kartli), is the oldest precisely dated basilica in Georgia, probably in the whole South Caucasus. Construction began under the Sassanid Great King Peroz I (r. 459–84) and the building was consecrated at the beginning of Shah Kavard I’s reign (r. 488–496, 498–531) around the year 493/4, during the rule of King Vakhtang Gorgasali (r. ca. 449–491/502) (Rapp, *The Sasanian World* (2014), pp. 41, 213). In the baptistery, a bull’s head is displayed on a capital with a cross rising between its horns. The representation is reminiscent of the mural painting of a scene from the life of Placidus or Saint Eustace in the Georgian church of Sapara (fig. 140). There, a stag appears before the still-pagan hunter Placidus, bearing an image of Christ in his antlers. To this day, there is a custom in Svaneti of attaching a cross between the horns of a white bull at a festival in the autumn – mixing pagan symbolism with Christian imagery. Photo 2018.

from the seventh century in the largest monasteries. Again, as in Armenia, the change of faith ordered from above met with bitter resistance from the people, especially in the highlands. And, again, as in Armenia, King Mirian finally used the military to force mountain dwellers to destroy their idols. Some mountain dwellers preferred to remain pagans by paying a hefty special tax, while others preferred to retreat further into the mountains or emigrate.¹³⁶ In fact, pre-Christian customs and beliefs in Svaneti, and especially among the Khevsur people who lived on both sides of the main Caucasian ridge, remained intact until the late nineteenth century.¹³⁷

Around the middle of the sixth century, Iberian Christianity received a new impulse from the arrival of the

‘Thirteen Syrian Fathers’, who organized the monastic life of Kartli. Although monks had already been active in Iberia, these thirteen monks – the number is an allusion to Jesus and the twelve apostles – are credited with the regulation and organization of local monasticism. Still famous to this day are Shio Mgvimeli, who founded a cave monastery north-west of Mtskheta, and Davit (David) Garejeli, who founded the large monastery complex of David Gareja on Mount Udabno in the desert steppe of Gareja in Kakheti (fig. 143). Originally, the monastery consisted of cave hermitages; later detached buildings were built in the lower third of the mountain flank, protected by a defensive wall. The extensive complex is now divided in two by the Georgian–Azerbaijani border. Opinions differ on the ecclesiastical affiliation



142. Sveti Tskhoveli Cathedral, seat of the Catholicos Patriarch of the Apostolic Orthodox Church of Georgia, Kartli, Georgia. The building that exists today was built between 1010 and 1029 by Catholicos Melchizedek I (in office 1010–33), the first Catholicos Patriarch of a united Georgia. The name Sveti Tskhoveli means ‘living pillar’ and refers to the miracle of the pillar on the occasion of the church’s foundation. The first building is said to have been a wooden church in which the middle pillar of cedar wood could not be erected despite the greatest efforts, which is why St Nino prayed throughout the night. The next morning, an angel wreathed in fire and light appeared and raised the pillar to heaven; the pillar then descended vertically on its own to earth in a fiery form (Pätsch, *Das Leben Kartlis* (1985), pp. 166–70; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 112–14 (1996), pp. 123–31). The significance of the pillar miracle is manifold: it refers to Zoroastrian fire symbolism, to the pre-Christian worship of trees, to the pillar of fire that showed the Israelites during night the way through the desert, and to the tree of life (Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 156–8). The archaeological excavations carried out in the cathedral between 1968 and 1972 indicated earlier stages of construction, but did not provide any clues for a reliable dating. Photo 2018.



143. The Lavra Monastery in the David Gareja cave monastery complex at Mount Udabno, Kakheti, Georgia, founded in the sixth century. The very extensive complex is divided into two halves by the Georgian–Azerbaijani border which runs along the mountain ridge. Today, five monks still live in the Lavra all year round; in the early thirteenth century there were several thousand spread out among thirteen monasteries. Photo 2013.

of the thirteen Syrian monks. In the view of Wolfgang Hage, they were Chalcedonian missionaries who wanted to bring the Iberian Church closer to the imperial; according to David Marshall Lang and Stephen Rapp, however, they were Miaphysites fleeing from Justinian's persecutions.¹³⁸

3.2 Kartli under Persian sovereignty

Despite embracing Christianity, King Mirian (Meribanes) III, like his Armenian neighbour Arsaces, was probably not a reliable ally of Constantinople. Indeed, Ammianus Marcellinus reports that Emperor Constantius II arranged for lavish gifts to be delivered to both kings in the winter of 360–61. He writes: 'It was feared that they could gravely injure the interests of Rome if at this critical moment [when foreign and civil war was threatening] they went over to the Persians.'¹³⁹ Thus the adoption of the Christian religion did not automatically mean the adoption of Byzantine foreign policy. Shortly afterwards, **Saurmag (Sauromaces) II** (r. ca. 361–368, 370–378 in West Iberia) ascended

to the Iberian throne as a Roman client-king. However, he was banished by Shapur II around the year 368 and replaced by his pro-Persian cousin **Aspacures II (Aspagur II, Varaz-Bakur I)** (r. 368–370, 370–378 in East Iberia).¹⁴⁰ After the *dux* Terentius invaded Kartli with twelve legions, Rome and Persia struck a compromise by dividing the country: Saumarg ruled in the west, Aspacures in the east.¹⁴¹ When Emperor Valens withdrew his troops from Iberia in early 378, Shapur II took the opportunity to harass them as they retreated and to drive Sauromaces out of West Kartli. In Kartli, which was now united under Sassanid rule, **Mihrdad III** (r. ca. 379–380) briefly followed as king; he was then succeeded by **Varaz-Bakur II** (r. ca. 380–394). Byzantium confirmed in the Treaty of Akilisene of 387 that Iberia lay outside of the Roman zone of interest and ceded the territory to Persia. It was only King Vakhtang Gorgasali, more than half a century later, who at times actually questioned Persian sovereignty.

The new king Varaz-Bakur II pursued a consistently pro-Sassanid policy. He turned away from Christianity and



144. The monastery church of Manglisi in Lower Kartli, Georgia. According to *K'art'lis C'xovreba* Manglisi belongs to the earliest churches of Kartli; from about 340 up to the 620s, it is said to have preserved the Holy Nails of the True Cross, venerated as relics, which Emperor Heraclius took away again during a campaign (Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 118, 227f (1996), pp. 131, 236). The church, originally conceived as a tetraconch with an octagonal exterior, might go back to the sixth century; it was rebuilt in the eleventh century in its present form. Photo 2018.

promoted Zoroastrianism, which was favoured by Persia. The *Kartlis Tskhovreba* condemns him as 'an impious man and a hater of religion' who did not build a single church.¹⁴² Since Varaz-Bakur left three underage sons, the *eristavi* enthroned the elderly brother of Saumarg, **Trdat** (r. ca. 394–406). He used the initially tolerant religious policy of Shah Yazdgerd I (r. 399–420) to build churches, among others the church at Nekresi in Kakheti (fig. 145).¹⁴³ The next ruler of Kartli was **Pharasmanes IV** (r. 406–409), one of the sons of Varaz-Bakur II, who had served in Byzantium as *magister militum* before his coronation. He is credited with the construction of the church of Bolnisi (fig. 141), even though it was in fact built during the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali. During the rule of the next three kings, **Mihrdat IV** (r. ca. 409–411), **Archil** (r. ca. 411–435) and **Mihrdat V** (r. ca. 435–447), the spread of Zoroastrianism began to increase considerably under the pressure of the Sassanid rulers, Vahram V and Yazdgerd II (r. ca. 438–457) in Kartli and Armenia.

According to the *History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali* which forms a part of *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, Archil supposedly unwittingly appointed a Persian named Mobidan as bishop. The latter, however, was a covert Zoroastrian (or Manichaean) priest or *mobed*, who wanted to undermine the Christian faith.¹⁴⁴ Later, when Sagdukht, the widow of Mihrdat V, held nominal regency for her underage son Vakhtang, her father Barzabod (the Persian representative of the shah, who controlled Iberia and Albania) forced her to approve the deployment of numerous Zoroastrian missionaries. Although they found little sympathy among the Iberian nobility, 'many common people were converted to fire-worship. So fire-worship spread among the lower people of Kartli.'¹⁴⁵

The next king, **Vakhtang Gorgasali** (r. ca. 449–491/502), is difficult to gauge. According to the epically embellished *History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali*,¹⁴⁶ the king was a devoted promoter of Christianity, who helped the Georgian Church achieve autocephaly.

He was also a shrewd strategist who expanded the territory of Kartli and won Iberia its independence. By contrast, in the opinion of the contemporary Armenian historian Łazar Parpetsi, Vakhtang was a timid and fickle ally of the Armenians. Furthermore, he was an inferior commander of a middling army who was betrayed by his own nobles after a crushing defeat.¹⁴⁷ Still, the fact that Parpetsi unilaterally blames the failure of the Ibero-Armenian military alliance on the Iberians and their king makes his account as biased as the Iberian tradition. Vakhtang's period of rule is also disputed. If Vakhtang Gorgasali can be identified with the Iberian king Gurgenes mentioned by Procopius, Vakhtang would have ruled until the year 522. Otherwise, his death is dated around the year 491 or 502.¹⁴⁸ The sobriquet Gorgasali is derived from the Persian word Gorgasar, 'wolf's head', as there was an image of a wolf on the front of his helmet.¹⁴⁹

In the beginning, Vakhtang was a loyal ally of Persia. After he had effectively seized power, he waged war against the Alans on behalf of the Persians in 456. He crossed the Darial Gorge and

defeated the Alans in their homeland, at which point he recruited Alanian and Hun mercenaries. He then invaded Lazica, which was a Roman client-state. This campaign probably took place on order of Shah Peroz I (r. 459–484), since the Lazian king Gubazes I (first r. before 456–?, second r. ca. 466–?) strove for an alliance with Persia to escape Byzantine domination. But when Emperor Marcian (r. 450–457) sent troops to Lazica, Gubazes surrendered. Vakhtang pulled back in a plunderous retreat and also invaded Svaneti. From then on, he claimed the mountain country as part of Iberia's zone of influence. When around the year 468 Gubazes, aided by Roman troops, wanted to bring Svaneti back under Lazian sovereignty, an Iberian army blocked their way. The Roman units were withdrawn and Gubazes' effort was fruitless.¹⁵⁰ A few years later, according to the tradition, King Vakhtang supposedly founded the new capital Tbilisi east of Mtskheta, whose construction was taken up again by his successor. Most likely, the city was established at the behest of Shah Peroz I, who had also built Perozabad (Partav) in neighbouring Albania around



145. From left to right: the basilica, the bishop's palace, the wine press and behind it the tower of Nekresi, Kakheti, Georgia. The oldest structure, the mortuary chapel (not in the picture), dates from the sixth century. Photo 2013.

461. He wanted to install Sassanid officials in both cities.¹⁵¹ The ruins of an *atashgah*, a fire temple in the old town of Tbilisi, bear witness to this early Persian-dominated period.

In 481 or 482, Vakhtang revolted against Sassanid sovereignty and sought political ties with Byzantium. The execution of Varsken, a Persian vassal and *marzpan* of Albania, was a provocation since it challenged Persian domination.¹⁵² The leading Armenian prince Vahan Mamikonian joined the Iberian uprising, but only reluctantly, because he regarded the Iberians' fighting power as weak and distrusted their Hunnic allies.¹⁵³ Initially, Kartli managed to repel an attacking Persian army. The Armenians led by Vahan Mamikonian also secured two victories over other Persian formations. But as King Vakhtang apparently delayed a military involvement in the Armenian war effort and sent only 300 Huns to Armenia, the Armenians suffered a heavy defeat in 483 and Vahan's brother Vasak was killed.¹⁵⁴ The following year, in 484, the Persian Hazaravukht (military commander) Zarmihr first penetrated Armenia and forced Vahan

Mamikonian to flee to the mountains.¹⁵⁵ He subsequently drove Vakhtang into exile in Lazica. As discussed earlier, Peroz's death in the war against the Hephthalites and the regime change in Iran turned the Ibero-Armenian defeat into a favourable peace agreement: the Christians obtained religious freedom, while Vakhtang was able to return to the Iberian throne.

According to the *History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali*, King Vakhtang fell in a battle against the Persians. Before this, he had refused to follow the order of Shah Kavadh I (r. 488–496, 498–531) to participate on the Persian side in the newly inflamed Persian–Byzantine war of 502–6.¹⁵⁶ Since Kavadh was indebted to Hephthalite military aid for his return to power in 498, he owed his allies a substantial sum of money. Kavadh requested the funds from Emperor Anastasius as a contribution to the costs of stationing troops at Derbent and the Darial Pass. After all, it was also in the interest of the Eastern Roman Empire that the barbarians of the North Caucasus be denied access to the south. This demand had a precedent, namely the treaty concluded by



146. The three-nave basilica of Urbnisi in honour of St Stephen the Protomartyr, Kartli, Georgia, sixth/seventh century. Photo 2013.



147. Ruins of the fortress city of Dara/Anastasioupolis, which was heavily fought over by the Roman Empire and Persia and which today lies in Turkey between Nisibis (Nusaybin) and Mardin. The army camp, hurriedly built or greatly expanded by Emperor Anastasius I (r. 491–518), served both as a defensive bulwark against Persian attacks and as a starting point for Eastern Roman attacks on the Sassanids. Photo 2001.

Theodosius II (r. 408–450) and Vahram V in 422. In it, Rome was to commit to making payments to the Persian defenders in the Greater Caucasus.¹⁵⁷ Anastasius (r. 491–518) turned down the demand, however, triggering the Anastasian War of 502–6. King Vakhtang died in battle at the very outset when he was struck by an enemy arrow. The conflict, which was costly for both sides, ended with Byzantium consenting to pay a lump-sum ransom for the return of some of the cities that Persia had conquered. As Procopius reports, during this period a Hunnic prince that he calls Ambazouces offered Emperor Anastasius the chance to purchase the Darial fortress, which he presumably controlled on behalf of the Persians. Anastasius declined the offer. The lack of secure communication and supply lines and of reliable allies in the area made the permanent stationing of a Roman garrison hundreds of kilometres from the nearest Roman base untenable.¹⁵⁸ A quarter of a century after Anastasius, Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565) once again had to pay Persia a large one-off payment on the occasion of the so-called ‘Eternal Peace’ of 532, allegedly as compensation for the cost of defending the Caucasus passes.¹⁵⁹

The war had revealed a Roman weakness, namely that Byzantium did not have a strong military base in a border zone of northern Mesopotamia. For this reason, immediately after the war Anastasius raised the powerful fortified city of Dara (Daras, Anastasioupolis) north-west of Nisibis (fig. 147). As Procopius reports: ‘The Emperor Anastasius, after concluding the treaty with Cabades, built a city in a place called Daras, exceedingly strong and of real importance.’¹⁶⁰ Since the bulwark of Dara could also serve as a Roman bridgehead to the Persian Empire, Persia repeatedly demanded it be razed. Dara remained a bone of contention between the two empires for more than a century until it lost its importance after the Arab conquest in 639.¹⁶¹ The Anastasian War was the first in a long series of military conflicts, whose only notable result was the decisive weakening of both empires.

The extant sources on the Iberian monarchy after Vakhtang’s death around the year 502 are contradictory. According to the *History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali*, Vakhtang divided Kartli on his deathbed between his three sons. He bequeathed the royal title as well as East Kartli and Kakheti to his eldest son **Dachi** (according



148. The Bertasheni church of the David Gareja monastery complex was partly destroyed by an earthquake. Its murals from the eleventh century feature episodes from St David's life, for example in the top right corner St David and his disciple Lukian encounter a herd of does which offer to the two thirsty hermits their milk, and to the left St David tames a dragon. Photo 2013.

to Toumanoff, r. ca. 522–534),¹⁶² and bestowed areas in south-west Iberia, which belonged to the Byzantine sphere of influence, to his two younger, subordinate sons **Mihrdat** and **Leon**.¹⁶³ Dachi, however, did not reside in Tbilisi, but in Ujarma in Kakheti, since the new capital was the seat of the Persian *marzpan*. Dachi was followed by the obscure kings **Bakur II** (r. ca. 534–547), **Parsman V** (r. ca. 547–561), **Parsman VI** (r. ca. 561–?) and, finally, **Bakur III** (r. ca. ?–580). When King Bakur died, the *eristavi* intervened with the Persian Great King and demanded the abolition of the monarchy. The Persian Crown Prince Khosrow II Parviz (r. 590, 591–628), who at that time resided in Partav as Persian *marzpan*, immediately complied with the request.¹⁶⁴ Although this reconstruction of later Iberian kings contradicts the report of the contemporary Procopius and was written around the year 800 at the earliest, Toumanoff claims that it is accurate. In particular, he asserts that the Iberian monarchy was not abolished until around the year 580.¹⁶⁵

Procopius, on the other hand, dates the end of the Iberian monarchy to the year 523. At the beginning of the 520s,

Perso-Byzantine tensions increased markedly after Emperor Justin received King Tzath (Tzathius) I of Lazica (r. ca. 522–after 527 or 540) in 521/22 and entrusted to him the royal insignia. In doing so, Justin disregarded the Persian claims to sovereignty over Lazica. The latter had abandoned Zoroastrianism in favour of Christianity and rose up against Kavadh.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, Kavadh demanded that the Iberian king **Gurgenes** (r. ?–523) convert to Zoroastrianism.¹⁶⁷ 'And just then Cabades was desirous forcing them [the Iberians] to adopt the rites of his own religion. [...] For this reason, Gurgenes wished to go over to Emperor Justinus.'¹⁶⁸ Rather than sending his legions, the emperor instructed Anastasius' nephew Probus to raise a mercenary army with the Bosphoran Huns. This stratagem failed. Kavadh, however, sent a powerful army to Kartli. 'Then it was seen that Gurgenes was too weak to withstand the attack of the Persians, for the help of the Romans was insufficient, [...] he fled to Lazica.'¹⁶⁹ Procopius adds elsewhere: 'Since the most notable men of these barbarians [the Iberians] together with their king, Gurgenes, had looked towards

revolt, [...] the Persians from that time on did not permit them to set up a king over themselves.¹⁷⁰ This spelled the end of the Iberian monarchy in 523, 95 years after the Armenian and thirteen years after the Albanian monarchy. The two divergent views may be reconciled by the interpretation that Persia abolished royal power in 523 and subordinated the whole territory to a *marzpan*, but allowed the descendants of Vakhtang to keep their small principality in the Kakheti region of Ujarma under a nominal royal title.

4. The conversion of Albania and the Apostolic Church of Caucasian Albania

There are very few historical sources, due to the loss of almost all Albanian written documents and the subordination of the early Albanian Church to the Armenian hierarchy. The later traditions are often politically biased. While the Armenian documents

present the Christianization of Albania as a mere continuation of the conversion of Armenia and deny the Albanian hierarchy any claim to legitimate independence, the Albanian Church repeatedly attempted between the seventh and tenth centuries to break away from Armenian dominance and to achieve autocephaly. To this end, the Church called itself 'apostolic'. The corresponding tradition claimed, moreover, that Jesus' brother James sent the apostle Elisha to Albania.¹⁷¹ This belief went hand in hand with the claim that the Albanian Church represented the mother church of the entire Caucasus. On the other hand, the view is historically justified that the Christianization of Albania took place as a later consequence of the change of religion in Rome and hence during the course of the missionary work in Armenia and Kartli in the later fourth century.

In this connection, there are two traditions that refer to different regions. The *Epic Histories* attribute to St Grigoris (d. ca. 337), the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator, the conversion of the territories south of the Kura. This area may have been



149. Ruins of the three-nave Albanian church of Qum, Qakh district, Azerbaijan. The brick basilica, including the porch, was 28 m long and 18 m wide and can be dated to the seventh century. Photo 2016.

Armenian territory before the year 363 or 387.¹⁷² Accordingly, Grigoris would probably not have been active in Albania but in Armenia. Grigoris is revered as the first head of the church.¹⁷³ The *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, by contrast, attributes the Christianization of Albania to the conversion of King Urnayr.¹⁷⁴ But this neither happened during Grigoris' lifetime nor before the year 372, when Urnayr fought faithfully on the side of the Sassanids. The most likely date is considered to be after 387, since the transfer of the areas south of the Kura river (Artsakh, Utik, Gardman, Kolt and Sakasene) to Albania meant that the kingdom suddenly counted a considerable Christian minority. Urnayr thus may have been motivated to embrace the religion of the newly won population. As in Armenia, at the time of King **Arsualēn** (r. ca. 424–444) more intensive missionary work was carried out in Albania by the Armenian monk-scholar Mesrop Mashtots and the Albanian Bishop Eremia. The latter was involved in developing

the Albanian alphabet and may have also translated the Holy Scriptures into Albanian.¹⁷⁵

Since the tradition that the Christianization of Albania originated from Armenia predominated in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the Armenian hierarchy insisted the Albanian Catholicos receive the ordination directly from the Armenian Catholicos. Notwithstanding this canonical demand, between the years 590 and 705 there were some bishops at the top of the Albanian hierarchy who renounced this confirmation. Theologically, the Albanian Church acquiesced to the Armenian claim to leadership for a long time; it also adhered to the Armenian position on the matter of the 'right' creed. Albania proclaimed the Miaphysite confession of faith, while denouncing the Chalcedonian confession. Yet the church leaders of Kartli, Albania and the Syunik region in south-eastern Armenia welcomed the imperial decrees when Emperor Justin revoked the Henotikon in 519 and



150. The cathedral of the Gandzasar Monastery was founded in 1216 by the Armenian prince Hasan Jalal Dawla (r. ca. 1214–61) of Khachen (Artsakh) and consecrated in 1240. The monastery served from about 1400 to 1836 as the last see of the Albanian Church. Gandzasar has been an archdiocese of the Armenian Church since 1989. The monastery stands about 40 km north-west of Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh, disputed territory, de jure Azerbaijan. Photo 2015.

aligned himself with the Chalcedonian confession, and when Justinian sharply distinguished the Chalcedonian confession from the condemned Nestorianism in 553. The Armenians, for their part, vehemently defended the purely Miaphysite interpretation at the synod of Dvin in 555.¹⁷⁶ The Albanian Catholicos Abas (in office *ca.* 552–596), during whose time the Albanian Church counted eight dioceses,¹⁷⁷ moved closer to the imperial church around 570 in order to bring about greater autonomy from the Armenian hierarchy.¹⁷⁸ This resulted in the loss of a unified position among the South Caucasian churches regarding the confession of faith. As explained earlier, the powerful *marzpan* for Armenia and commander of the army Smbat IV Bagratuni compelled the hierarchies of Albania and Syunik at the Persian Synod of 607 to join the Miaphysite position and recognize the Armenian claim to leadership.¹⁷⁹ However, when the Byzantine emperor Heraclius had the newly enthroned Varaz-Grigor baptized a second time around the year 628 in the tradition of the Chalcedonian Creed, Catholicos Viroy objected to this second baptism.

The active Caucasian policy of the Byzantine emperors in the seventh century, who sought to regain the Caucasian zone of influence lost to the Arabs, seemed to offer the Albanian Catholicos Nerses Bakur (in office 688–705) the chance to liberate himself from Armenian paternalism. He recognized the Chalcedonian Creed and desired the protection of the Orthodox imperial church. Nevertheless, the Armenian Church enjoyed the acceptance of the Caliphate, and the Armenian Catholicos Elijah denounced the Albanian Catholicos for high treason. Muslim officials immediately arrested Nerses Bakur. They insisted in an ultimatum that the Albanian bishops recognize the Armenian-Miaphysite confession. Elijah then appointed the Albanian bishop Simeon as Albanian Catholicos.¹⁸⁰ The latter subsequently arranged for the destruction of allegedly heretical works: '[Simeon] placed all the heresy-ridden writings of Nerses in boxes and threw them into the Trtu River.'¹⁸¹ We can assume that not only Nerses' own writings were destroyed, but all texts written in non-Armenian languages, including Albanian. This partly explains the almost complete loss of Albanian manuscripts. After this disruption, very few Albanian books appear to have been written or copied, and Albanian writing eventually became extinct. It seems, moreover, that Albanian rulers did not promote the writing and copying of Albanian texts with the same zeal as their Armenian or Iberian counterparts. Although a last attempt was made by the Albanian Catholicos Sahak (in office 929–947) and Gagik (947–958) in the middle of the tenth century to establish the Chalcedonian Creed and to assert the autocephaly of the Albanian Church, it failed.¹⁸²

In the eighth century, increased efforts at Islamization induced numerous Albanian Christians to accept Islam and to be assimilated by the immigrating Turkish-speaking and Iranian tribes. Simultaneously, many Albanians who were loyal to Christianity were absorbed by the Armenian Church. There was, however, still a notable Albanian-Christian community in the north-west of Albania, in the Kingdom of Hereti, whose capital was Shaki. In 893, Prince Grigol Harman (d. *ca.* 893 or 897), a grandson of the Armenian Shah of Arran, Sahl Smbatean, proclaimed himself king of Hereti. According to the Georgian tradition, in the 940s Queen Dinar Bagrationi and her son Ishkhanik subordinated Hereti's Albanian clergy to the Orthodox Church of Iberia, which pushed through the change to the Chalcedonian Creed. In the year 1010, Hereti was incorporated into Kakheti.¹⁸³ The Albanian Church continued to exist nominally under Armenian sovereignty. For instance, there is evidence of the participation of the Albanian Bishop Stephanos (or rather Catholicos Stephan III, in office 1155–1195) at the Armenian Synod of Hromkla of 1178–9.¹⁸⁴ Around 1400, the nominal Albanian catholicosate was relocated from the monastery of Khamshi (today's West Azerbaijan) to Gandzasar in the Principality of Khachen in today's Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh. There, it continued to exist as an autonomous diocese of the Armenian Church under the name of the Catholicosate of Ałuank. But from a theological and canonical point of view, the catholicosate was completely aligned with the Armenian mother church. The cathedral of Gandzasar was founded in 1216 by the powerful Armenian feudal lord Hasan Jalal Dawla (*r. ca.* 1214–1261) of Khachen. The dynasty, which was able to retain its autonomy until the Russian-Persian War of 1805–1813, also held a quasi-monopoly over the office of Gandzasar's Catholicos. As a result of this close intertwining of secular and clerical power, catholicos of Gandzasar at times played a significant political role, including Catholicos Yesai (Isaiah) Hasan Jalalian (in office 1702–1728). In 1703, he asked Tsar Peter I to provide military assistance to the Armenians in their fight against their Muslim overlords; he met the tsar in Russia in 1711 and played a decisive role in the formation of a local army.¹⁸⁵ In 1815, at the instigation of the Armenian Church hierarchy in Etchmiadzin, the catholicosate was downgraded by the Russian authorities in Elisavetpol (today's Ganja) – who had administered Nagorno-Karabakh since 1813 – to a metropolis. In 1836, it was finally dissolved and converted into an Armenian diocese. Today, the small Caucasian Albanian-Udi Christian Community, which numbers about 6,000 people, has been officially registered with the Azerbaijan State Committee for Religious Organizations since 2003.¹⁸⁶

5. Lazica and the initial Christianization of the North Caucasian Alans

The territory of Lazica, bordering the eastern Black Sea, had great strategic importance for Rome and later for Byzantium for geographical reasons. It bordered the western part of the Greater Caucasus, the north of which was home to invading ‘barbarians’ such as Goths and Huns, as well as hostile mountain peoples who liked to plunder in the south. Lazica was the bulwark that protected the Roman Empire from a northern invasion. Moreover, a Rome-friendly Lazica was able to obstruct, at the Surami Mountains, Sassanid advances on the Black Sea via Iberia, which had been a Persian protectorate since 378. Lazica thus ensured that Persia could not attack Constantinople across the Black Sea using a fleet built in Lazica. If, however, Lazica belonged to the Persian sphere of influence, these powerful defensive functions would cease to exist. Consequently, Lazica was of greater importance for the security of Rome than it was for Persia. For the Sassanids, having influence over Lazica was merely a tremendous means of exerting pressure on Rome. Lazica, though, used these special circumstances to play the two major powers off against each other.

While Rome reduced its military presence in Lazica in the middle of the third century, it withdrew its troops only in the last quarter of the fourth century in connection with the Hun invasions.¹⁸⁷ If we are to believe the historian Menander Protector (d. after 582), Vahram V had acknowledged in the treaty with Emperor Theodosius of 422 that Lazica belonged to the Roman zone of influence. He also affirmed that it was within Rome’s jurisdiction to approve the kings of Svaneti appointed by Lazica.¹⁸⁸ The Lazian kingdom included not only Egrisi and Svaneti, but also the mountain peoples of the Scymni and the Abasgi, Apsilae (Apsilii) and Misimiani in the north.¹⁸⁹ However, the Persians tried several times to isolate Svaneti from Lazica and bring it under their control. This was demonstrated in 468 when an Iberian army blocked the way to Svaneti for King Gubazes I.¹⁹⁰

5.1. The Lazic Wars

In the first half of the fifth century, the kingdom of Lazica seems to have been spared from Persian and Eastern Roman attacks, not least because both great powers were engaged at other flashpoints. During the reign of King **Gubazes I** (first r. before 456–?, second r. ca. 466–?), Emperor Marcian sent a military expedition to Lazica in 456. He was motivated by the fact that the Lazian king was seeking an alliance with Persia.

But the Sassanids refused to provide military aid, and Gubazes was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, unknown by name (r. after 456–ca. 466).¹⁹¹ Around the year 465/66, Gubazes travelled to Constantinople. Together with Emperor Leon I (r. 457–474), he visited the stylite (pillar saint) Daniel, who made a strong impression on the Lazian king.¹⁹² Gubazes was very likely a Christian, an assumption reinforced by contemporary diplomat and historian Priscus (d. ca. 474), who remarked that the king ‘brought with him the symbols of the Christians’.¹⁹³ Christianity had gained an early foothold in the coastal towns of Lazica through the deployment of Roman garrisons. Bearing witness to this was Bishop Stratophilos of Pityus (Pitsunda), who participated in the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and in whose city soldiers of the Legio XV Apollinaris were stationed.¹⁹⁴ Even though Rome did not have troops in Lazica in the 460s, the kingdom remained under Roman influence for a certain period of time. Certainly, the Iberian king Vakhtang Gorgasali, fleeing from the Persians, would not have sought refuge there otherwise. Given that the then king, **Damnazes (Zamnaxes, r. ?–ca. 522)** was a Zoroastrian, the influence of the Sassanid Empire appears to have gained the upper hand at the Lazian royal court around the turn of the century.¹⁹⁵

This was the time of one of the rare tactical military alliances between Byzantium and Persia. The semi-nomadic, Turkic-speaking **Sabirs**, who had invaded the North Caucasus at the turn of the fifth to the sixth century, frequently engaged in raids in the southern Caucasus and offered their services as mercenaries to the highest bidder. Around the year 521/2, Emperor Justin concluded a treaty with the king of the Sabirs, Zilgibis. It stipulated that Zilgibis would supply an army of 20,000 men. At the same time, however, the Sabir leader entered into an identical treaty with the Sassanid Kavadh I (r. 488–531) and likewise accepted his payment. Justin learned of the double-cross and informed Kavadh that Zilgibis had previously sworn an oath of allegiance to him. He added: ‘it is necessary that we, as brothers, become friends and not follow the sport of these dogs’. Kavadh agreed. When Zilgibis chose Persia and marched with his army towards the region, Kavadh set a trap for him. As a result, Zilgibis and most of the Sabir warriors were killed.¹⁹⁶ Thirty years later, in the 550s, Sabir mercenaries fought on both sides: in the army of the Byzantine commander Bessas and his Persian adversary Mihr-Mihroe.¹⁹⁷ According to Procopius, women also fought in the Sabir armies.¹⁹⁸

Damnazes’ son and successor **Tzath (Tzathius) I** (r. ca. 522–after 527 or 540) escaped the Persian stranglehold by submitting to Byzantine protection, receiving the royal insignia from



151. The large, three-nave St Andrew's Patriarchal Cathedral of Pitsunda (Greek Pityus, Georgian Bichvinta) was built at the beginning of the tenth century as the seat of the Abkhazian archbishopric of Soterioupolis (Khroushkova, *Monuments chrétiens* (2006), pp. 94, 159). The murals were whitewashed in 1845 and most of them were destroyed in 1970 when the church was converted into a concert hall. Today (as of 2020), the cathedral belongs to the non-canonical Abkhazian Orthodox Church, which was proclaimed in 2009 and is not recognized by either the Georgian or Russian Churches. Photo 2018.

Emperor Justin, and by being baptized. Lazica was now a Christian state and a Roman protectorate; the kingdom enjoyed tax exemption but had to keep a tight grip on the border, which was located near the Great Caucasus. As Procopius elaborates:

*The Lazi at first dwelt in the land of Colchis as subjects of the Romans, but not to the extent of paying them any tribute [...] And he [the king], with his subjects, guarded strictly the boundaries of the land in order that hostile Huns might not proceed from the Caucasus mountains [...] and invade the land of the Romans.*¹⁹⁹

In contrast to Emperor Leon, who did not provide any military support for Rome's influence in Lazica in the 460s, Emperor Justin stationed Byzantine troops in the two border fortresses, Scanda and Sarapanis (Shorapani), on the Iberian borders around 522. He thus replaced the Lazian garrisons.

However, when the Iberian king Gurgenes asked for military assistance, Justin considered an extension of the military deployment to Kartli too risky. The sending of imperial soldiers against the wishes of the Lazi soon turned out to be a mistake. It aroused the wrath of the Lazi, who regarded the legionaries as foreign occupiers. The anger in turn provoked the pro-Persian circles and later erupted in the rebellion of 541. At first the Lazi refused to cooperate with the Roman garrisons, which were dependent on food supplies. Procopius reports critically:

The emperor demanded that he [Petrus, a Byzantine general,] should assist the Lazi to guard their country, even against their will. [...] These [Lazian] garrisons the emperor removed from the place and commanded that Roman soldiers should be stationed there to guard the fortresses.

In view of the supply difficulties of the two garrisons and the passive resistance of the Lazi, ‘the Romans abandoned these forts, whereupon the Persians with no troubles took possession of them’ around the year 528.²⁰⁰ At that time, Byzantium and the Persians waged a war in Mesopotamia, which ended in a stalemate in 531. The subsequent ‘Eternal Peace’ of 532 the following year represented little more than an armistice, however. Byzantium pledged its exorbitant lump-sum payment and returned the Armenian fortresses Pharangium and Bolum. In return, Persia cleared out of Sarapanis and Scanda.²⁰¹

Justinian then ordered these to be rebuilt and extended the large and strong fortresses of Archaeopolis (Nokalakevi) and Rhodopolis (today’s Vartsikhe, south of Kutaisi) in the east of Lazica, and Pityus (Pizunda) and Sebastopolis (Sukhumi) in the north. In addition, the emperor had the city of Petra, which

looked over the Black Sea, massively fortified and, a few kilometres further south, the fortress of Losorium (today’s Tamaris-Tsikhe near Batumi) was constructed (fig. 86). Sebastopolis was particularly important because the city not only had a port but also controlled the western side of the Kodori Valley, which was an important link to the northern Caucasus. Following Roman armament within Lazica, the former buffer state transformed into a border protectorate, which would soon become the scene of two Roman–Persian wars. Roman garrisons were stationed in the newly strengthened fortresses. As the Lazi had to provide them with provisions at reduced, non-market prices, they considered these troops to be occupiers. The resentment of the Lazi was only exacerbated by the rebukes of high Roman officers such as the general Petrus, whom Procopius calls ‘a slave of avarice’.²⁰² His successor Ioannes Tzibus behaved even worse. As a merchant,



152. The Byzantine fortress of Petra on the Black Sea, built by Emperor Justinian I in 535, stands on a hill that has been inhabited since the Late Bronze Age, where a Roman fort probably already stood at the time of Emperor Hadrian.

he had established a monopoly in Lazica's trade with Rome. King **Gubazes II** (r. ca. 540–555) then initiated secret negotiations with Shah Khosrow I Anushirvan (r. 531–571). The shah personally led an army to Lazica in 541, and Gubazes swore allegiance to him. When the first attack on Petra (fig. 152) failed, the enraged King of Kings ordered the impaling of the commander in charge, the general Aniabedes. During the siege that followed, Tzibus was killed. The Persians also dug a tunnel under one of the towers that stood on the landward side, causing it to topple. The Persians then invaded Petra, whereupon the Byzantine garrison surrendered.²⁰³ Khosrow now held a port city on the Black Sea. He could make contact from here with Cappadocia or Bithynia and even arrange a maritime raid on Constantinople. To this end, Khosrow had a great deal of wood suitable for shipbuilding transported to Lazica. He sought to build up a Persian fleet on the Black Sea.²⁰⁴ However, immediately after the conquest of Petra, Khosrow was forced to hurry south to Nisibis, in whose vicinity the Byzantine commander Belisarius had launched a counter-offensive. He left behind a strong garrison in Petra, both to prevent the Byzantines, who had also evacuated Pityus and Sebastopolis, from returning, and also to keep watch over Gubazes. Khosrow and Justinian concluded an armistice in 545. Lazica, however, was explicitly excluded from it.

Gubazes would soon regret changing sides. The rigid Persian laws and rules of conduct, as well as the Zoroastrian attempts at conversion, were intolerable for the Lazi. The historical record of Lazica from the time of Gubazes I's visit to Constantinople shows that the Lazian kings were more or less forced to adopt the religion of their respective overlords. The adoption of the religion of the protecting power was demanded as proof of loyalty. Another impediment for Lazica was the fact that it was now excluded from trade in the Black Sea, which was completely controlled by Byzantium. According to Procopius, Khosrow finally planned the destruction of King Gubazes and a population exchange, in which the Lazi would be deported and Persians settled in Lazica.²⁰⁵ Khosrow wanted to ensure the loyalty of this strategically important border region with the mass settlement of Persians. Learning of the conspiracy in advance, Gubazes made a political U-turn in 548: he again submitted to Byzantium and asked for military aid. Justinian sent an army of 7,000 men under Dagisthaeus. Khosrow consequently dispatched his commander Mihr-Mihroe (Mermeroes) to Lazica with an army four times as large. When Dagisthaeus foundered at the first siege of Petra, Justinian replaced him with General Bessas. To begin with, Bessas had to crush an uprising of the Abasgi instigated by Persia in order to avoid a war on two fronts in Lazica. According to

Procopius, the Abasgi had broken away from Lazica and appointed an uncle of King Gubazes named **Opsites** (r. ca. 541–550) as ruler in the northern half of Abkhazia. He entrenched himself in his fortress of Trachea, which was probably located near Gagra. But the Romans stormed it, forcing Opsites to flee to the North Caucasian Sabirs. Some of the Sabirs, whom Procopius refers to as 'Huns', had been Christianized.²⁰⁶ After his victory, Bessas ordered the reconstruction of Pityus and Sebastopolis. In 552, following a year-long siege, he and his Lazian allies, who also included Alanian mercenary units, conquered Petra and had its fortifications razed to the ground. It should never again serve as a base for the Persians.²⁰⁷ Instead of Petra, the fortress of Apsaros, located a little further south, was extended and reinforced. With the loss of Petra, Khosrow also forfeited the option of attacking Constantinople by sea.

The war in Lazica did not end with the Byzantine reconquest of Petra, however. Now, it was being fought in the eastern part of the territory. The Persians held Rhodopolis and Cotais (Kutaisi), but suffered two defeats when attacking Archaeopolis.²⁰⁸ The protracted nature of the war led to tensions between the Roman generals Martinus and Rusticus and King Gubazes, who denounced each other in writing to Justinian. In the autumn of 555, Rusticus and his brother John, dreading being ousted, murdered King Gubazes II. The infuriated Lazi demanded justice from the emperor and the appointment of Gubazes' younger brother **Tzath II** (r. 555/56–?). Because of the threat that Lazica would again change sides, Justinian confirmed Tzath II as Lazian king and had Rusticus and John publicly executed in Apsaros. Shortly afterwards, in 557, the Byzantines succeeded in reconquering Rhodopolis. The sixteen years of fighting in Lazica came to an end after the withdrawal of the majority of the Persian troops.²⁰⁹ Three years earlier, on the southern front of the war, the Byzantium-aligned Ghassanids had achieved a remarkable victory over the Persian-aligned Lakhmids. Byzantium's position was greatly strengthened as a result.²¹⁰

Peace was not brought to Lazica until the Treaty of Dara of 561/2. Most likely, the rapidly growing power of the Turkic Khaganate on Persia's north-eastern border convinced the King of Kings Khosrow to abandon his strategy of waging war against Byzantium via Lazica. In the Treaty of Dara, Byzantium committed itself to annual payments of 30,000 gold coins, ostensibly as a contribution to the defence of the Caucasus passes. In return, Persia recognized Byzantine sovereignty over Lazica and granted freedom of worship to Christians living in Persia. The conversion of Zoroastrians, however, was still

prohibited. The treaty also regulated Persia's handling of the Caucasus passes and the contentious issue of the fortified city of Dara. The contemporary, Menander Protector describes the most important clauses as follows:

- 'Through the pass at the place called Tzon [Derbent] and through the Caspian Gate [the Darial Pass] the Persians shall not allow the Huns or Alans or other barbarians access to the Roman Empire.'
- 'Henceforth, the Persians shall not complain to the Romans about the fortification of Dara. But in the future neither side shall fortify or protect with a wall any place along the frontier.' This put an end to any further militarization of the border. The Byzantines and Sassanids understood the value of demilitarized border zones as a confidence-building measure.
- 'A large force [...] shall not be stationed at Dara, and the general of the East shall not have his headquarters there.'²¹¹

The negotiations merely failed to clarify matters concerning Svaneti. Svaneti, which had belonged to Lazica since the early fifth century, had preferred Persian over Roman-Lazian sovereignty during the war. In 552, the Svans had driven out the Roman garrison stationed in Svaneti and welcomed the advancing Persians. During the renegotiations of 562, Khosrow refused to relinquish Svaneti, from where Persia posed a threat to Roman Lazica. Instead, he emphasized that the Svans had voluntarily placed themselves under Persian protection. Five years later, negotiating on behalf of Emperor Justin (r. 565–578), the emissary Ioannes (John) likewise failed when he attempted to repurchase Svaneti from Khosrow.²¹² There is evidence that the Sassanids continued to maintain garrisons in Svaneti in the year 571. In fact, when the Byzantine envoy Zemarchos returning from his diplomatic mission to the Turkish Khagan Istämi visited the Alanian King Saroes, he warned him against journeying further through Svaneti, 'because the Persians were lying there in wait for [him] in Suania'.²¹³

By and large, the Treaty of Dara restored the situation to that of before 541, with both sides having to make concessions. Byzantium had to make humiliating annual payments to Persia, which were de facto tributes; it also had to put up with Persian dominance in Svaneti. Persia, for its part, renounced the demand that the stronghold of Dara be razed to the ground. To the extent that Byzantium frustrated the Persian strategy of establishing a

bridgehead to the Black Sea in Lazica, it emerged as the victor in the Western Caucasus. The fate of Lazica, on whose territory war had been waged for almost two decades with brief interruptions, shows how small states at the crossroads of two warring great powers were hardly masters of their own destiny. They were only spared from war so long as the great powers found small kingdoms such as Lazica useful as buffer states. If, on the other hand, a great power regarded control over the small state as desirable, it used political pressure or military means.

5.2 The Christianization of Lazica, Alania and Svaneti and the veneration of military saints

While the Christian communities of **Lazica** arose in the first quarter of the fourth century due to the Roman garrisons stationed there, King Gubazes I was the first known Christian ruler of Lazica. Attesting to these early Christian communities among the Roman soldiers is the small church of Gagra, which stood inside the Roman fortress of Nitika (fig. 153). Although Gubazes' son, whose name is unknown, was most likely also a Christian, the next ruler, Damnazes, followed Zoroastrianism for political purposes. King Tzath adopted the Christian faith around the year 522 and soon introduced it as the state religion. In contrast to Armenia and Iberia, where conversion was also imposed by force, it seems to have taken place more gradually and leniently in Lazica. Bishop Stratophilos of Pityus had already in the first half of the fourth century laid a cornerstone for the later missionary work with the urban Lazi and Abasgi (proto-Abkhazians). A short time later, Christian communities emerged among the mountain people of Apsilia. After the baptism of Gubazes, Emperor Justinian sent missionaries and priests to Lazica to convert the (according to Procopius) tree-worshipping Abasgi and to build churches. One of these missionaries was the eunuch Euphrates, who prohibited the Abasgi leaders from castrating young boys.²¹⁴ The churches built in the sixth and seventh centuries were designed specifically for the locals, with large baptisteries for adult baptism. As for the organization of the church, a bishop resided in Pitsunda before 325. The Abasgi already had their own bishop before the war began in 541 and the bishop's see was most probably in Dranda (fig. 154). The large brick church has a cruciform floor plan, three apses and a central dome. This singular basilica has been dated either as the church built by Justinian in the year 551 or in the second half of the sixth century.²¹⁵ Around the year 600, the metropolitan seat of Lazica was located in Phasis (Poti), with jurisdiction of four suffragan dioceses. There were also the metropolis of Sebastopolis, where the foundations of an octagonal church from the first half



153. The small, three-nave church of Gagra, which stood within the Roman-Byzantine army camp Nitika, dates from the fifth/sixth century. The Church of the Intercession of Our Lady was restored in 1902 and reconsecrated a year later in honour of St Hypatius. Abkhazia/Georgia. Photo 2018.

of the fifth century have been uncovered, and the diocese of the Abasgi in Dranda.²¹⁶

The missionary activities Emperor Justinian initiated in Lazica were undertaken with security policy objectives in mind. The empire sought to establish three lines of defence on the borders with Persia. The first was the fortified imperial border, in whose hinterland the legions were stationed. Lying just beyond the border of the empire were protectorates such as Lazica. They were ruled by client-kings and possessed their own armies. In some cases, like Lazica, they did not have to deliver tributes, but instead had to secure their external borders. In such protectorates, Rome posted its own garrisons to support the local troops as well as to keep an eye on the client rulers. Whenever the peoples lying geographically between the imperial border and a protectorate resisted Roman sovereignty, they were subdued militarily and Christianized. This was the fate of the Tzanni, who lived south-west of Lazica in the north-east of present-day Turkey. As they continued to attack and plunder Roman and Armenian settlements, they were subjugated and Christianized by the Roman general Sittas in 529.²¹⁷ The third line of defence was soft. It did

not operate by military means, but by ideological and pecuniary ones. Christian missionary work aimed to introduce the 'barbaric' peoples and tribes bordering the protectorates to the Byzantine cultural world and to integrate them into the ideology or religion of the imperial church. The instruments utilized to this end were priests, churches and gifts distributed to tribal leaders.

North of the Abasgi, i.e. the Abkhazians, lived the Zikhi already mentioned by Strabo, who, like the Heniochi, engaged in piracy and kidnapping in order to extort ransoms from those abducted or sell them into slavery.²¹⁸ According to Procopius, they had once recognized the sovereignty of Rome: 'In ancient times the Roman emperor used to appoint a king over the Zikhi, but at present these barbarians are in no way subject to the Romans.'²¹⁹ Their settlement area was initially located between the present-day cities of Gagra and Tuapse on the north-east coast of the Black Sea and later, according to Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, extended northwards to close to the city of Tamatarcha (Tmutarakan).²²⁰

The Great Caucasus in the north-east of the empire formed the outer border of the second line of defence. Beyond



154. The unusually large central-domed church of Dranda, Abkhazia/Georgia probably dates from the second half of the sixth century. It was a bishop's see. The church was burnt down by the Ottoman Turks in 1637 and was used as a stable until 1835 (Khrushkova, *Monuments chrétiens* (2006), p. 74). Photo 2018.

this, north of the main ridge, lived the feared **Alans**, who had once inhabited the lower Danube. In around 371, the Alans had been dispersed by the Huns into four groups. One group was incorporated into the Hunnic army, while the second moved westwards in the course of the Migration Period, first to Pannonia. When the Huns also advanced into Pannonia, the Alans fled on to Gaul and Spain, where they submitted themselves to the protection of the Vandals. Together, the Vandals and Alans conquered North Africa, where they founded an empire that lasted from 429 to 534.²²¹ The third group of Alans fled to northern Crimea, while the fourth joined their kinsmen who had inhabited the North Caucasus for centuries. In the Byzantine Empire, an Alanian family played a prominent role for five decades: the Alan Ardabur (d. after 442) was a *magister militum* in the service of Emperor Theodosius II. Alongside his son Aspar (ca. 400–471), who was an Arian Christian, he led a difficult campaign in Italy. At its climax, he captured the usurper John of Ravenna (d. 425) and placed the underage Valentinian III (r. 425–455) on the western Roman

throne, while his mother Galla Placidia acted as regent. Aspar then fought as *magister militum* against the Vandals in Africa as well as against the Sassanids and Huns. In this capacity and as a former consul, after he returned to Constantinople he was one of the most powerful men in the empire, with his own military guard. Following the death of Theodosius II in 450, the Senate offered him the title of emperor, which he however declined in favour of his subordinate Marcian. Aspar was now the 'éminence grise' in Constantinople, and when Marcian died in 457, he helped Leon I to become emperor. Nonetheless, Aspar's aim to marry his son Patricius to a daughter of Leon and secure him the imperial throne failed. In 471, Emperor Leon had Aspar assassinated. Patricius managed to escape with serious injuries.²²²

In late antiquity and the early medieval period Alania did not form a unified, structured state, but was rather the homeland of Alanian tribes. It stretched almost the entire length of the northern Caucasus and included areas of the present-day provinces of Stavropol and Krasnodar, as well as the republics

of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia–Alania, Ingushetia, south Chechnya, and south Dagestan. The Alans, moreover, did not constitute a uniform ethnic group in the political sense, as they included native North Caucasians and, from the seventh/eighth century onwards, Turkic-speaking proto-Bulgarians. The language of the Alans in the narrower sense belonged to the East Iranian language group. The tribes living in the north of Alania remained semi-nomadic cattle breeders, while the southern tribes settled in the mountainous terrain. Here, they terraced the slopes for agricultural cultivation and switched to a mixed economy of farming and cattle breeding. Since branches of the Northern Silk Road crossed Alanian territory, road tolls and trade offered lucrative sources of income. The belligerent Alans were too few in number to conquer a neighbouring southern state. Still, from the first century onward they undertook war campaigns to the south whenever they were called upon to do so and the mountain passes were open. It is not a contradiction when Procopius talks,

on the one hand, of ‘the Alani and Abasgi, who are Christians and friends of the Romans from of old’, but emphasizes, on the other, that ‘the Alani [living near the Caspian Gates] are an autonomous nation, who are for the most part allied with the Persians’.²²³ The Alani tribes hired themselves out as mercenaries and always lent their sword to whomever paid them the most.²²⁴ The most important branch of arms of the early medieval Alans was light cavalry. From the end of the sixth century onwards, they used the stirrup brought to Eastern Europe by the Avars and replaced the straight sword with the curved sabre. They also exchanged heavy scale armour for the lighter chain mail. Light cavalry favoured the reflex bow as the primary weapon, in contrast to heavy cavalry, which preferred the lance.²²⁵ The strong militarization of Alanian society is further revealed in their necropolises from the fourth to seventh century, where several women’s graves also contained battleaxes, swords or sabres.²²⁶

Geographically, the western Alans were closer to Byzantium and the eastern Alans to the Sassanids. The highest



155. The three-nave basilica of Ambara at the Cape of Mussera near the Black Sea is located about 16 km, as the crow flies, east of Pitsunda. The building is believed to date from the eighth–ninth or the tenth–twelfth century. According to tradition, the church later served as a refuge for pirates and smugglers. Abkhazia/Georgia. Photo 2018.

population density of the western Alans was in the area of the Upper Kuban and its tributaries; for the eastern Alans it was the Upper Terek. The Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (ruled nominally from 913, de facto 945–959) distinguished the Exusiocrator of Alania from the ruler of Azia, which lay east of Alania north of the Darial Pass, in a list of titles with which envoys and official messages had to address Caucasian princes and kings.²²⁷ Presumably the tribal union of the As, variously spelled, was not under the control of the western Alanian king.²²⁸ The As are considered the direct

ancestors of the Ossetians. By the thirteenth century, the distinction between the As and the Alans had become blurred, as both John of Piano Carpini in 1246 and William of Rubruck at the end of 1254 equated Alans and Assi by reporting ‘Alani or Assi’²²⁹ and ‘Alani or Aas’ respectively.²³⁰

The best-known Alanian ally of the Romans was King **Saroes** (Sarosius, r. before 557–ca. 573/4), who ruled in Western Alania. Around 558–9, he negotiated on the Byzantine side with the Avars, who were advancing from Central Asia. He persuaded them to wage war against steppe peoples hostile to



156. The three-nave Alanian church of Shoana from the early tenth century was built in the Byzantine style and stands on a rocky outcrop near the left bank of the Kuban river. Karachay-Cherkessia, Russian Federation. Photo 2018.



157. The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary of Likhny in the district of Gudauta, Abkhazia/Georgia. The cross-domed church was built in the tenth century and formerly contained murals in the Byzantine style from the fourteenth century. The bishop's church stood close to the palace of the Abkhazian princely dynasty of the Shervashidze, which ruled the principality of Abkhazia with interruptions from 1046 to 1864, when it was abolished by Russia (Khroushkova, *Monuments chrétiens* (2006), pp. 115f, 131). Inside the church is the tomb of Prince Safar Ali Bey Shervashidze, who overthrew his pro-Turkish Muslim brother Aslan Bey with Russian military aid, and who lived in the fortress at Sukhumi from 1810 to 1821 as nominal Prince of Abkhazia (Hewitt, *Abkhazians*, (2014), pp. 70–78). Photo 2018.

Byzantium, such as the Hunnic Zali, the Utrigurs and the Sabirs. The latter were settled between the Caspian depression and the Pontic Steppe.²³¹ Around the year 570, the Sassanids tried to bribe the Alanian ruler to assassinate the Byzantine envoy and his entourage as they marched through. Saroes, however, remained on Rome's side and helped Zemarchos reach the Black Sea safely. In the spring of 573, Alans commanded by King Saroes aided a Byzantine army in its victory at the Battle of Sargathon at Nisibis.²³² Shortly thereafter, the pro-Roman Alans were defeated by the westward advancing troops of the Western Turkic Khaganate.²³³ As Procopius mentions, Byzantine-friendly Alans were already Christianized in the sixth century, and, in the Crimea, the Alans joined the Orthodox imperial church during the reign of Justinian.²³⁴ In the seventh century, the Christian faith continued to spread among the Alans, especially the upper strata.

Nevertheless, the mass conversion of the Alans did not take place until the beginning of the tenth century. By this time, the power of the dominant khaganate of the Khazars had decreased and its influence on the Alans had waned. During his first term of office, the orthodox patriarch Nikolaos

Mystikos (in office 901–907, 912–925) dispatched monk missionaries to Alania under the leadership of the monk Euthymios. At the beginning of his second term, he recalled Euthymios to Byzantium and appointed the bishop Petros as the new archbishop of Alania. This step was motivated by the occasional Byzantine ally Abkhazia, whose king Constantine III (*r. ca.* 898–916 or 894–923) sought closer relations with the Western Alans. Petros' mission thus also involved a diplomatic goal. Between the years 914 and 916, Petros succeeded in baptizing the king of the Alans and the majority of the nobility. The kingdom of Alania probably started to solidify over the course of the ninth century. The capital and royal residence was either located at Kiafar – where the ruins of the largest fortified city of the Alans and a wealthy cemetery were discovered²³⁵ – or at the nearby town of Maghas, 12 km away. Maghas is probably connected with the present-day village of Nizhny Arkhyz (fig. 158) in the current Autonomous Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia. This is where the archiepiscopal seat was located, as three churches embellished with murals from the tenth century demonstrate. Since Archbishop Petros was clearly suffering from depression at his



158. The Alanian church complex of Arkhyz is located in the valley of the Bolshoi Zelenchuk River, which flows parallel to and into the Kuban river. All three Byzantine-style churches, similar to the one at Shoana, date from the early tenth century. They can be traced to the missionary efforts of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos (in office 901–7, 912–25). In the picture is the restored northern church of Arkhyz, which served as the seat of the archbishop of Alania. Photo 2016.

remote outpost, the patriarch ordered Bishop Euthymios to go to Alania for a second time to lend support.²³⁶

This first phase of Christianization was short-lived. The Alans, who were allied with the Byzantines, were defeated in the 920s or early 930s by the revitalized Khazars, whose king and elite professed their belief in Judaism. Although the Khazars were temporarily allied with the Byzantines, attempts to convert them failed. As the Arab geographer and historian al-Masudi (*ca.* 895–957) reports, Western Alania was allied with the Christian kingdom of Sarir, which existed in the mountains of Dagestan from about the fifth to the twelfth century.²³⁷ In the wake of the Alanian defeat, during which the Khazars captured their ruler, the Christian bishops and priests were expelled. Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus indicates in his *De Administrando Imperio*, however, that the Alans' period of vulnerability did not last long. As he notes: the Khazars 'are afraid of

the attack of the Alans'.²³⁸ Moreover, Christianity was now firmly ensconced. And, from the 960s onwards, political and religious contacts with Byzantium were resumed and deepened, just as the Khazar Empire was falling apart. Byzantine clerics were once again active in Alania and church construction continued. Numerous Greek inscriptions confirm the presence of Byzantine master builders. The Alanian eparchy extended in the west to the Laba river, east of the present city of Krasnodar, and in the east to Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.²³⁹ In the course of the eleventh century, Georgia, which had been united since 1008, established close relations with the Alans and the As. This was evidenced in the church architecture. While the Alanian churches followed Abkhazian–Byzantine models until the eleventh century, they and those of the As oriented themselves afterwards towards Georgian church architecture, particularly in North Ossetia and Ingushetia.²⁴⁰

Both the Byzantine Christianization and the subsequent Georgian Christianization in Alania were mostly carried out by peaceful means. The lenient form of Christian monotheism, which is based on a Trinity and includes the cult of Mary and the veneration of saints, permitted the converted Alans to assimilate their pre-Christian deities, spirits and rituals with the veneration of saints. The Christian faith was essentially the religious superstructure under which the pagan beliefs and rituals, especially burial customs, continued to exist. The male dead were still buried with weapons, sacrificed horses or harnesses; later on, horses and weapons were painted symbolically on the plastered interiors of tombs. Georgian and Russian ethnographers in the nineteenth century examined the Christian–pagan syncretism among the Ossetians, who are descendants of the Alans and still nearly 80 per cent Christian. Tentative conclusions may therefore be drawn about the older folk religion of the Alans. The Byzantine martyr soldiers such as St Theodore, St Demetrios and St George had great appeal for the Alans (Ossetians) and were

suitable for projecting pagan concepts. In the figure of St George, the Ossetians worshipped Uastyrdzhi, the god of war, protector of travellers and god of oaths; in the figure of St Theodore, Tutyr, the god and protector of wolves; in the figure of St Elijah, Uatsilla, the god of thunder and lightning; and in the hybrid figure of St Florus and St Laurus, Faelvaera, the protector of sheep herds. Besides other deities and spirits without a Christian equivalent (such as Barastir, the god of the dead, Binati Khuytsau, the protective household spirit, Donbittir, the god of waters, and Kurdalaegon, the god of blacksmiths), the Ossetians worshipped Khuytsau, the god of gods, and Mady Mairam, the ‘Mother Mary’ and protector of women. Remarkably, in the course of a return to pre-Christian rituals, the Ossetians also converted churches and chapels into pagan places of worship.²⁴¹

Unlike Lazica, there were no early Christian communities in Svaneti due to the fact that there were no permanently stationed Roman garrisons. The Roman division deployed in the region in the early 550s was an exception, occurring during the



159. At almost 2,200 m above sea level, the village of Zhibiani is the highest of the Ushguli rural community in Upper Svaneti, Georgia. On the right, in the background, the Church of Our Lady Lamaria with murals from the thirteenth century. Above it rises the 5,201-m-high Shkhara Mountain. Photo 2013.

Roman–Persian wars. As far as the Christianization legends are concerned, the spreading of the gospel is attributed to St Andrew and occasionally even to Christ himself. The cultural proximity of Svaneti to Lazica is thus unmistakable. In any case, the cult of St Nino, which is widespread in Kartli, is unknown in Svaneti.²⁴² Just as with the mass conversion of the Alans, the initiative originated from Abkhazia, whose kingdom included Svaneti starting from the end of the eighth century. The Christianization was carried out in the ninth and tenth centuries by missionaries from Abkhazia and Tao-Klarjeti, who had been strongly moulded by the Byzantine Orthodox Church. Byzantine proselytizers were also presumably active. The dating of this first Christianization is confirmed by the oldest churches of Upper Svaneti, which date back to the tenth century, such as the Lamaria Church of Ushguli (fig. 159), the Church of St Barbara in Ipari, the Ienashi Church of the Prophet Jonah at Latali and the Lower Church of the Transfiguration of Mestia from the late ninth or early tenth century, and the Church of St Quiricus and St Julitta of Lagurka from the tenth/eleventh century. Numerous other surviving churches date from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Many of these single-nave aisle-less churches have kept their original murals; four of them were precisely dated by the artist ‘Tevdore, the King’s Painter’. He created the murals of the Archangel Church of Ipari in 1096, of Lagurka in 1112 (fig. 160), of the St George Church of Nakipari in 1130, and of the Redeemer Church of Tsvirmi around the year 1130.²⁴³ The Svanetian churches also preserve local religious art treasures such as icons, metal crosses and manuscripts as well as Georgian and Byzantine works. The churches in the high, inaccessible mountain valleys were situated beyond the routes of the armies and political conflicts. When necessary, they were doggedly defended by the battle-hardened Svans. The Svanetian churches were considered so secure that Georgian princes and church dignitaries kept their valuable religious art objects there whenever war threatened. The fortified nature of Svaneti can still be traced today in the light of the dozens of fortress towers (figs 43, 159) standing in the capital Mestia and the numerous villages of Upper Svaneti. Many of the altogether 400 surviving fortified towers date from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries; they not only served as protection against raids by North Caucasian tribes, but also against the bloody vendettas of neighbouring clans.

As with the Alans, the Svans particularly revered the Roman martyr-soldiers, who were depicted in officer’s armour, on horseback or standing. Supplementing the military saints George, Theodore, Demetrius, Mercurios and Panteleimon were

Quiricus and Julitta, Barbara and the Archangel Michael. The veneration of the military saints dated back to Byzantine traditions.²⁴⁴ In Svaneti, St George inherited attributes of the sun god; in perilous times, the Svans turned to him, not to God the Father or Christ.²⁴⁵ In Svaneti, however, the mounted saint was often depicted not killing the dragon, but rather spearing the prostrated Emperor Diocletian with a lance. The proliferation of this unusual depiction may be a reflection of the conflicts between Georgia and Byzantium, which occurred at the beginning of the eleventh century, and Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025) in particular, who threatened the unity of the newly consolidated Kingdom of Georgia.²⁴⁶ In contrast to Byzantine art, which often represented St George’s martyrdom, Svanetian and Georgian art portrayed him as a victorious general. During the time of the royal painter Tevdore, St George was elevated to become the national saint of the united Kingdom of Georgia. According to the ‘History of David, King of Kings’ from *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, St George led the Georgian army under the command of King David IV to the decisive victory against the Seljuks in the battle of Didgori on 12 August 1121. This was then followed by the successful siege and liberation of Tbilisi.²⁴⁷

The distinctive Christ-like veneration that the military saint George enjoyed in Upper Svaneti is also shown by the massive altar crosses, which were up to three metres high (fig. 160). The wooden crosses before the altar were surrounded with silver or gilded metal fittings, which depict the life cycle of St George instead of that of Jesus Christ. Other crosses bear mixed iconography, showing scenes from both Christ’s and George’s life. The monumental crosses rise on a stone base symbolizing the hill of Calvary (Golgotha), a motif that originated in Palestine.²⁴⁸ As Marina Kevkhashvili has pointed out, the monumental crosses stood in the middle of the small naves, signifying the central role of crucifixion on the road to salvation.²⁴⁹ However, just as in Alania, many pre-Christian beliefs were ascribed to the venerated saints in Svaneti; the hierarchy within the military saints reflected the hierarchy of the respective associated pagan deities. A sun god was worshipped in the form of the holy warrior George, as was the old Iranian evil-conquering god of war Verethragna with features of the archangel Gabriel; St Theodore possessed attributes of the god of horses and agriculture, and the popular St Barbara stood for the moon and fertility goddess Barbale.²⁵⁰ Even today, pre-Christian customs are cultivated at church festivals, such as the Kvirikoba festival in Lagurka on 28 July, where animals are sacrificed close to the church.

160. The monumental altar cross in the sanctuary of the Church of St Quiricus and Julitta of Lagurka from the tenth/eleventh century, Upper Svaneti, Georgia. The 2.6-m-high cross stands on a stone base and consists of a wooden core, which is surrounded by gilded silver plates. On the embossed tiles appear crosses, the knightly saints George and Theodore, the Virgin Mary with child, angels and other saints. Such monumental crosses visualize the cross of Golgotha and have their origin in the Holy Land, the preferred place of pilgrimage of medieval Georgians (Didebulidze in Bacci et al., *Cultural Interactions* (2018), p. 31; Schrade, *ibid.*, pp. 118–31). The mural paintings were created by the painter Tevdore, commissioned by King David IV; at the top left, on the north side of the barrel vault, the baptism of Jesus is visible. Photo 2013.





161. An archangel blesses St Barbara and St Catherine. Murals by the Svanetian artist Mikael Maglakeli (see Soltes, *National Treasures* (1999), p. 105) from the 1140s in the Church of the Redeemer, Matskhvarishi in Latali from the eleventh/twelfth century, Upper Svaneti, Georgia. Photo 2013.

6. Persian hegemony in Armenia, Georgia and Albania

The period after Armenia's partition and the Roman withdrawal from Iberia was marked by a largely repressive Persian sovereignty. This ultimately came to an end in 628 with Byzantium's victory over its arch-enemy Persia and the death of Shah Khosrow II. Although the imminent demise of the Sassanid Empire was a turning point for the South Caucasus, it did not bring peace. For the Persians were replaced by the Arabs, who after decades of war brought the entire southern Caucasus under their control.²⁵¹ Following the abolition of the monarchy in 428, Persian Armenia split up into a surfeit of around 42 small principalities controlled by 27 dynasties.²⁵² Sassanid rule did not usually interfere in the internal affairs of the princely families, and its acceptance directly depended on how much autonomy was granted to the nobles. There were three additional factors: the imposed

tax burden; the requirement to participate in Persian wars; and freedom of religion. Towards the great powers such as Byzantium, Persia and later the Caliphate, the *nakharar* pursued a realpolitik, which was chiefly concerned with protecting their own interests and at what price. They were loyal to their own clan dynasty, not to idealistic notions like that of a nation or a church. But occasionally, Catholicoi played the leading role of advocate for the Armenian nation towards foreign overlords.²⁵³

As discussed earlier,²⁵⁴ when in 449 Shah Yazdgerd II increased the princes' tax burden, cancelled the tax exemption of the church (which was closely tied to the nobility), and tried to force the nobility and the people to convert to Zoroastrianism, most of the Armenian princes rebelled under Vardan Mamikonian. A sizeable minority followed the Zoroastrian Armenian Vasak, prince of Syunik. According to legend, the motto of the insurgents was 'death with piety rather than life with apostasy'.²⁵⁵ After two initial victories, the Armenians suffered total defeat at Avarayr in southern Armenia in May 451 and their leaders were killed.

Shah Yazdgerd then had Catholicos Hovsep and several priests who had participated in the uprising executed. Nonetheless, Yazdgerd suspended forced conversions and persecutions.²⁵⁶ The second Armenian uprising of 482–4 also ended in a military defeat. Yet, as already mentioned, it also culminated in a diplomatic victory.²⁵⁷ After the heavy defeat of the Armenian leader Vardan Mamikonian, several Armenian allies deserted, while his Iberian ally Vakhtang fled into exile. At the same time, the death of Shah Peroz restored the political status quo. Moreover, Shah Balash appointed Vahan Mamikonian as the *marzpan* of Armenia (in office *ca.* 485–503 or 510); further, in the Treaty of Nuarsak he granted the princes greater autonomy and guaranteed Christian Armenians religious freedom.²⁵⁸ The newly won freedom of worship made it possible for the cathedral of Vagharshapat to be rebuilt.²⁵⁹ According to Sebeos, Khosrow I later affirmed the principle regarding the ‘religious affiliation of the ancestors’:

Khosrow I Anushirvan commanded: ‘Let each hold his own faith, and let no one oppress Armenians. [...] Let them serve us with their bodies; but as for their souls, only He knows who judges souls.’

Khosrow II subsequently amended this as follows:

*Let each one [Christian] remain firm in his own ancestral tradition. And whoever does not wish to hold his ancestral religion, but in rebellion abandons his ancestral traditions, shall die.*²⁶⁰

In the western part of Armenia, which belonged to Byzantium, Emperor Justinian undertook military and administrative reform in 528, followed by a legal reform in 536. This ended the special status of the Armenian *nakharar* and reinforced the integration of Western Armenia into the empire. Roman Armenia was reorganized into the four provinces of Armenia



162. Western facade of the Holy Mother of God Katoghike Cathedral in Avan, a north-eastern district of Yerevan, Armenia. Built in the 590s, the cathedral served as the see of the Chalcedonian counter-patriarch of the Armenian Church, John III of Bagaran (in office 592–*ca.* 607, d. 615). The church was later renamed the Church of St John. It was destroyed by the earthquake of 1679. Photo 2018.

I–IV, which were under the control of a *magister militum* seated in Theodosiopolis (Erzurum).²⁶¹ In legal terms, the *nakharar* lost their tax privileges and the traditional right to maintain private armies. Their forces were subordinated to the *magister militum*. Through these measures, the nobles' previous autonomy largely evaporated. The subsequent reform of inheritance law aimed at breaking up the territorial unity of the family dynasties. In traditional Armenian law, legacies were firstly only bequeathed to male family members and, secondly, administered in their entirety by the head of the clan. In its place, Justinian introduced Roman family-inheritance law. The reform additionally abolished the traditional feudal law, in which land ownership was linked to military service. In contrast to this custom, which automatically excluded women from land ownership, women were now also entitled to inherit and had a right to a dowry. Under this system, women could transfer inherited land if they married foreign men,

which meant that the woman's original clan had to forfeit it. By instituting this legal reform, Justinian destroyed the power base of the nobility and dissolved the network of the *nakharar* that was based on it. Indeed, the clans' possessions soon dissipated, forcing many of their leading members to make do with the status of high officials.²⁶² In more modern terms: Justinian's reforms put an end to the principle of 'one empire, two systems' which had been in force in Western Armenia since 387.

It did not take long for the *nakharar* to respond. Affected members of the families of the Mamikonian, Bagratuni (Aspetiani) and Arshakuni rebelled and murdered the proconsul Acacius before the end of the year 538.²⁶³ The *strategos* (general) Sittas, who was responsible for the Armenian provinces, first tried to find a diplomatic solution. However, the insurgents internationalized their rebellion and asked both the Ostrogothic king Vitigis (r. ?–ca. 542), who was at war with Byzantium in Italy, and



163. The monastery of Jvari near Mtskheta stands on the place where, according to tradition, St Nino erected a large wooden cross on the site of a destroyed pagan temple. The monastery church was built between 586 and 605 and remains almost unchanged today. Photo 2013.

Shah Khosrow I for military aid. The prospect of an Ostrogoth–Armenian–Sassanid tripartite alliance was one of the reasons why Khosrow broke the ‘Eternal Peace’ of 532 and invaded Lazica.²⁶⁴ Sittas fell in 539 in a minor skirmish in mountainous terrain. Three years later, Byzantium bribed the leaders of the rebellion through gifts and promises to switch sides. Still, the reforms remained in force.²⁶⁵ Persia, on the other hand, refrained from using similar measures to break the power of the nobles and to incorporate Persian Armenia into the empire.

In 571, the Persian *marzpan* Suren provoked the Armenians by ignoring the Treaty of Nuarsak. He began to impose Zoroastrianism and erected a fire temple in Dvin. Emperor Justin II (r. 565–578; disempowered in 574) then encouraged the leader of the Armenian resistance, Vardan III Mamikonian, to revolt. The reason was because he had let himself be seduced by Western Turkish diplomacy into a Byzantine–Turkish pincer attack on Persia. He also wanted to reconquer Svaneti and to stop paying tributes to Persia.²⁶⁶ The revolt began in 571. The *marzpan*, Suren was killed in February 572 and the fire temple was burnt down.²⁶⁷ Despite initial success, the uprising failed. Vardan Mamikonian, and the Catholicos John II (in office 557–574) subsequently fled to Constantinople and had to informally submit to the Chalcedonian Creed.²⁶⁸ Vardan was able to reconquer Dvin for a short period thanks to Byzantine military support. In 574, however, the strategically important fortified city of Dara fell to the Persians, after which Emperor Justin supposedly lost his mind. He was consequently forced to cede power to the future emperor Tiberios I (r. 578–582) and elevate him to co-regent. Two years later, the Persians occupied Armenia once again, whereupon Shah Khosrow issued an amnesty for the rebels.²⁶⁹ The situation of Byzantium deteriorated further. After defeating the Alans in the North Caucasus, the Western Turks continued to advance westward and, in the winter of 576–7, crossed the frozen Cimmerian Bosphorus. They first conquered Pantikapaion (Kerch) and then Chersonesos (Kheron) in 579.²⁷⁰ In the protracted war, which proved especially costly for Persia, the tide definitively turned when the Persian commander Vahram Chobin (r. 590–591) revolted. Vahram had Shah Hormizd IV (r. 579–590) overthrown and executed, and his son and successor Khosrow II Parviz expelled. As Sebeos reports, both sides to the civil war – Vahram and Khosrow II – made an appeal to Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602). They also both offered to return conquered territories in exchange for military backing.²⁷¹ Maurice went with the highest bidder, Khosrow. And, in 591, the Byzantine–Persian alliance defeated the usurper Vahram Chobin. The two great powers then made peace. Khosrow proceeded to



164. Tympanum over the southern entrance to the Jvari Church near Mtskheta, Georgia. The motif of the two angels holding the cross has Sassanid influence. This is demonstrated by the comparison with the large rock relief monument Taq-e Bostan near Kermanshah, Iran from the fifth/sixth century. There, above the tympanum of the main cave, two winged sky messengers hold the ring of royal investiture or a victory wreath over the Great King crowned by Ahura Mazda and Anahita. Photo 2013.

withdraw from Dara and Martyropolis (but not Nisibis) as well as the western halves of Iberia and Armenia. The border now ran between Mtskheta and Tbilisi and between Dvin and Avan (today a suburb of Yerevan) to Lake Van and Dara in the south (map 8).²⁷²

In Iberia, the kingless period did not last long – either 8 or 57 years, depending on the interpretation.²⁷³ The victories secured by the *magister militum* and later Emperor Maurice and the reduction of Persian troop numbers in Kartli induced the *eristavi* to take the Byzantine side. In 588, they asked Maurice to appoint a new king from their ranks. As the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* reports:

*‘The Greeks came, defeated the Persians in Mesopotamia, expelled them, invaded Persia and began to ravage Persia. Then Kasre Ambarvez [crown prince Khosrow] abandoned Ran [Albania] and Kartli, and went to assist his father [Hormizd IV]. While the Persians were preoccupied [...] all the eristavi of Kartli [...] sent an envoy to the king of the Greeks, and asked that he choose a king.’*²⁷⁴

Maurice chose **Guaram I (Gurgenes, r. 588–ca. 590)**, a distant relation of Vakhtang Gorgasali who had participated in the failed Armenian uprising in 572. Maurice did not appoint Guaram as king, but rather as presiding prince and *kouropalates* (curopalate) of Iberia, a role which roughly corresponded to the function of a viceroy.²⁷⁵ Guaram selected as his residence Mtskheta, located a few kilometres west of Tbilisi, where the

Persian *marzpan* ruled over the remaining Persian half of Kartli. Guarum founded the monastery church of Jvari on a mountain that rises above the confluence of the Mtkvari (Kura) and Aragvi rivers, where the legendary St Nino had built a monumental wooden cross. Its construction was later completed by his successors Stephen I and Adarnase I (fig. 163).²⁷⁶

After the peace accord, Maurice moved quickly to integrate the newly acquired Armenian territories into the empire. His measures provoked resistance from affected noble families. Another uprising ensued, this time against both the Byzantine emperor and the Persian king of kings. This time, however, the two rulers were not tempted to interfere in the internal affairs of the other power, but rather took joint action against the rebels. An apocryphal letter from Maurice to Shah Khosrow II reflects the new spirit of Perso-Byzantine cooperation. Maurice, according to this letter, opined:

*They [the Armenians] are a perverse and disobedient race; they are between us and cause trouble. Now come, I shall gather mine and send them to Thrace; you gather yours and order them to be taken to the east. If they die, our enemies die; if they kill, they kill our [other] enemies; but we shall live in peace.*²⁷⁷

In fact, Maurice had several unruly Armenian nobles deported to the Balkans and Cyprus, which weakened the previous supremacy of the Mamikonians.²⁷⁸ Both rulers also transferred numerous local Armenian soldiers to remote and peripheral regions of their empires. In the first half of the eleventh century, Byzantium repeated this strategy of demilitarizing Armenia and deporting Armenian princes in Eastern Anatolia – with disastrous consequences. The Seljuks under Sultan Alp Arslan (r. 1063–1072), as well as irregular horse-riding bands of Turkish origin, used the defenceless and depopulated area to invade Byzantine Anatolia more or less unobstructed. The subsequent Byzantine defeat in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 and the Byzantine civil war that followed would change the balance of power in Asia Minor forever.²⁷⁹

To cement the integration of the newly won territories of Armenia into the empire, Maurice urged the Armenian Church leadership to enter into communion with the imperial church and to recognize the Chalcedonian Creed. To this end, he convened a regional synod in Theodosiopolis (Erzurum) in late 591. However, Catholicos Moses II (in office 574–604), who resided in Dvin in the Persian sector, refused to participate. The *Narratio de Rebus Armeniae*, written around the year 700, reports:

*But the Catholicos did not heed this command, saying: 'I will not cross the river Azat [which formed the border between the Byzantine and Persian zones] to eat yeast bread and drink hot water.'*²⁸⁰

The Catholicos' rejection meant the refusal to worship together with the Byzantine emperor and to receive communion with the Orthodox Church of the Empire. The anathematization of Caledonian churches pronounced by Catholicos Abraham (in office 607–615) at the beginning of his time in office was the logical consequence of Moses' refusal.

Maurice then ordered that the Chalcedonian Creed be preached in all the churches of the Byzantine sector. He also appointed the stylite John III of Bagaran (in office 592–ca. 607, d. 615), who enjoyed the support of several bishops, to the position of anti-Catholicos. John III selected Avan, which was only a few kilometres from Dvin in the Byzantine sector, as his new seat (fig. 162).²⁸¹ Thereupon, Catholicos Moses II and his successor Vrtanes (in office 604–607) expelled the pro-Chalcedonian bishops remaining in the Persian sector, who fled to the Byzantine sector or to Iberia.²⁸² This resulted in the first Armenian schism into a Chalcedonian and a Miaphysite church.²⁸³ Compromise proposals put forward by Catholicos John and the Byzantine commander Sormen did not meet with Moses' and Vrtanes' approval.²⁸⁴ Later, the emperors Heraclius (r. 610–641), Constans II (r. 641–668) and Justinian II (r. 685–695, 705–711) precipitated three further brief schisms. In each case, however, the Miaphysite hierarchy survived the crisis.²⁸⁵ In the course of the sixth and seventh centuries, it became obvious, once and for all, that the unity of the orthodox imperial church could not be restored in Asia. Independent and autonomous church hierarchies emerged along political and ethnic fault lines, as for example the Assyrian Church of the East, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church, the Armenian Church or the Iberian Church. At the beginning of the seventh century, the Iberian Church entered into communion with the imperial church. Because Byzantium succumbed to the Arabs in the struggle for the Caucasus, the Armenian Church, which strictly rejected the Byzantine–Chalcedonian Creed, was able to assert itself unchallenged.

The division of Armenia was temporary. In 602, Maurice perished in an army revolt. When the insurgent officer Phokas (r. 602–610) usurped power, Shah Khosrow II declared war on him under the pretext of wanting to avenge the murder of his former benefactor. In the wake of a long string of victories, Khosrow conquered Dara in 604 or 605; two years later, he occupied central Armenia and deported the Chalcedonian Catholicos John.

By the year 610, Persia had recovered practically all territories that had been ceded to Maurice in 591. Three years later, it conquered Damascus. Then, in 614, Jerusalem fell to the Sassanids, whereupon a Persian army crossed Anatolia and appeared outside Chalcedon, south of the capital Byzantium. In 619, Byzantium also lost Egypt to the Persians. In Iberia, the *kouropalates* **Stepanoz I** (**Stephanos**, r. ca. 591–627) exploited the death of the dreaded Emperor Maurice to switch sides and – with Persian consent – to unite the divided Iberia under his rule.²⁸⁶ Although Stepanoz recognized Persian sovereignty, he remained a Christian and promoted the Christian religion. The coins he minted reveal how he sought a balance between the Byzantine Christian world and the Persian–Zoroastrian world. The coins were imitations of Sassanid drachmas, but on the reverse side there was a cross above the fire altar instead of a flame. Conversely, Persian elements can also be found in the external iconography of Jvari monastery church.²⁸⁷ The Iberian Church ultimately decided in favour of the Chalcedonian Creed from the year 607 onward, bringing it significantly closer to the imperial church. Stepanoz, however, remained loyal to the Persian alliance until his death. When Heraclius and his Western Turkish allies invaded Iberia in 626 and began to

lay siege to Tbilisi, Stepanoz refused to capitulate. After several months, the city finally fell and Stepanoz was skinned alive.²⁸⁸

In Byzantium, Emperor Heraclius, who was probably of Armenian descent,²⁸⁹ had subjected both army and administration to radical reforms. This allowed him to launch a counter-offensive starting in 622, which rested on three pillars. Firstly, he relied on the superior Byzantine fleet; secondly, on a strategy that threatened Persia from the north from the Caucasus; and, thirdly, he formed an offensive alliance with the Western Turks coming from Central Asia.²⁹⁰ The Western Turkic Khaganate had been a trading partner of Byzantium since 569, and occasionally also a military ally.²⁹¹ Their shared, long-term commercial interest consisted in expanding the lucrative northern trade route leading from Central Asia and China to Byzantium via the Caspian–Azov Steppes, at the expense of the southern routes through their mutual enemy Iran. In 623 or 624, Heraclius moved to Persian Armenia and conquered Dvin. He ravaged Nakhchivan, Atropatene and Media and even reached the fire temple of Ganzak (today Takht-e Sulaiman), one of the three holiest sanctuaries of Persia. After Heraclius extinguished there the sacred fire Adur Gushnasp, he spent the winter in Albania.²⁹² In the summer of



165. The fortress of Narikala in Tbilisi, Georgia was originally founded by the Sassanids at the end of the fourth century CE. In 1827, a powerful explosion damaged the fortress, as the Russian occupants had stored their gunpowder there. The preserved architecture dates from the sixteenth/seventeenth century. On the left in the picture, the Metekhi Church of the Assumption, which was built by the Georgian King Demetrius II between 1278 and 1289, and in the centre an equestrian statue of King Vakhtang Gorgasali. The church has been restored several times, most recently in the late 1980s and in the 2010s. Photo 2013.

626, a triple alliance of Persians, Avars and Sclaveni (Slavs) laid siege to Constantinople. But Heraclius put his trust in his fleet and the city's strong fortifications and continued his offensive in the South Caucasus. After devastating Albania during their advance until Catholicos Viroy capitulated, his Western Turkish allies conquered Tbilisi in 627.²⁹³ A few months later, Heraclius achieved a decisive victory over the Persians on 12 December 627 at Nineveh. When the emperor marched on to the capital Ctesiphon, Khosrow's eldest son Kavadh II (r. 628) overthrew his father in February 628 and called for peace. Khosrow and Kavadh's brothers were executed. Persia was forced to abandon the territories conquered by Khosrow, including Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and to hand over the True Cross stolen in Jerusalem. As a bloody succession conflict erupted in Persia, Heraclius marched triumphantly into Jerusalem in March 630.²⁹⁴

Heraclius' conquest brought to an end four centuries of rivalry between Rome and the Sassanids. It was a pyrrhic victory, however, as both opponents were exhausted militarily and financially and thus greatly weakened. In 634, Arab forces invaded Palestine and Syria, and in 635 conquered Damascus. One year later, an Arab army destroyed Heraclius' contingent on the Yarmuk river in a six-day battle. The Byzantine armed forces, which were made up of several different ethnic groups and had little motivation, were no match for the homogeneous Arab warriors, driven by religious zeal and the prospect of looting. Moreover, the ageing Heraclius, who had distinguished himself as an outstanding commander in the wars against Persia, made the mistake of not leading his heterogeneous units himself. Instead, he delegated supreme command to five quarrelling commanders. Eventually, many of the Levantine cities as well as the strong local Miaphysite Syriac Orthodox Church quickly defected to the conquerors, as the Byzantine tax collectors had fast become hated. As a result, Byzantium lost to the Arabs the Levant, Egypt and ultimately also the South Caucasus. After the Arabs had disabled Byzantium as a military force and no longer had to fear a counter-attack on their western flank, they turned against Persia, which they destroyed. The last king of kings was assassinated while on the run in 651. The withdrawal of the Byzantines from the Levant, the fall of Persia as an independent state, and the rise of the Umayyad Caliphate significantly changed the political, religious and ethnic configuration in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. This caesura marks the point of transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages.

During his successful Caucasus campaign, Heraclius installed new rulers under Byzantine authority. In Albania, he

appointed **Varaz-Grigor** of Gardman (r. ca. 628–636) as presiding prince, followed by his son **Juansher** (r. ca. 637–680).²⁹⁵ In Kartli, Heraclius awarded **Adarnase I** of Kakheti (r. 627–ca. 642) the honorary title of *patrikios*; he was followed by his son *patrikios* **Stepanoz II** (r. ca. 642–650) as presiding prince.²⁹⁶ In the Byzantine half of Armenia, he nominated **Mzhezh (Mezezius) Gnuni** (r. 628–637/8) to military commander, while in the eastern part **Varaz Tirots II Bagratuni** (r. 628–632?) was installed during the peace negotiations with Kavadh II. Varaz Tirots II was the son of the nobleman Smbat IV Bagratuni (d. ca. 617), who served in the Byzantine army until about 595 and distinguished himself in Sassanid service in Khorasan; he was then promoted to *marzpan* of Persian Armenia. Thus began the inexorable rise of the Bagratuni dynasty. Varaz Tirots, though, quarrelled with a Persian military commander stationed in Atropatene and fled to Constantinople. Because he participated in the conspiracy against Emperor Heraclius, which aimed to put his illegitimate son Athalarikos (d. 637) on the throne, he was banished to Africa. After he was



166. The Adoration of the Three Kings, Etchmiadzin Gospel Book, tenth century. Matenadaran, Mesrop Mashtots Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Armenia, cod. 2374, p. 229r.

recalled to Constantinople around the year 645, Emperor Constans II (r. 641–668) appointed him *kouropalates* and presiding prince of Armenia. He died, however, before he could take office.²⁹⁷ Another conspirator was **Davit Saharuni** (r. ca. 637/8–ca. 640/1), who managed to escape to Armenia and rally numerous followers to his side. With their support, he defeated and killed Mzhezg Gnumi. Davit Saharuni quickly united all Armenia under his command and confronted Heraclius with a *fait accompli*. Heavily weakened by the military disaster of Yarmuk, the emperor had no choice but to bestow on Davit Saharuni the titles of *kouropalates* and ‘Prince of all Armenian territories’. Davit’s army mutinied three years later and **Theodore Rshtuni** (r. 640/41–654/55) seized power as *sparapet* (commander-in-chief in Armenia).²⁹⁸ In the same year, the Arabs commenced their invasion of Armenia.

7. Alienation between the Caucasian church hierarchies

Following his military triumph over Persia, Emperor Heraclius had ambitious religious-political plans. On the one hand, he hoped to accelerate the spread of Christianity in Persia and to bring about a reconciliation of the Nestorian Church of the East with the imperial church.²⁹⁹ On the other hand, he wanted to bring the Armenian Church back into the fold, if necessary through military action. In fact, for political and doctrinal reasons, Christianity at that time was divided organizationally and theologically into at least three major camps: the Chalcedonian imperial church, the Diophysite church of Persia, and the Miaphysite churches. The Nicene Creed of 325 and – by implication – the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381) formed their only common basis. While certain divergent doctrines, such as Marcionism³⁰⁰ and Arianism,³⁰¹ vanished over time, the third ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) burst apart the previous church unity. The Council condemned the Diophysite dual-nature doctrine of Christ of Patriarch Nestorius and endorsed the Miaphysite position of Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria.³⁰² Nestorius was defeated because he had limited the supremacy of the undisciplined monks in Constantinople. He also had denied the epithet ‘Mother of God’ to St Mary, who was especially popular in Egypt and whose cult was linked to the pre-Christian Isis cult.³⁰³ The resolutions of Ephesus also excluded the Church of the East, which was rooted in Persia. It had constituted itself as an autocephalous church in the years 410 and 424, mostly for political reasons. The theological views of

both Nestorius and the Persian church were based on the teachings of Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428).³⁰⁴ The Armenian Church, by contrast, accepted the decisions of Ephesus in 437 on the basis of an explanatory letter sent by Patriarch Proclus (in office 434–446) to the Armenian bishops and nobles. This document would become a cornerstone of Armenian orthodoxy.³⁰⁵

The fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), in which neither representatives of the Armenians nor of the Church of the East took part, accepted the compromise proposed by the Bishop of Rome, Leon I. This profession of faith was significantly closer to the ideas of Nestorius than to those of Cyril. However, it referred to Mary as *Theotokos*, Mother of God. The Egyptian Patriarchate as well as several Syriac bishops rejected the Chalcedonian Creed.³⁰⁶ Emperor Zeno then tried in 482 to bring the Egyptian, Syriac and Caucasian Miaphysites back to the imperial church with the formula called the *Henotikon*.³⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, in 491, the Armenian Catholicos Babken (in office 490–516) as well as the Iberian and Albanian Catholicos accepted the *Henotikon* and rejected the Chalcedonian formula.³⁰⁸ The Patriarch of Constantinople Acacius, on the other hand, rejected the *Henotikon*. This led to the Acacian schism, which lasted until 519.³⁰⁹ Since Emperor Zeno banned the Nestorians and their teachers from the empire, they fled to Persia and joined the Church of the East. They occasionally enjoyed the support of the shahs, who for political reasons sought to build up the Persian church as a counterweight to the Byzantine imperial church. It was also for political reasons – namely, as way of stressing its distance from Byzantium – that the Church of the East affirmed its Diophysite creed at the synods of 486 and 497.³¹⁰ As the Persian authorities encouraged the Church of the East to spread in Armenia in order to weaken the autocephalous Armenian Church, the latter had no alternative but to endorse the Miaphysite doctrine. By condemning the Diophysite confession and the Persian church, the Armenian hierarchy was able to preserve its own independence.³¹¹ It was with this in mind that, under the leadership of the Armenian Catholicos Babken, the three South Caucasian churches at the Pan-Caucasian Council of Dvin in 505–6 condemned the profession of faith of the Persian church and implicitly accepted the Byzantine *Henotikon*.³¹² Two years later, Babken reaffirmed the condemnation of the Persian church. At

167. (over) Ruins of the tetraconch cathedral with ambulatory at Zvartnots, Armenia, which Catholicos Nerses III (in office 641–61) had built. An earthquake in the tenth century caused the central building to collapse. In the picture, the south portal with the exedra and the semicircular arrangement of columns. Photo 2017.





the same time, he rejected the Chalcedonian confession, as it was identical in nature to the Nestorian confession: 'We flee and deny the false teaching of Nestorius and of others like him [which doctrine was confirmed] in Chalcedon.'³¹³

Emperor Justin's revocation of the Henotikon in 519 and Justinian's decisions put an end to intra-Caucasian religious unity once and for all. The churches of Kartli and Albania supported the Byzantine return to the Chalcedonian formula, while the church of Armenia categorically rejected it at the synod of Dvin in 555. Here, there were no Iberian bishops present.³¹⁴ The Miaphysite bishops of Syria and Egypt also separated from the orthodox imperial church. Jacob Baradaeus, who was secretly appointed bishop of Edessa in 542, began to consecrate bishops for the Miaphysite communities of Syria. This created a parallel church hierarchy with duplicated ecclesiastical offices. A parallel church organization also emerged in Egypt.³¹⁵ In 607, *marzpan* Smbat IV Bagratuni took advantage of the elimination of the Byzantine-Armenian counter-Catholicosate of Avan (592–607) to impose the Miaphysite creed under the direction of the Armenian Church.³¹⁶ In the period leading up to the synod in Dvin of 607, the Iberian Catholicos **Kyrion** (in office 595–610), who was closely tied to the imperial church, refused to bow to the Armenian claim to hegemony and to condemn the Chalcedonian Creed. Instead, he professed his Chalcedonian faith and, with his church, entered into communion with Byzantium. The ecclesiastical hierarchy of Lazica had in any case already been loyal to Byzantium. In the year 609, the Armenian Catholicos **Abraham** (in office 607–615) confirmed the anathematization of the Iberian Church and forbade all Armenians under threat of excommunication to have any contact with Iberians except for business purposes:

*The resolution of our first masters taken with regard to the Byzantines [...] we have now taken against the Iberians: not to have with them any communion, either in prayers, or in food, drink, friendship, bringing up children, not to go in pilgrimage to the Crosses of Mc'xet'a [Jvari] and Manglisi and not to allow them in our churches, and to abstain altogether from entering in matrimony with them; it is possible only to buy and sell to them, as with the Jews. This resolution shall apply also to the Albanians.*³¹⁷

While the Catholicos Kyrion pronounced a similar anathema in return, the Albanian Catholicos Viroy relented and submitted to the Armenian dictates.³¹⁸ The synod of 607 caused a deep dogmatic rift between the Armenian Church,

on the one hand, and the Georgian and Byzantine hierarchy, on the other. Seeds of mutual distrust were accordingly sown between the faithful. Diophysite Armenians fled to Iberia, Lazica or Byzantium, while Miaphysite Iberians escaped to Armenia. Nonetheless, the large family clans such as the Bagratunis, which were rooted in both Armenia and Iberia, helped to bridge this gulf. Catholicos Kyrion, though, was deposed around the year 610 and fled to Lazica, where he served as Metropolitan of Phasis.³¹⁹

Emperor Heraclius chose a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, with the support of Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (in office 610–638), he sought an accommodation with the Armenian Synod. Amendments to the Chalcedonian Creed were supposed to conform with the basic Miaphysite position. On the other hand, he used his political-military dominance to exert pressure on the nobility and clergy. The new formula of 'monoenergism' asserted that Christ is composed of two natures: one divine and one human, united in one mode of activity (*mia energeia*) in the earthly Christ. To be sure, by threatening to appoint a Chalcedonian counter-Catholicos, Heraclius succeeded in persuading the Armenian Catholicos **Ezra** (in office 630–641), residing in Avan, to relent at the Union Synod of Theodosiopolis (Erzurum) of the year 631 or 633.³²⁰ As a consequence, the Armenian Church stood in communion with the imperial church. Yet, as two Byzantine patriarchs rejected monoenergism, Heraclius replaced it with 'monothelism' in 638, according to which Christ possessed a single will. This formula was also highly controversial in the imperial church and was again prohibited by Emperor Constans II in the year 648.

In the beginning of 641, Arabs attacked Dvin and massacred the population, including Catholicos Ezra.³²¹ Ezra's successor was **Nerses III** (in office 641–661), who had once served as an officer in the Byzantine army and was familiar with Byzantine culture. He advocated close ties to the imperial church. But the *sparapet* Theodore Rshtuni, who rejected the church's rapprochement with Byzantium, forced Nerses to take up the Miaphysite positions and rites again. Moreover, when Emperor Constans II and Patriarch Paulos II (in office 641–653) advanced proposals to the Armenian Church for a church union, the synod of 648/49, presided over by Theodore Rshtuni, firmly rejected them. Nerses was forced to comply.³²² However, once *sparapet* Rshtuni sided with the Arabs in the year 652/3 and concluded a submission and protection treaty with the governor of Syria and later Caliph Mu'awiya I (in office as governor 639–661, r. 661–680), Emperor Constans marched into Armenia. In 653, before Catholicos Nerses in the cathedral of Dvin, he had the mass celebrated according to the Greek rite.

He also proclaimed the Chalcedonian resolutions and the church union. This third attempt at union did not last, however. Constans had to return with his army to the capital because of an imminent Arab attack on Constantinople; Nerses followed him out of fear of Theodore Rshtuni and henceforth lived in exile in Tao. Rshtuni's successor *kouropalates* Hamazasp Mamikonian (in office 656/58–661) was pro-Byzantine and took advantage of the civil war in the Arab caliphate of 656–661 to pursue his own policies. He permitted Catholicos Nerses to return to Armenia, where he witnessed the completion of the cathedral at Zvartnots. He had commissioned this cathedral of the 'Heavenly Host' to be built after the

destruction of Dvin in 641 or 644 (fig. 167). The church and palace complex, between Vagharshapat and Yerevan, was located at the site where, according to legend, King Trdat had met St Gregory.³²³ The cathedral, which was probably destroyed by an earthquake in the tenth century, was a tetraconch – a church with four apses surrounded by a 32-sided polygon 37.7 m in diameter, resembling a circular rotunda. The structure, approximately 45 m high, was probably three-tiered; the entire central building stood on a three-stepped circular terrace, which, in turn, was positioned atop a larger decagonal and seven-stepped artificial terrace. The palace walls were located immediately north of the decagonal terrace.³²⁴



168. The approximately 1 m-high foundation walls of the round church of Vardisubani near Dmanisi, Lower Kartli, Georgia. The church has a diameter of 17.6 m and dates from the seventh/eighth century. It was discovered in 1989 and excavated in 1992. Photo 2018.

The dedicatory inscription written in Greek and the Greek monograms of the catholicos carved in the capitals underscore its proximity to Byzantium.

Zvartnots was not the first tetraconch with an ambulatory; older examples can be found in Italy, Syria and northern Mesopotamia and were mostly built between the years 450 and 550.³²⁵ Possible models for this type of church are the 'Golden Octagon' *Domus Aurea* in Antioch, commissioned by Emperor Constantine, which collapsed in the sixth century as a result of several earthquakes, and the *Anastasis Rotunda* in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, completed in the year 336.³²⁶ Although the ground plan of Zvartnots was based on models from the Levant, it was not a copy of an existing building. Instead, it incorporated elements from various buildings to create a novel and unique form. Zvartnots was the first tetraconch with an ambulatory in the southern Caucasus and inspired a handful of similar churches.

A distinction must be made between tetraconch churches, like Zvartnots, which were surrounded by a circular or quasi-circular ambulatory and which simultaneously formed the circular outer wall, and churches in which the tetraconch was enclosed by a rectangular outer wall. The following churches may be counted among the type of Armenian tetraconch with circular ambulatory:³²⁷

- The Sioni Church of **Garni** near Yerevan, which was also commissioned by Nerses III, and whose foundation walls are located right next to the Hellenistic Mausoleum. The tetraconch church was completely destroyed by the earthquake of 1679 and, unlike the classical temple, was not rebuilt.
- The tetraconch church of **Vardisubani** near Dmanisi, South Georgia, from the seventh/eighth century, built of basalt stones and excavated in 1989 (fig. 168).



169. The three-nave basilica of Odzun, Lori Province, Armenia. It is traditionally attributed to Catholicos John III of Odzun (in office 717–28), but it is significantly older; the building probably dates from the fifth to seventh centuries. Photo 2015.



170. The cathedral of Talin from the seventh/eighth century, Armenia, founded by the Kamsarakan dynasty. The cathedral is a combination of a three-nave basilica, a central building and three semicircular conches. In the apse, there are traces of murals from the period of construction. Stone material from the cathedral was used to build the small neighbouring Church of Our Lady. Photo 2015.

- The round church of **Lekit**, in today's Azerbaijan, which was connected with a palace complex, as in the case of Zvartnots, and is dated in the second half of the seventh century. It was probably the residence of a western Albanian prince (fig. 117).
- The churches of **Mamrukh-Armatian** and **Kilisedagh**, today's Azerbaijan, were purely round churches without an inner tetraconch and cannot be dated with certainty due to a lack of archaeological evidence.³²⁸
- The church of **Bana** in Tao, today's north-eastern Turkey, which was as large as Zvartnots and similarly designed. It was probably built in the later seventh century and rebuilt around the year 900.
- The church of **Ishkhan** in Tao preserves in its apse the eastern conch of a tetraconch from the second half of the seventh century. Written records attribute the building to Catholicos Nerses III, who came from Ishkhan and lived here in exile around 653–656/58.
- The church of **St Gregory** of Ani, the then capital of the Armenian Bagratid kingdom; it was founded by the Armenian King Gagik I (r. 989–1017/20) and completed in 998 (fig. 204). Dedicated to St Gregory the Illuminator, the church replicated the cathedral of Zvartnots, although the latter had already collapsed when construction in Ani began. The architect was Trdat, who also rebuilt the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which had collapsed in 989, and built the Cathedral of Ani.
- The round church of **Marmashen** from the eleventh century, situated west of Gyumri, was probably still incomplete before its destruction by the Seljuks in 1064.

Emperor Justinian II (r. 685–695, 705–711) made a final attempt to force a union with the Armenian Church. After he ratified a peace treaty with Caliph Abd al-Malik, according to which the tax revenues from Armenia, Iberia and Cyprus were to be divided between the Caliphate and the empire in a kind of condominium, several Armenian nobles rebelled. Justinian II marched into Armenia in 689 and then appointed Nerses Kamsarakan (d. *ca.* 691) as presiding prince. He next abducted Catholicos **Sahak III** (in office 677–703) and five Armenian bishops to Constantinople. At this time, Sahak was forced to sign a union treaty under duress with the imperial church, which however he revoked upon his return. The Byzantine–Arab fiscal condominium ended in 693, and two years later Catholicos Sahak was banished to Damascus by the commander Mohammad ibn-Marwan for his alleged ties to Byzantium. He died in Damascus in 703.³²⁹ Sahak’s successor, Catholicos **Elijah** (Elias, in office 703–717), used his political contacts with the Caliphate to bring the independent, pro-Chalcedonian church of Albania back under Armenian authority. He denounced the Albanian Catholicos Nerses Bakur as a heretic and traitor. The caliph subsequently had Nerses Bakur arrested and deported. The Albanian bishops and nobles had to promise not to appoint a church head without the consent of the Armenian Catholicos.³³⁰ Catholicos **John III of Odzun** (in office 717–728) finally sealed

the separation from the Byzantine imperial church. He realized that the Arab dominance at the time ruled out any rapprochement with Byzantium, since such a move would have provoked an Arab response. The Synod of Manzikert, convened by John in 726, returned to Cyril’s Christological formulation of ‘One Nature of God the Logos Incarnate’. The Synod’s interpretation took a more moderate line to accommodate the Syriac Orthodox Church founded by Jacob Baradaeus. Formally, the Miaphysite Armenians stood in communion with the Syriac Orthodox, even though the dispute over the date of the Christmas celebration and individual rites persisted. The divide from the imperial church had now widened, and the Armenian Church had established itself as an independent church, but at the price of further isolating the Armenian Church from the neighbouring Chalcedonian churches. As in Albania, Armenian Chalcedonian writings were likely burned following the Synod.³³¹

Nonetheless, Byzantium did not give up its goal of leading the renegade Armenian Church back into the bosom of the imperial church. Moreover, during the Crusades, the Roman Catholic Church made numerous attempts to win the exiled Armenian kingdom of Cilicia over to its side by means of a swap – military aid in exchange for the recognition of papal authority and the adoption of Catholic rites.³³²

VIII

Between Caliphate, Byzantium and Khazars

'My lands are too small to accommodate you and to provide what you require. The best plan is for you to go and raid the Byzantines, to strive on the path of God and to gain booty. I shall follow in your tracks and aid you in your enterprise.'

Seljuk army commander IBRAHIM INAL speaking in 1048/9 to bands of independent horsemen warriors of the so-called Iraqiyya Turkmen.¹

1. South Caucasian principalities under Islamic rule up to the battle of Bagrevand in 772

The Arab invasion of Dvin in 641 was only a raid. The systematic conquest of the southern Caucasus did not begin until after the decisive Arab victory over the Persians at Nahavand near Hamdan in 642. In 643, the Arabs attacked in three corps on a broad front. The *sparapet* Theodore Rshtuni, however, understood how to skilfully use the mountainous terrain of Armenia and Nakhchivan and their fortresses to conduct a successful guerrilla war, which prevented the Arabs from gaining much ground. In contrast, the Arabs were successful in the west, in the Van region, while in the north-east they conquered the cities of Shaki and Shamakha.² Their advance against Iberia was more effective: King Stepanoz II capitulated in 645, recognized Arab sovereignty, and committed to paying a head tax. In return, the commander Habib ibn Maslamah

guaranteed Kartli's Christians freedom of religion. Ibn Maslamah designated Tbilisi as the governor's seat. The city became an Arab enclave and developed into an independent emirate around 809. It remained, though, under the jurisdiction of the governor of the large province of Arminiya.³ Soon thereafter, the Muslim emirates of Dmanisi and Rustavi, which themselves were under the control of the Emirate of Tbilisi, were established. Their populations consisted of Arab migrants.⁴ In 652/3, Theodore Rshtuni sided with the Arabs and concluded a treaty with Mu'awiya that made Armenia an Arab client-state. The Pseudo-Sebeos reports critically:

Theodoros, lord of Rshtunik, with all the Armenian princes, made a pact with death and contracted an alliance with hell [...] The prince of Ismael [Mu'awiya ...] said: 'I shall not take tribute from you for a three-year period. Then you will pay with an oath as much as you may wish [as you are able]. You will keep in your country 15,000 cavalry and will provide sustenance [...] I shall not request the cavalry for Syria; but wherever else I command they shall be ready for duty. I shall



171. The seven *türbes* (mausoleums) of Kalakhana, 5 km south-west of Shamakhi, Azerbaijan. The octagonal *türbes* date from the seventeenth century. Photo 2016.

*not send amirs to [your] fortresses, nor an Arab army [...] An enemy shall not enter Armenia, and if the Romans attack you I shall send you troops in support.*⁵

The terms were not unattractive, for Armenia did not have to accept and finance occupying forces and could remain an autonomous vassal.

During the inconclusive counterattack of Emperor Constans II on Dvin in 653, Theodore Rshtuni retreated to the island of Aghtamar on Lake Van and invoked the recently concluded protection treaty. As Sebeos reports, a 7,000-strong Arab army rushed to his aid.⁶ In the same period, an Arab army suffered a heavy defeat in the attack on Balanjar, the first capital of the Khazars. It was located north of Derbent and probably south of the present capital of Dagestan, Makhachkala. This failed assault was the second Arab advance north of the Great Caucasus after the raid of 643.⁷ A short time later, an Arab counterattack destroyed the Byzantine army operating in the South Caucasus under General Maurianus in Nakhchivan.

*The army of Ishmael [...] ravaged all the land of Armenia, Atuank, and Siwnik, and stripped all the churches. They seized as hostages the leading princes of the country, and the wives, sons and daughters of many people.*⁸

Theodore Rshtuni, whom the Arabs distrusted, was also deported to Syria. In the winter of 654/5, ibn Maslamah tightened the existing submission treaty, forcing Armenia to pay a head tax and taxes on land ownership.⁹ The Arabs, moreover, demanded that taxes be paid in cash rather than in kind. Armenia's monetization was thereby accelerated, resulting in a slow transition from a self-sustaining rural economy to a more urban and mercantile one. Juansher of Albania, who had adopted a watchful posture in the Byzantine counter-offensive, surrendered later to the Arabs around 662. Armenia, however, retained a large degree of autonomy. When a civil war broke out in the Caliphate in 656/7 due to Mu'awiya's revolt against Caliph Ali (r. 656–661), pro-Byzantine nobles of Armenia rebelled under Hamazasp Mamikonian. Since Mu'awiya was unable to spare any troops to quell the uprising, he instead had 1,775 hostages, whom ibn Maslamah had taken to Syria after the conclusion of the second submission treaty, summarily murdered.¹⁰ Once Mu'awiya resolved the civil war in his favour and ascended the caliph's throne, he consolidated Arab control over the South Caucasian vassal states.

But the southern Caucasus did not come to rest. In 681/2, Prince **Gregory Mamikonian** (r. ca. 662–685) interrupted the

Armenian tribute payments to the Caliphate. **Nerseh (Adarnase) II** of Kakheti (r. 650–685) followed his example, but both princes fell in a battle against invading Khazars in the year 685.¹¹ Presumably, the Caliphate had encouraged the Khazars to launch this campaign. In doing so, it could eliminate the two rebels without having to intervene itself. Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) transferred the Iberian princely title to **Guaram II** of Klarjeti and Javakheti (r. 685–before 693). And, in Armenia, the Caliph chose **Ashot II Bagratuni** (r. ca. 686–690) over a representative from the Mamikonian family, marking the beginning of the rise of the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty.¹² As explained earlier, Justinian II's campaign of 689–90 also failed to bring Armenia and Albania back into the Byzantine zone of influence. In 692, he suffered a major defeat at Sebastopolis, north-west of today's Sivas, in Byzantine territory, against Mohammad ibn Marwan (d. 719/20), the half-brother of the caliph. Gregory Mamikonian's insubordination, the incessant Khazarian raids, and the campaign of Justinian II together induced the caliph to end the local status of autonomy. With the exception of western Georgia, the South Caucasian states were incorporated into the province of Arminiya. It was headed by a governor – called *ostikan* in Armenian – whose seat was in Dvin, and in Partav from 789.¹³ The appointment of ibn Marwan as the first *ostikan* in 693 or 695 induced many nobles to flee to Byzantium together with their followers. The more or less final Byzantine withdrawal from the southern Caucasus paradoxically put an end to the external division of Armenia into a Byzantine and a Persian or Arab zone of influence. Under Arab sovereignty, old demarcation lines, such as that of 591, were rendered obsolete once and for all. Nonetheless, the internal fragmentation between and even within the noble families persisted.

In 697, *patrikios* Sergius, the Byzantine vassal of Lazica, surrendered to the caliph. As a result, the whole of the southern Caucasus, with the exception of Svaneti, was now under mostly stable Arab rule.¹⁴ A short time later, around the year 711, the Arabs also extended their rule over Abkhazia. Then, on the orders of Justinian II, the future emperor Leon III the Isaurian (r. 717–741) tried to bribe the Alans to again expel the Arabs. The Alans were content, however, to conduct a plundering expedition.¹⁵

The Armenians revolted once more in autumn 703 with Byzantine support. After ibn Marwan crushed the uprising, he decided to destroy the source of the rebellions: the *nakharar*. In 705, he summoned the *nakharar* to Nakhchivan and Khram. There, he imprisoned 1,200 nobles and their followers in churches and had them burned alive.¹⁶ Caliph al-Walid I (r. 705–715), however, implemented a change in strategy: instead of further weakening

and dissolving Armenia as an existing state, he invited the exiled *nakharar* to return to Armenia and returned their lands and privileges. In view of the danger posed by the Khazars pushing southwards, he apparently did not want Armenia to be a defenceless province dependent on Arab troops, but rather a defensible, semi-autonomous client-state.¹⁷

Once Armenia's political situation had stabilized, the next strategic priority of Caliph al-Walid and his successors was to transform Albania which was fragmented into many small principalities, many under Khazar control. The plan was to make it into a bulwark against the expanding Khazar Empire. A large number of Arab tribal warriors were settled in Albania, and, in 714, there was a renewed Arab incursion into Derbent. As al-Tabari reports, Arab troops conquered the Khazar capital Balanjar in 722; the Khazars moved their capital north to Samandar.¹⁸ In return, the Khazars, who often acted as *de facto* allies of Byzantium, pushed deep into the south, as far as Ardabil, in what is now north-west Iran, and Mosul. Caliph Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Malik (r. 724–743) then appointed Marwan ibn Muhammad, the later caliph Marwan II (r. 744–750), as *ostikan* and commanded him to permanently drive the Khazars out of Kakheti and Albania, and to disrupt the ongoing influence of Byzantium in Lazica and Abkhazia. Caliph Hisham's ambition to dominate the South Caucasus over the long term and use it as a springboard for an attack on Byzantium was much like that of Khosrow I two hundred years earlier. Also like Khosrow, the *ostikan* – whom the Iberians called Murwan Qru ('Murwan the Deaf') because he ignored appeals for leniency – was successful in the east but foundered in the west. In the campaign of 735–7, Marwan carried out ethnic cleansing in Albania, in particular in Kartli and Kakheti, by killing Khazar sympathizers and razing cities and fortresses to the ground. He then carried out a two-pronged lightning attack via Derbent and the Darial Pass on the Khazars' heartland and forced the Khagan to convert to Islam. No sooner had Marwan left the Khaganate than the Khagan renounced his conversion.¹⁹

Marwan's advance westward, however, was doomed to failure. The Prince of Klarjeti and Javakheti, **Guaram III** (r. ca. 693–748), who was also a nominal *kouropalates* of Iberia, fled from Marwan to Lazica, which since ca. 730 had returned to the Byzantine sphere of influence. Marwan decided to pursue him with the aim of subjugating Lazica and Abkhazia.²⁰ Marwan captured Archaeopolis (Nokalakevi), but suffered defeat in the siege of Anacopia due to the tough resistance of archon **Leon I** of Abkhazia (r. ca. 736–766/67) along with his Lazian and Iberian allies.²¹ Thanks to this victory, Leon was able to extend his dominion further with Byzantine backing. A short time later, in

740, Emperor Leon III stabilized the Byzantine north-eastern border thanks to his victory over an invading Arab army in the Battle of Akroinon. In Abkhazia, Leon's successor, King **Leon II** (r. 766/67–811), broke away from Byzantium and between the years 788 and 797 declared himself King of the Abkhazians.

*When the Greeks grew feeble, the erist'avi of the Ap'xaz by the name of Leon [...] rebelled against them. This second Leon was the offspring of the daughter of the king of the Xazars. With their support he rebelled against the Greeks, seized Ap'azet'i and Egrisi [Lazica] as far as Lixi [Likhni Mountains], and took the title of king of the Ap'xaz.*²²

At the same time, he moved the capital from Anacopia to Kutaisi in the interior of the country and also claimed sovereignty over Svaneti. Soon afterwards, the autonomous Catholicosate of Abkhazia also changed its seat and was relocated eastward from Pitsunda to Gelati, near Kutaisi.²³ At the beginning of the tenth century, the Catholicosate of Abkhazia took an important step with regard to the unification of Georgia. It ended its association with the Patriarchate of Constantinople in favour of an affiliation with the Iberian Catholicosate of Mtskheta.²⁴ A little later, the conversion of the rulers of Hereti from Miaphysitism to Chalcedonian Diophysitism strengthened the reputation and influence of the Catholicosate of Mtskheta.²⁵ In taking this step, the clerical union of Sakartvelo preceded the political one. In the ninth century, Abkhazia consolidated its independence and in the tenth the kingdom extended its influence to the Alans. Abkhazia remained an independent kingdom until 1008, when King Bagrat III (r. 978–1014) united Abkhazia with Kartli into the Kingdom of Georgia.

Soon after the last Umayyad caliph Marwan II came to power in 744, several revolts flared up in the caliphate. Emperor Constantine V (r. 741–775) seized the opportunity to launch counter-attacks on the north-eastern front. The renewed Byzantine–Arab conflict was also a war between Armenian families and aggravated the rivalry between the traditionally pro-Byzantine Mamikonians and the pro-Arab Bagratids. Prince **Ashot III Bagratuni** (r. 732–748) remained faithful to the caliph and enjoyed his confidence; Gregory Mamikonian (r. 748–750) headed the rebels. The latter triumphed and blinded the captured Ashot III in 748.²⁶ But no sooner had the new Muslim dynasty of the Abbasids (750/51–1258) prevailed, with the accession to power of the second caliph al-Mansur (754–775), than Byzantium lost the initiative. Constantine subsequently began to depopulate the border zone around Theodosiopolis (Erzurum) with deportations to Thrace. Concurrently, al-Mansur



172. The fortress of Anacopia (Novy Afon), Abkhazia/Georgia, located on the Black Sea. The citadel was built in the fourth/fifth century and was expanded due to the Arab menace towards the end of the seventh century. Around the year 736/7, the ostikan Marwan ibn Muhammad failed in the siege of the fortress, which was defended by Leon I of Abkhazia (r. ca. 736–66/7). Marwan's defeat is considered a turning point in the Arab conquest of West Georgia. Photo 2018.

appointed the Bagratids **Sahak** (r. ca. 755–761) and **Smbat VII** (r. ca. 761–772/75) as presiding princes of Armenia. The rule of the Abbasid *ostikans* was brutal. They demanded high taxes, even by means of torture, and restricted the free exercise of religion by the Caucasian Christians. The rebellion of Artavazd Mamikonian in 771 was quashed by the still loyal Smbat VII, although he joined the revolt of Mushegh Mamikonian the following year. On 25 April 772 (or 775), a strong Abbasid army annihilated the rebels in the Battle of Bagrevand north of Lake Van. Most of the Armenian clan leaders and numerous leading *nakharar* fell.²⁷ The defeat had far-reaching consequences: after the brief interlude of **Tachat Andzevatsi** (r. 780–785), the caliphate did not appoint a presiding prince for Armenia for twenty years; the same was true

in Iberia after the failed uprising of **Stepanoz III** (r. 779/80–86). Secondly, the Abbasids encouraged Muslims to settle in the southern Caucasus, especially in the cities of Tbilisi and Dvin as well as in Albania.²⁸ The establishment of armed tribes from Arabia and Yemen not only served to monitor the local population, but also created a reservoir of Muslim warriors who could be quickly mobilized as local auxiliary troops. Finally, the defeat at the Battle of Bagrevand wiped out the political power of leading noble families, in particular the Mamikonian, Rshtuni, Gnuni and Kamsarakan.²⁹ Meanwhile, the Artsruni, who had remained neutral, made good on their chance to fill the power vacuum in Western Armenia and to lay the foundations for the future kingdom of Vashpurakan.³⁰

2. The rise of the Bagratid dynasties

The disaster at Bagrevand paved the way for the seizure of power by the Bagratid dynasty both in Armenia and in Tao and Kartli, and later in united Georgia. At first, however, the family lost virtually its entire estates. The son of Smbat VII, **Ashot**, the later 'Prince of Princes' **Ashot IV** of Arminiya (r. 806–826), fled to Syspiritis (Ispir, Speri), north of Erzurum in the Armenian–Byzantine border area. His ownership of the silver mines there allowed him to buy up numerous estates of impoverished clans such as that of the Kamsarakan.³¹ Furthermore, through shrewd intermarriages of relatives, he consistently expanded his power base.³² Another Bagratid refugee was Vasak Bagratuni. Son of Ashot III the Blind, he fled to Ardahan, in the north-eastern tip of present-day Turkey. His marriage to a daughter of Guaram III allowed him to come

into the possession of Tao, Klarjeti and Javakheti. Vasak and his son **Adarnase I** of Tao-Klarjeti (r. ?–ca. 807) paved the way for the Iberian/Georgian line of the Bagratids, who called themselves **Bagrationi**. They would shape the fate of Georgia in Kartli–Kakheti until 1801 and in Imereti until 1810.³³ As early as the ninth century, the Iberian Bagrationi commissioned contemporary historians to separate their family tree from that of the Armenian Bagratids, which can be traced back to the third century.³⁴ It was derived instead from King David of Judah. With this in mind, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* refers to Adarnase I as being 'from the family of the prophet David', and King David IV Bagrationi (r. 1089–1125) as 'the homonym of David the father of God, and David's seventy-eighth descendant'. In this way, it not only postulates a descent from the biblical King David, but also a kinship with Jesus Christ.³⁵

The early ninth century is considered the golden age of Abbasid rule. Nevertheless, the caliphs faced serious attempts



173. The Khvtaeba (Holy Spirit) monastery church at Ikalto from the eighth century. It was extended in the tenth/eleventh century to the present cross-domed building, Kakheti, Georgia. In the early eleventh century, King David IV founded an academy in Ikalto, where not only astronomy, mathematics, geometry, theology and rhetoric were taught, but also various handicrafts like metallurgy and pottery as well as viticulture. In 1616, the Persian Shah Abbas I completely destroyed the academy. The large wine qvevri at the front of the picture were originally sunk into the wine cellar and sealed with a stone lid. Photo 2013.

by local rulers to gain independence, also in the Caucasus. In the early 790s, a Muslim rebellion broke out in Albania, and, in 809, the **Emirate of Tbilisi** (Arabic Tiflisi) declared its independence under Emir **Isma'il bin Shuab** (r. ?–813). The emirate was an important trading centre controlled by Arabs and Persians; the princes of Tao and Kartli also temporarily lived within its borders. For decades, the *ostikans* and caliphs tried to force the insubordinate emirate to recognize Abbasid sovereignty. In 852, caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–861) sent the Turkish *ghulam* (military slave) Bugha al-Kabir (d. 862) to the Caucasus in order to quell the Armenian uprising, and to force Emir **Ishaq bin Isma'il** (r. 831–853) into submission. After Bugha had inflicted a bloodbath on the rebels in Armenia, he conquered Tbilisi in 853. He set fire to the city and captured the unruly emir, who was beheaded in Baghdad. Most likely, Bugha's radical destruction of Tbilisi and its faltering reconstruction prevented the emirate from becoming a leading Muslim power in the southern Caucasus. This greatly benefited the Bagrationi. The weakening of the caliphate after Mutawakkil's death enabled Emir **Jaffar bin Ali** (r. 880–914) to stop paying taxes for good and to found the dynasty of the Muslim Jaffarids of Tbilisi.³⁶ Tbilisi did not finally fall to Georgia until 1122.³⁷

Caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) was wary of the growing power of the Armenian Artsruni and feared an alliance of the two Bagratid clans with Byzantium. On the other hand, he could not spare any troops to station in the South Caucasus. In order to bind the ascendant, traditionally pro-Arab Bagratids to the caliphate, Harun appointed **Ashot IV Bagratuni** in 806 as presiding prince of Armenia and, in 813, Caliph al-Amin (r. 809–13) named Adarnase I's son **Ashot I Bagrationi** of Tao as presiding prince of Iberia). Byzantine Emperor Leon V (r. 813–820) immediately hastened to appoint Ashot of Iberia as *kouropalates* as a way of formally demonstrating the Byzantine claims on Iberia.³⁸ Thus, within three decades, members of the Bagratid dynasty transformed themselves from dispossessed refugees to presiding princes of two states, forming a kind of pan-Bagratid condominium. However, cooperation between Armenian and Iberian Bagratids remained scant. Still, Tao-Klarjeti became the source of the Iberian–Georgian revival. Despite the renewed formation of the two major principalities, the southern Caucasus was divided into almost twenty principalities and emirates. This fragmentation was accelerated by the gradual transition from a patrilineal succession according to the principle of seniority, to a division of inheritance among male heirs – in other words, between brothers.

2.1 The emergence of the Kingdom of Armenia

Ashot IV Bagratuni of Armenia (r. 806–826) – called *Msaquer* or 'the Meat-Eater' because he ate meat during Lent – conquered the Taron region west of Lake Van. He was also able to fend off attacks from Arab emirs, among others from the local emir Djahaf, who had acquired extensive lands in Taron through his marriage to a daughter of Mushegh Mamikonian.³⁹ At the time of his death, Ashot apportioned his lands between his sons. The eldest, **Bagrat II** Bagratuni (r. 826–852) received the southern part of Taron and the neighbouring Sasun as well as in 830 the title *Ishkhan Ishkhanats*, 'Prince of Princes'; for his part, the younger son Smbat VIII 'the Confessor' (d. 859/60) received Bagaran, west of Armavir, as well as the title of *sparapet*. For many years, Bagrat II enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, as the caliphate was preoccupied with the revolt of Babak al-Khurrami (d. 838) in Iranian Azerbaijan and in Syunik in south-eastern Armenia from 816 to 837. The Khurramites drew on the teachings of Zoroastrian Mazdakites, while blending them with Shiite themes.⁴⁰ They called Babak the 'expected saviour' following the death of the sect founder Jawidan.⁴¹ The Iranian-nationalistic oriented revolt was not crushed until 837 by the general Khaydhar ibn Kawus al-Afshin (d. 841). Babak then fled to the Armenian prince Sahl Smbatean (d. 855) of Arran (Albania) and Shaki, who, as al-Tabari (d. 923) reports, immediately handed over the refugee to General Khaydhar.⁴² Later, in 854, Sahl was deported by Bugha al-Kabir to Samarra, the new Abbasid capital of the caliphate. Bagrat II remained loyal to the caliphate for some time. In 838, he took part, with Prince Ashot I Artsruni of Vashpurakan (r. 836–852), in the victorious campaign of Caliph al-Mu'tasim (r. 833–842) and his general Khaydhar al-Afshin against Emperor Theophilos (r. 829–842). It concluded with the triumphant Abbasid–Armenian victory of Dazimon (Anzen) and the capture of the city of Amorion in Phrygia.⁴³ This military alliance of the Muslim caliph with two Christian princes against the Christian emperor demonstrates well that a different religious affiliation was not in itself an obstacle to forming alliances.

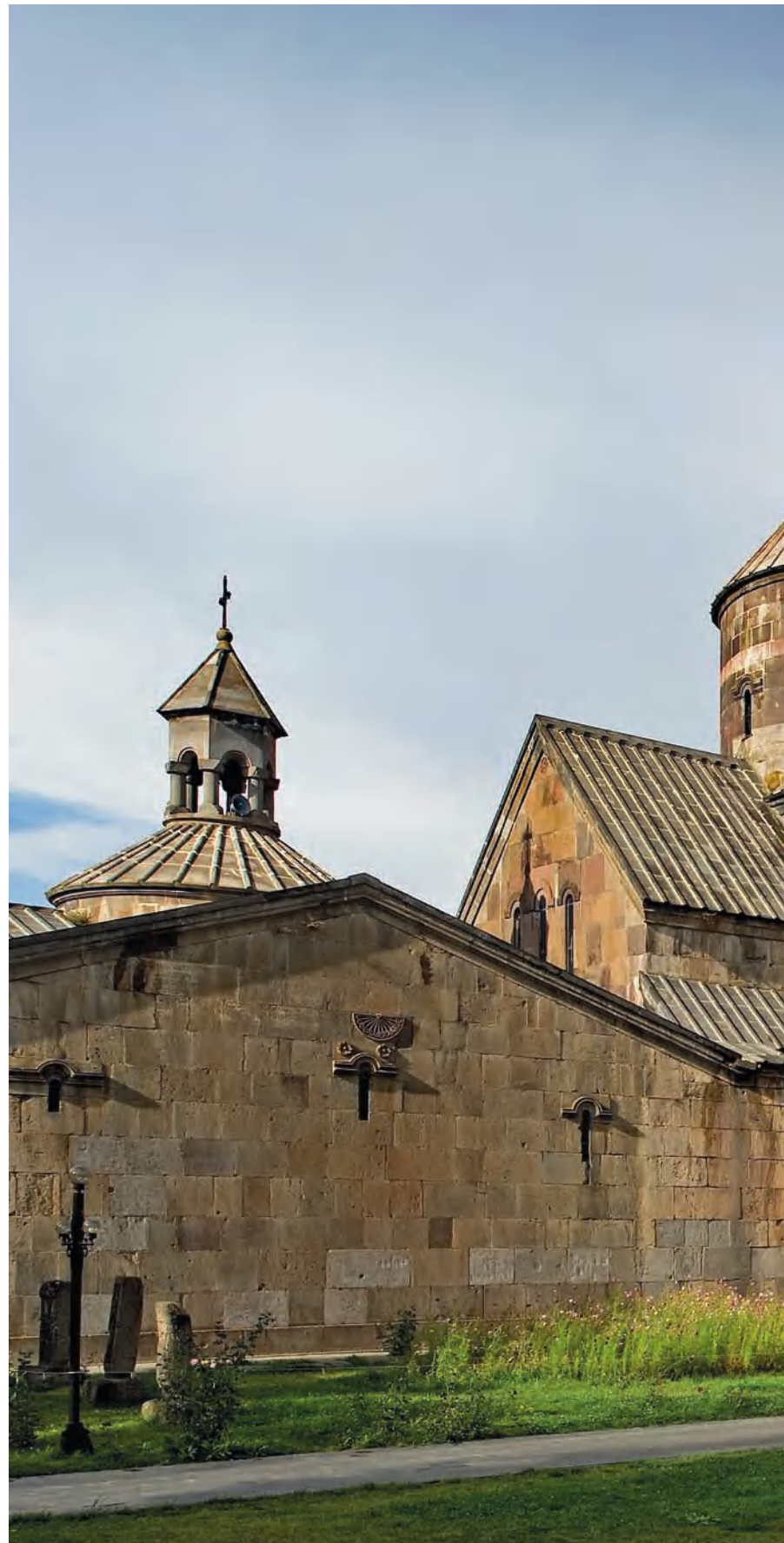
On the other hand, exorbitant tax demands such as those made by Caliph al-Mutawakkil incited revolt. Bagrat II and Ashot Artsruni defeated two Abbasid armies in 851. However, when Bugha al-Kabir invaded Armenia the following year with a large army of Turkish mercenaries, Smbat VIII, who had been at loggerheads with his brother for many years, sided with Bugha. Bagrat was captured and executed in Samarra. Although Smbat had cooperated with the Abbasid army commander Bugha, he too was deported to Samarra. He died in prison there in 859/60 for refusing to convert to Islam.⁴⁴ The other *nakharar* detained in Samarra feigned their conversion

and were released, probably thanks to the intercession of the famous Muslim commander of Armenian origin, Ali ibn Yahya al-Armani (d. 863). When Bagrat's sons David and Ashot were freed from prison, they ruled in the county of Taron. Under Byzantine pressure, Gregory Taronites (d. ca. 995) ceded Taron to Byzantium a century later, in 968, in exchange for lands within the empire.⁴⁵

Arab tribes took advantage of the power vacuum in Armenia created by the deportation of leading *nakharar* to establish local dynasties. These included the Banu Sulaym, who had settled in the area around Lake Van after the Abbasid victory of Bagrevand. Around the year 860, **Abu'l-Ward** (r. ca. 860–890s) founded the **Emirate of the Kaysites** with Manzikert as its capital. When the caliph promoted Ashot Bagratuni to king of Armenia in 884, Abu'l-Ward became his vassal. After the capture of Ashot's successor Smbat I in 913, the Kaysites suspended tribute payments to Armenia. Soon, however, they came under pressure from the advancing Byzantines; nevertheless they remained autonomous. In 940, the Kaysites had to submit to the later emir of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla, and, in 964, a military slave of al-Dawla murdered the last Kaysite **Abu'l-Ward II** (r. before 952–964).⁴⁶

In Armenia, the Abbasid national crisis that erupted after al-Mutawakkil's death offered an opportunity for greater autonomy. The son of Smbat VIII, **Ashot V** (r. 856/62–884) was appointed *sparapet* in 856 and prince of princes in 862, the time when Ali ibn Yahya al-Armani was governor of all Arminiya.⁴⁷ Ashot used his room to manœuvre to keep other family clans and emirates in check – the former through skilful diplomacy, the latter through warfare. Caliph al-Mu'tamid (r. 870–892) consented in 884 to the coronation of Ashot as king of Armenia. He was motivated by Ashot's growing power and the weakness of the last *ostikan* of Arminiya, Muhammad ibn Khalid (in office in 878), as well as by a desire to strengthen Armenia as a bulwark against a resurgent and hostile Byzantium. At the same time, Armenia remained obliged to pay taxes to the caliph, whereas Ashot was not allowed to mint his own coins.⁴⁸ On 26 April, 884, Catholicos George II (in office 877–897) crowned Prince Ashot V as the new king of Armenia **Ashot I** (r. 884–890). Emperor Basil I (r. 867–886) recognized him in the same year.⁴⁹ Some 450 years after the abolition of the Armenian monarchy in 428, Armenia again had a king and the fragile prospect of national unification.

174. The Kecharis Monastery founded in 1033 in Tsaghkadzor, Kotayk Province, Armenia. From left to right; the refectory, the Church of St Gregory from 1033; half-concealed, the small Holy Cross Church Surb Nshan from 1051; the cathedral from 1214. The latter was founded by the Zakarian brothers. The complex was severely damaged by the earthquakes of 1828 and 1927 and restored in 1937 and 2000. Photo 2015.





Paulicians and Tondrakians

In the seventh century in the Byzantine part of Western Armenia, a heterogeneous Christian movement developed. Although they called themselves Christians, they were condemned as heretics both by the orthodox imperial church and by the Armenian Church. Due to the persecutions by these two churches, the **Paulicians**, as they were called by the Byzantines, chose Muslim neighbours as political and military allies. The Paulicians, who originated in Armenian circles, had a dualistic world view and a minimalist form of belief.⁵⁰ If the accounts of the philosopher and Catholicos John III of Odzun are true, the Paulicians distinguished the benevolent God of the New Testament from the strict and vengeful creator God of the Old Testament. Consequently, they possessed a docetic Christology according to which Christ only appeared in human form as an illusion.⁵¹ Contrary to what is often claimed in the literature, these principles did not have a Manichaean background, but clearly go back to the Marcionism widespread in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia.⁵² But the radical repudiation of ecclesiastical hierarchies by the Paulicians ran counter to the Marcionite Church, which had an episcopal organization. The Paulicians recognized the four Gospels, but rejected as obsolete the Old Testament, the

vereneration of saints and Mary, and Mary's designation as *Theotokos*. They also rejected the sacraments, the veneration of the cross and images, asceticism, fasting, and the belief in miracles.⁵³ As the Paulicians rejected religious imagery, they always attracted members of the imperial church in the eighth and ninth century whenever the Byzantine iconoclasts suffered a backlash.⁵⁴

Since the Paulicians resisted conversion to the imperial Orthodox Church and held sympathies for Muslims, Emperor Constantine V deported numerous Paulicians and Armenians to Thrace in 747 and 755. Their young men were then incorporated into the army to bolster the defensive position against the Bulgarians. In the years 778, 782, 792 and 794, there were further mass deportations of Paulicians and Armenians suspected of Paulician sympathies.⁵⁵ The deportation of Armenians to Thrace and the Balkans represented a resumption of Emperor Maurice's population transfers in the late sixth century. These forced migrations continued in the ninth and tenth centuries and swelled the Armenian community in Thrace. If one gives credit to Stepanos Taronetsi, Samuel, the powerful Bulgarian army commander (in office 976–997) and emperor of the First Bulgarian Empire



175. The fortified monastery of Tatev, Syunik province, Armenia, was built between 895 and 906 and later expanded. The monastery was the focal point of the Armenian Church's confrontations with the heterodox, anti-feudal sect of the Tondrakians. After the devastation of the Seljuks in the twelfth century, the Orbelian lords had the monastery rebuilt. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, there was a prestigious university in Tatev. On 25 December 1920, Armenian nationalists who resisted the Soviet invasion proclaimed the Autonomous Region of Syunik in Tatev Monastery, and on 26 April 1921, again in Tatev, the Republic of Mountainous Armenia. Three months later, the Red Army forced the members of the Mountainous Armenia government into exile in Iran. Photo 2015.

(r. 997–1014) was of Armenian descent.⁵⁶ In the early 830s, the leader of the Paulicians, Sergius (d. 834/35) sought refuge from the Byzantine persecutions with the emir of Melitene. The emir aided his expansion and fortification of the city of Tephrike, north of Malatya. In 843, Tephrike (today Divriği) became a sanctuary for persecuted Paulicians. The brutal oppression was carried out by the regent Theodora II (r. by proxy 842–857), who had commanded their violent conversion. According to the tradition, one of the victims was the father of the Byzantine commander Karbeas, who fled with thousands of Paulicians to Tephrike. There, Karbeas militarized the sect and transformed the religious community into a fortified city-state with its own army, which enjoyed the recognition and protection of the caliph. From that point, Karbeas undertook plundering campaigns through the Byzantine Empire – to Ephesus, Nicaea, and Nicomedia east of the capital. In 863, however, Karbeas and Emir Umar al-Aqta of Melitene fell at the Battle of Lalakaon. Emerging from this conflict as the overwhelming victor was the Byzantine *strategos* (general) Petronas. Karbeas' successor Chrysocheir continued the assaults on the empire and defeated Emperor Basil I in 871. Two years later, however, Chrysocheir suffered a crushing defeat and died. Tephrike was subsequently stormed and razed to the ground in 878. The surviving Paulicians either fled to Armenia and the caliphate or they were resettled in Thrace.⁵⁷ The large Paulician community in the Balkans most likely played a role in the formation of the European Bogomils. The later historian Anna Comnena (d. ca. 1154), daughter of Emperor Alexios I (r. 1081–1118), indicates as much, calling the Paulicians 'Armenian Bogomils'.⁵⁸

In Armenia, conversely, the Paulician movement gave rise to the radically anti-feudal Christian sect of the **Tondrakians**.⁵⁹ The Tondrakian movement, which originated north-west of Lake Urmia in the early 830s, invoked Smbat Zarehavantsi (d. ca. 835) who, like Babak, claimed to be the 'expected saviour'. Soon, the movement expanded to Syunik and Ayrarat. The ideology of the Tondrakians had both a religious component and an unmistakable element of class struggle. First of all, it demanded property rights for farmers. It also called for the abolition of the official Armenian Church, especially its numerous feudal rights as well as the useless sacraments and paid rites such as requiem masses and animal sacrifices. The Tondrakians further supported peasant revolts in the tenth and eleventh centuries, which resulted in the sect's popularity among the rural lower classes. A crucial development that spurred the rapid spread of the sect was the transfer by princely edict of several villages to the Tatev Monastery in Syunik, completed in 906. The peasants revolted, and in 915, they attacked and plundered the monastery. A repeated intervention by the Prince of Syunik managed to contain the unrest for a brief period. The peasant uprisings, however, flared up continuously until King Vasak of Syunik (r. ca. 998–1019) scorched the leaders' village. Soon afterwards, the movement spread to Ani, Vashpurakan and Taron. It took an alliance of Armenian nobles and church princes, Byzantines, and Muslim rulers to wipe out the pockets of resistance among the Tondrakians around 1060. Numerous survivors were deported to Thrace.⁶⁰ With its mass resettlements of Armenian Paulicians and Tondrakians, however, Byzantium indirectly helped the Armenian national church to rid itself of its dissidents.

2.2 The emergence of the Georgian Kingdom of Sakartvelo

The *kouropalates* of Iberia **Ashot I Bagrationi** (r. 813–ca. 830) governed from his fortified capital Artanuji, whose ruins are located south-west of Batumi in the north-east of Turkey (today's Ardanuç). He gained control of territories in Kartli, Kakheti and even Albania, but was held in check by the Emirate of Tbilisi. At the same time, he resettled regions devastated by war, and in Tao-Klarjeti, where the majority of the population was Armenian, Iberian priests and monks assumed control of the churches and monasteries. As a consequence, the Armenians living in Tao-Klarjeti switched to the Chalcedonian Creed.⁶¹ Ashot, however, proved unable to maintain his overstretched and poorly consolidated realm. As the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* reports:

*After this Xalil [Khalil ibn Yazid] the Arabian, came forth and seized Armenia, K'art'li and Heret'i [in the year 829]. They [hostile noblemen] killed Ashot curopalates at Gardaban, in the church.*⁶²

The heartland of the Bagrationi, which had been spared the Abbasid invasion, also broke up, for Ashot had bequeathed it to his three sons. The youngest, Guaram (d. 882) ruled in south-west Kartli, although he was forced by his own eldest son Nasri to retreat to a monastery in the late 870s. Ashot's eldest son Adarnase II (d. ca. 869) received the territory around Artanuji. The middle son, *kouropalates* **Bagrat I** (r. ca. 830–876) supported Abbasid campaigns on two occasions against the Emirate of Tbilisi and was granted Inner Kartli in gratitude, only to lose it to King Demetrius II of Abkhazia (r. ca. 837–872).⁶³ **David I** (r. 876–81) succeeded Bagrat I as Prince of Iberia. He was murdered in 881 by his cousin Nasri, the son of Guaram I, who had coerced his

father into the monastery. The family feud now degenerated into a war between Bagrationi principalities. To impede the rise of the Bagratids, Byzantium did not appoint David's young son Adarnase IV as *kouropalates*, but rather **Gurgen I** (r. 881–891), the son of Adarnase II. Gurgen at first helped Adarnase IV to avenge his father by jointly capturing and executing his murderer Nasri. But when **Adarnase IV** (r. as prince 881–888, as king 888–923) declared himself 'king', from 888 onwards, Gurgen responded by taking up arms. He then fell in battle against his cousin.⁶⁴ Once Adarnase had won this intra-Bagrationi war, Byzantium recognized him as king. More than three hundred years after the abolition of the Iberian monarchy, there was a king again, not in Kartli itself, but in 'New Kartli'.⁶⁵ A united kingdom of Sakartvelo would not come into being for another 120 years, however.

Adarnase IV entered into an alliance with Armenia when he helped Ashot I's son Smbat I (r. ca. 890–913, d. 914) assert himself as king. In 904, they jointly defeated Constantine III of Abkhazia (r. ca. 898–916 or 894–923), with whom Adarnase

vied for control of Kartli. The alliance collapsed, however, when Adarnase surrendered the captured Constantine to his ally Smbat, who released the Abkhazian king to restore the previous balance of power. Smbat's about-face cost both former allies dearly. Constantine of Abkhazia soon wrested Kartli from Adarnase. And the now-isolated Armenian king Smbat, whose retreat to Tao Adarnase had forbidden, was defeated by the Abbasid governor of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj, after a four-year war in 913. Yusuf had the captive Smbat tortured to death the following year.⁶⁶ The dominion of Adarnase's eldest son and successor King **David II** (r. 923–937) was limited to the Lower Tao and Javakheti. Although he was king, Byzantium denied him the title of *kouropalates*; this was conferred instead on David's brother Ashot II of Klarjeti. Inner Kartli, however, remained under the control of Abkhazia, which was somewhat insulated from Muslim and Byzantine attacks due to its geography. Byzantium refused David's brothers and successors **Ashot II** (r. 937–954) and **Smbat I** (r. 954–958) the recognition of the royal title and



176. The cathedral of Bedi in Abkhazia/Georgia, was built by King Bagrat II of Abkhazia (r. 978–1008) and consecrated in 999. King Bagrat – who as Bagrat III became the unifier of Georgia (r. 1008–1014) – was buried in the church. The present building dates from the twelfth/thirteenth century. Photo 2018.



177. The upper part of the Bedia Chalice, which King Bagrat II of Abkhazia gave to the monastery of Bedia in 999. The chalice has a spherical shape and on the outside there are twelve figures; in the picture, the enthroned Christ is flanked by St John the Evangelist and St James the Elder. Repoussé gold. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

did not countenance it again until **Bagrat II** (r. 958–994). The latter, however, only ruled over northern Tao and was thus merely a titular king of Kartli. From about 978 onward, Bagrat was gradually stripped of power by his son **Gurgen** (r. de facto ca. 978–94, de jure 994–1008).⁶⁷

The most dominant Bagratid in the last three decades of the first millennium stemmed from a secondary line: *kouropalates* **David III** of Tao (r. 966–1000/01), a great-grandson of Adarnase IV.⁶⁸ Even though – or perhaps precisely because – he was childless, he vigorously pursued the strategic goal of creating a united Georgia. He sought to put an end to the ongoing fragmentation and the struggles that accompanied it. He thus laid the foundation for the establishment of the Georgian nation and for Georgia's supremacy in the Caucasus until the Mongol invasion. In 975, David adopted his nephew Bagrat III, the grandson of the titular King of Kartli Bagrat II and son of the de facto ruler Gurgen. **Bagrat III**, born around 960 (r. as prince in Kartli 976–978, in Abkhazia as king Bagrat II 978–1008; united Georgia 1008–1014), was not only the designated heir of Kartli, but he also had claims to Abkhazia, which controlled parts of Kartli. His mother Gurandukht was the sister of the blind and childless king Theodosius III (r. 975–978) of Abkhazia. In his testament, David wanted to bequeath Tao to his adopted son Bagrat, so that

in due course Kartli, Abkhazia and Tao would be united under Bagrat's rule. The *kouropalates* David forcefully realized his vision thanks to his powerful cavalry. In the year 975/6, he expelled the Kakhétians from Kartli and installed Bagrat III as designated king of Kartli in the rock-hewn town of Uplistsikhe (fig. 104) after deposing some recalcitrant *eristavi*.⁶⁹ In 978, David invaded Abkhazia, where political turmoil predominated. He deposed the weak Theodosius III and had the future Bagrat III of Georgia crowned king as Bagrat II of Abkhazia in Kutaisi.⁷⁰

This ambitious project almost failed, however, when Bagrat III, together with his biological father Gurgen, ruthlessly attacked his adoptive father David III in 989 to seize Tao. His actions were probably encouraged by the Byzantine Emperor Basil II. When informed about Bagrat's build-up of troops, David mobilized his army and received reinforcements from Bagrat III's grandfather Bagrat II of Kartli. He then conquered Gurgen. After the advancing Bagrat III had learned of his father's defeat and recognized the superiority of David's troops, he claimed that his military target was not Tao but the rebellious nobleman Rati Baghvashi. So as not to jeopardize the future unification of Georgia, David accepted the apology against his better judgement and permitted his rebellious adopted son to withdraw. David was murdered in 1001 (or 1000) by poisoned altar wine; both Basil II and the adopted son Bagrat III are considered possible instigators. Indeed, they both wanted to take possession of Tao. Not only had David greatly expanded the lands and purged them of marauding bands of Turkish horsemen, but Tao controlled the trade route leading from northern Mesopotamia to the Black Sea.⁷¹

Upon David's death, both Basil and Bagrat laid claim to the territories belonging to Tao. When the young Emperor Basil II had wanted to take power in Byzantium in 976, the commander Bardas Skleros tried to usurp the throne. Under this pressure, Basil asked David III of Tao for military assistance; the latter sent a 12,000-strong cavalry division under the command of Ioane Tornike (John Tornikios). Ioane was a former commander of Tao, who had retired as a monk in the 960s to a monastery on Mount Athos. Together with the Byzantine general Bardas Phocas, he convincingly defeated Skleros in 979. To show his gratitude, Basil permitted the victor Ioane – who had again swapped his commander's armour for the monk's habit – to found the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, which still exists today. Moreover, he transferred to Prince David personal, non-hereditary rights over wide areas in Western Armenia, which stretched from Tao to Theodosiopolis. Bardas Phocas rebelled eight years later, and this time David III took the wrong side. Basil enlisted the support of



178. The five-nave Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary at Mokva (Mokvi), Abkhazia/Georgia, was commissioned by King Leon III of Abkhazia (r. 960–69). The last nominal Prince of Abkhazia, Mikhail Shervashidze, is buried here. Photo 2018.

an army of Russian mercenaries, while David took part in Phocas' rebellion. However, in 989, Bardas Phocas suffered a cardiac arrest and died before battle even began. David's decision to take sides with the rebel Phocas was a disastrous mistake – both with regard to the territorial integrity of the new state of Georgia and the long-term prospects of the two Armenian kingdoms of Ani and Vashpurakan (for which see below). To appease the enraged emperor, David was forced to entrust his lands to Byzantium in his will. As the Melkite Christian historian Yahya of Antioch (ca. 980–1066) remarks:

*David, King of Georgia, asked the Emperor for forgiveness and mercy, promised him obedience and submission, and that after his death his lands would be annexed to [Basil's] kingdom.*⁷²

David also offered guarantees for the transfer of land. In his act of atonement, David ultimately promised his territory to two different kings: the powerful emperor Basil and his adopted son Bagrat. No sooner had Basil learned of David's death than he marched north to annex a large part of Tao and the territories

that had been ceded in the interim. Bagrat III had no choice but to content himself with the title of *kouropalates*. The part of Tao surrendered to Byzantium would be for a long time the source of hostilities between the two powers.⁷³ Byzantium's acquisition of Tao also changed the political equation to the disadvantage of Ani and Vashpurakan, both of which were too feeble to stop the unceasing Byzantine advance eastwards. When Basil occupied Tao with his massive army in 1001, King Gurgen-Khatchik of Vashpurakan hastened to subject himself to Basil. At the same time, Gagik I of Greater Armenia took refuge behind the walls of the heavily fortified capital Ani.⁷⁴

King Gurgen died in 1008. Bagrat III was now officially king of a Georgia that was united for the very first time. It incorporated Abkhazia together with Svaneti, Klarjeti, North Tao and Kartli. It is only from this date that it is historically accurate to speak of a 'Kingdom of Georgia', or Sakartvelo. In lockstep with the political union, an ecclesiastical merger took place under Melchizedek I (in office 1010–1033). He was the first church head to call himself 'Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia'. Tbilisi and the small Georgian protectorate of the Kingdom of **Lori**, which was situated within

the Georgian–Armenian border area, were not incorporated into Georgia until the beginning of the twelfth century. Today’s province of Lori, which has been part of Armenia since 1921, is famous for its well-preserved medieval monasteries, such as Haghpat (fig. 201) and Sanahin, and for its churches, including Odzun (fig. 169) and Akhtala. The murals of Akhtala are among the most valuable works of Byzantine painting outside the traditional borders of the empire. In the year 1010 Bagrat attacked Kakheti and Hereti. Prince David of Kakheti (r. 976–1010) had to submit, but was able to keep his title. David died the same year and was succeeded by his son Kvirike III (r. 1010/14–37). When about two years later Fadhl I al-Shaddadi (r. 985–1031) of Ganja launched military campaigns against Kakheti and Kartli, Bagrat allied himself with King Gagik I of Armenia and the two kings devastated Arran, which roughly corresponds to the former Albania. Bagrat subsequently accepted Fadhl’s surrender and imposed tribute payments on him. However, soon after Bagrat’s death in 1014, Kvirike III re-established the sovereignty of Kakheti–Hereti and

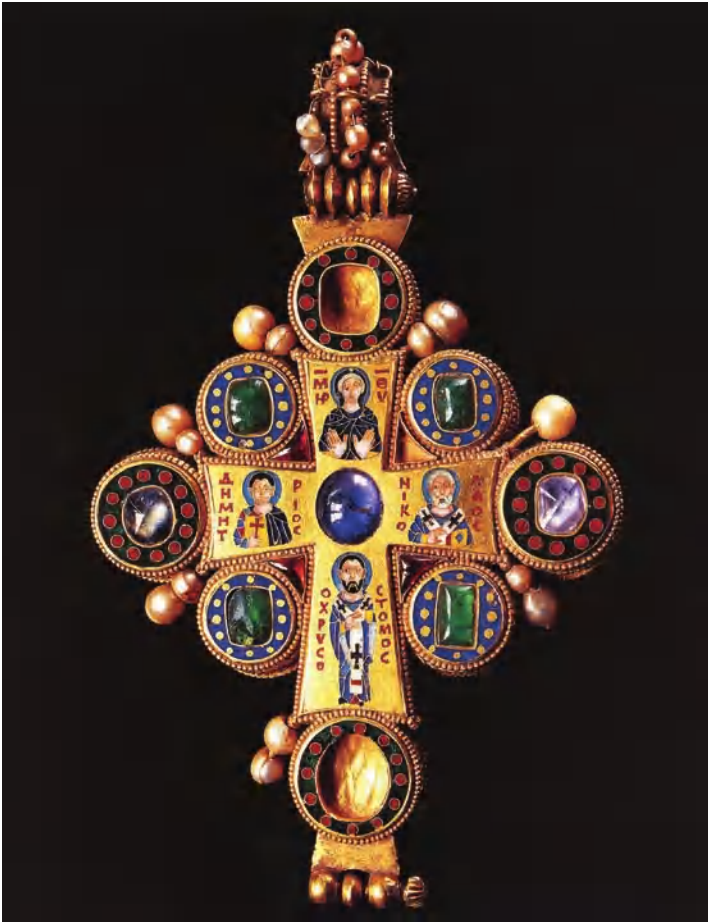
declared himself king.⁷⁵ Tense relations between Sakartvelo and Kakheti–Hereti would continue for ninety years till the Georgian ruler David IV ‘the Builder’ annexed Kakheti–Hereti in 1105. Bagrat also had numerous churches built, the most magnificent being the cathedral of Kutaisi, consecrated in 1003 (fig. 179).

3. The Kingdom of the Khazars

From around 630/50 to 969, the semi-nomadic Khazars – who lived in the North Caucasus, the Manych Depression and the Pontic Steppe – formed a successor state of the West Turkish Khaganate. While most horsemen warriors were of West Turkic descent, the Khazars also included Ugric, Sabir,⁷⁶ North Caucasian and Iranian tribes; the Khazars probably spoke an Oghur-Turkish dialect.⁷⁷ The Turkish ethnonym of the Khazars means ‘wandering freely’. The federation, which became independent between 630



179. The Cathedral of the Assumption, also called Bagrati Cathedral, at Kutaisi, Georgia. Completed in 1003, it was the largest Georgian church of its time and symbolized the country’s unification. The cathedral was blown up by the Ottoman Turks in 1692. The cathedral was restored to its original state between 2010 and 2012. In 2017, UNESCO withdrew the World Heritage status from the now-active house of prayer that had been awarded to the ruin in 1994. Photo 2013.



180. Pectoral cross of Martvili, tenth century. The small enamel depictions show Mary at the top, on the left St Demetrius with the cross, below St John Chrysostom and on the right St Nicholas. Gold, pearls, gems, enamel. The Simon Janashia National Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi.

and 650, extended its power in the east to the Kazakh steppe, in the west to the Dnieper and Crimea and in the south to the Great Caucasus Mountains, conquering Greater Bulgaria (Bulgaria Magna) but exercising only loose sovereignty over Alania. From 626/7 until the second half of the ninth century, the Khazars were occasional allies of Byzantium – first against the Sassanids and, then, from the year 642/3 against the Arabs advancing northwards. The Arabs had overrun the fortress of Derbent and drew near the first Khazar capital Balanjar in today's Dagestan. The second Arab campaign against Balanjar ended in the year 652 with an overwhelming Khazar victory.⁷⁸ Almost a century later, in 722/3, the Umayyads once again attacked the city of Balanjar, this time conquering and destroying it.⁷⁹ The victorious Arabs resettled captured Khazars in Qabala.

The Khazars then relocated their capital to Samandar, slightly to the north. At the same time, a Khazarian army invaded Iraq in 730 and advanced as far as Ardabil and Mosul.⁸⁰

The campaign revealed that the Khazars were able to penetrate as far as the power centres of the caliphate. This threat was all the more menacing because the Khazars often functioned as allies of Byzantium. Thus, in 732, the Byzantine Emperor Leon III had married off his son, the future Emperor Constantine V (r. 741–75), to a daughter of the Khazar Khagan Bihar named Tzitzak, who took the name Irene. From this marriage was born the future emperor Leon IV (r. 775–80), called 'the Khazar'. The Arabs reacted to the peril of a Byzantine–Khazar pincer movement with a strong counter-offensive aimed at pushing the Khazars back north of the northern border of the Greater Caucasus. In 737, Marwan ibn Muhammad managed to penetrate deep into the Khazar Empire and to force the Khagan to accept Islam. No sooner did Marwan withdraw than the Khagan renounced Islam, which never took hold among the Khazars. As a result of the Arab advance, the Khazars moved their capital far north to Atil, located in the delta of the Volga, north of the present-day city of Astrakhan.⁸¹ Marwan's successful military action put an end to the Arab–Khazar wars, with the exception of the campaign of the Khazar army leader Ras Tarkhan against Albania, Iberia and Armenia in 762–4 and other smaller raids. As a consequence, trade between the Caliphate and the Khazars flourished: in 799, the confrontation between the Khazars and the Muslim caliphate, which had lasted since 642/3, finally came to an end and gave way to a commercial partnership. Despite this, the Khazars remained allies of Byzantium, as they were opposed to a military Arab-Muslim expansion. Although Byzantium and the Khazars had been competing for the control of Crimea since the later seventh century, safeguarding against this potential peril remained a shared objective. Furthermore, the Khazars protected the north-east of the empire from incursions by other nomadic horsemen. It was therefore in Byzantium's own interest to contribute to the defence costs of the Khazars. As Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus tells us, Byzantium built the mighty fortress of Sarkel on the lower course of the Don river in 838–841.⁸² This was primarily intended to serve the Khazars as a bulwark against the advancing Turkish horsemen of the Pechenegs.

The **Pechenegs** were a loose tribal confederation speaking a Turkic language whose homeland was located east of the Aral Sea and along the lower course of the River Syr Darya. Towards the end of the eighth century, the increasing pressure from the Turkic Karluks and Oghuz forced the Pechenegs to migrate westward into the region between the Ural and the Volga. From

here they launched raids against the Khazars and thus threatened to create a dangerous gap in the Byzantine–Khazar defence line against aggressive steppe warriors. In the earlier 890s, an alliance of Oghuz expanding westward and Khazars attacked the Pechenegs in a pincer operation and forced them to move westward into the Pontic Steppe between the Don and Danube.⁸³ The migration of the Pechenegs and an increasing distrust of the Khazars led Byzantium to reassess its defensive strategy in the Empire's north-east. Byzantium was now increasingly relying on the Pechenegs and the Alans to check the Khazars, especially in Crimea. Emperor Constantine VII wrote in the middle of the tenth century:

If the ruler of Alania is not at peace with the Chazars, but thinks preferable the friendship of the emperor of the Romans, then, if the Chazars are not minded to preserve friendship and peace with the emperor, he, the Alan, may do them great hurt by ambushing their routes. [...] And if this ruler will act zealously to check them, then

*Cherson [the most important Byzantine harbour in the Crimean Peninsula] and the Regions may enjoy great and profound peace; for the Chazars, afraid of the attack of the Alans and consequently not being free to attack Cherson and the Regions with an army, since they are not strong enough to fight both [the Alans and Byzantium] at once, will be compelled to remain at peace.*⁸⁴

Furthermore, Byzantium hoped that a friendly Kingdom of Alania would protect the eastern Black Sea regions from attacks by northern mobile horse warriors. Compared to today's geopolitical perspective seen from a Western European angle, the northern Caucasus was not an unknown backwater of a potentially hostile superpower as it is perceived today, but a strategic ally within the Byzantine security system.

Like other Turkic tribes, the Khazar ruling elite was during the process of consolidating political power also confronted by the need of a unifying ideology. Until then, they had worshipped Tengri, the god of heaven, a goddess of fertility,



181. The Georgian Orthodox Church of Tkhaba-Yerdy in Ingushetia, Russian Federation. On the basis of an inscription which reads 'Christ, bless Patriarch of the East Mkizek', which probably means the Georgian Catholicos Melchizedek I (in office 1010–33), the church can be dated the first third of the eleventh century. In the tympanum above the west entrance, there is a high relief of three male figures. The one on the right holds a sword and a large cross; above the middle one there used to be a miniature model of a Georgian cross-domed church. The church was probably restored around 1200. Photo 2016.

and a god of sun or thunder, as well as their ancestors and trees. They offered human and animal sacrifices.⁸⁵ As throughout history, the choice between the three 'available' monotheistic faiths was made according to political considerations. The choice of orthodox Christianity carried the risk of being absorbed into the zone of influence of Byzantium, while Islam was disqualified as the religion of the arch-enemy. This left only Judaism. This choice was not far-fetched: many Jews had fled Byzantine, Sassanid and Muslim discrimination and persecution and lived in Khazar territory. Moreover, Jewish traders, such as the Radhanites, who were presumably organized as a merchant guild, handled a significant portion of the transcontinental trade on the northern steppe routes.⁸⁶ The most detailed account is given by the Persian geographer Ibn Khordadbeh (ca. 820–912) in his work *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* about the trade routes used by the Jewish Radhanites in their trade between China, India, the Caliphate and Europe.⁸⁷



182. Silk fragment from the early medieval cemetery of Moshchevaya Balka, Karachay-Cherkessia, Russian Federation. Depicted are two Persian hunters, probably in both instances Shah Vahram Gur, who employs the Parthian shot, in which the galloping marksman shoots to the rear. Seventh–ninth century CE. The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

The precise date of the conversion of the Khazar elite to Judaism is debated. According to Khazar sources, a ruler named Bulan converted to Judaism around 740; according to the Muslim historian al-Masudi (ca. 895–957), the conversion took place during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid. The later date is more likely. In any event, Khazarian coins have been found with the inscription 'Moses is God's prophet' from the years 837–8.⁸⁸ The conversion to Judaism, nonetheless, did not affect the majority of the Khazar population. Al-Masudi reported that in the capital Atil, different judges administered justice for different religious people. There were two judges for Christians, two for Muslims,⁸⁹ two for the Jewish elite, and one for the various pagans.⁹⁰ In the kingdom of the Khazars, people were only sentenced according to a uniform law when it came to serious crimes such as murder. For minor offences, they were subject to the law of their respective religion. Khazarian Judaism was close to that of the Karaites, who rejected the rabbinic-Talmudic tradition.

At the beginning of the ninth century, there was a power struggle within the Khazar elite that led to a dual form of rule. Ibn Fadhlān remarks in his travelogue from the year 922:

*The king of the Chasars is called Khagan, and he only appears in public promenading once every four months. He is called the great Khagan and his viceroy is called Khagan Bih. It is the latter that leads and controls the armed forces [and] conducts affairs of the kingdom.*⁹¹

The Khagan, who presumably represented the older line of rulers, had only symbolic functions. The real power lay with the Bih (Beg, Bey), who controlled the state and led the army. The Beg came from the new line of rulers that had asserted itself. The Khagan mutated into a sacred figure worshipped like a demigod. According to Old Turkic belief, he had the mandate from heaven to mediate between the divine sphere and his people. As long as he possessed the divine charisma called Qut, he was a guarantor for the Khazars' welfare. In a manner of speaking, he served as their amulet.⁹² Yet whenever the state fell to misfortune – for example in the form of drought or military defeat – it was believed that the Khagan had lost his Qut or that heaven had taken it away from him. As a consequence, he was executed.⁹³ In the tenth century, an alliance of Kiev Russians and Oghuz of Turkic origin brought about the downfall of the Khazar Empire. When the allies destroyed the Sarkel fortress in 965 and the capital Atil in 968 or 969, the empire crumbled. Byzantium exploited the decline of the



183. Medieval fortified village of Tsmity, North Ossetia–Alania, Russian Federation. Photo 2011.

Khazars to occupy the Khazar cities of Crimea. The Kiev Rus, on the other hand, seized the Khazar fortress of Tamantharkan, which stood on the Taman Peninsula, opposite Pantikapaion/Kerch on the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The Khazars had built the fortress in the seventh century at the site of the former Greek city of Hermonassa. The Russians called the city Tmutarakan, which was, in turns, under the rule of the princes of Kiev or Chernihiv. In 1022, Prince Mstislav (d. 1036) extended his rule over the neighbouring Kassogi (Adyge). At the same time, the Cumans (Kipchaks) temporarily interrupted ties with the other principalities of the Rus. The Russian expansion into Tmutarakan was the first sustained Russian advance into the Caucasus and thus the beginning of a millennium-long process. Towards the end of the eleventh century, Tmutarakan fell under nominal Byzantine rule.⁹⁴

4. The Kingdom of Alania

Between the sixth and early twelfth century, the territory of the medieval Alans was considerably larger than the present Republic of North Ossetia–Alania. In the west it extended to the Abkhazian border and included the territories of the present-day republics of Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria; in the north it extended to the Stavropol region; and in the east it also included present-day Ingushetia, the home of the autochthonous Ghalghai (Ingush), whose language is related to that of the Nokhchiy (Chechens). From the seventh/eighth century onwards, invading Turkic-speaking steppe peoples such as the Proto-Bulgars, Pechenegs and Kipchaks (whose western branch Byzantine and Latin sources called ‘Cumans’) intermingled with the Alans.



184. Medieval cemetery of Eltyubyu in the Chegemsky District, about 45 km as the crow flies south-west of Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria. The houses of the dead, built of stone called 'Keshna', date from the tenth to the twelfth century, the period of transition from pre-Christian beliefs to a superficial Christianization. Photo 2017.

During this period, the system of heavily fortified settlements and defence towers was further developed. The watchtowers were at signalling distance from each other, which enabled the rapid warning of approaching enemies over long distances. For example, along the Alikanovka river in the Kislovodsk basin, there stood fourteen towers and fortresses along a stretch of 12 km.⁹⁵ An especially powerful fortress stood 41 km south-west of Maghas as the crow flies, near Khumar in Karachay-Cherkessia.⁹⁶ Many of these fortresses and watchtowers were not simply used to warn of approaching enemies, however. They were located at fords where caravans using a northern so-called 'silk road' had to cross a river. Accordingly, these fortified towers were used to secure the trade routes, but above all to collect road tolls, whether in the form of goods or currency. The northern trade routes increasingly gained importance. Because of the attacks of the Hephthalites and the Persian–Byzantine wars from the end

of the fifth century, the southern, most significant trade route with China and Central Asia through Khorasan and Persia was regarded as unsafe. Trade caravans arriving from the east, originating in China and Sogdia as well as the Ural foothills of Perm, converged in the Volga delta. From here, one route continued on to the Sea of Azov, then to the southern coast of Crimea and across the Black Sea to Constantinople; the other crossed Khazaria and Alania to reach the ports of Abkhazia. Ships would then transport the goods to Constantinople.⁹⁷

Bearing witness to this brisk trade are the abundant finds from the early medieval cemetery of Moshchevaya Balka, which lies at 1,000 m altitude along the march to the 2,265 metre-high Tsegerker Pass, also called Magana Pass. From here, the route led directly to Sebastopolis (Sukhumi). The dead and their precious grave goods lay in stone-cist tombs and walled grave niches.⁹⁸ The internationality of the exchange of goods at that time is hinted at in



the grave finds of Chinese, Sogdian, Syrian, Egyptian and Byzantine silk fabrics as well as Christian cult objects. The Alans processed the silk fabrics into caftans and headgear or used them to embellish dresses, shoes and bags.⁹⁹ One remarkable find is the personal belongings of a Chinese merchant from the eighth century. They consist of his written bookkeeping, which he recorded on paper in Chinese shorthand, a Buddhist Sutra written on paper, an envelope made of papier-mâché, a Buddhist scroll painting on silk, and a small Buddhist votive banner. There is no evidence, however, that the Buddhist merchant was actually buried here.¹⁰⁰

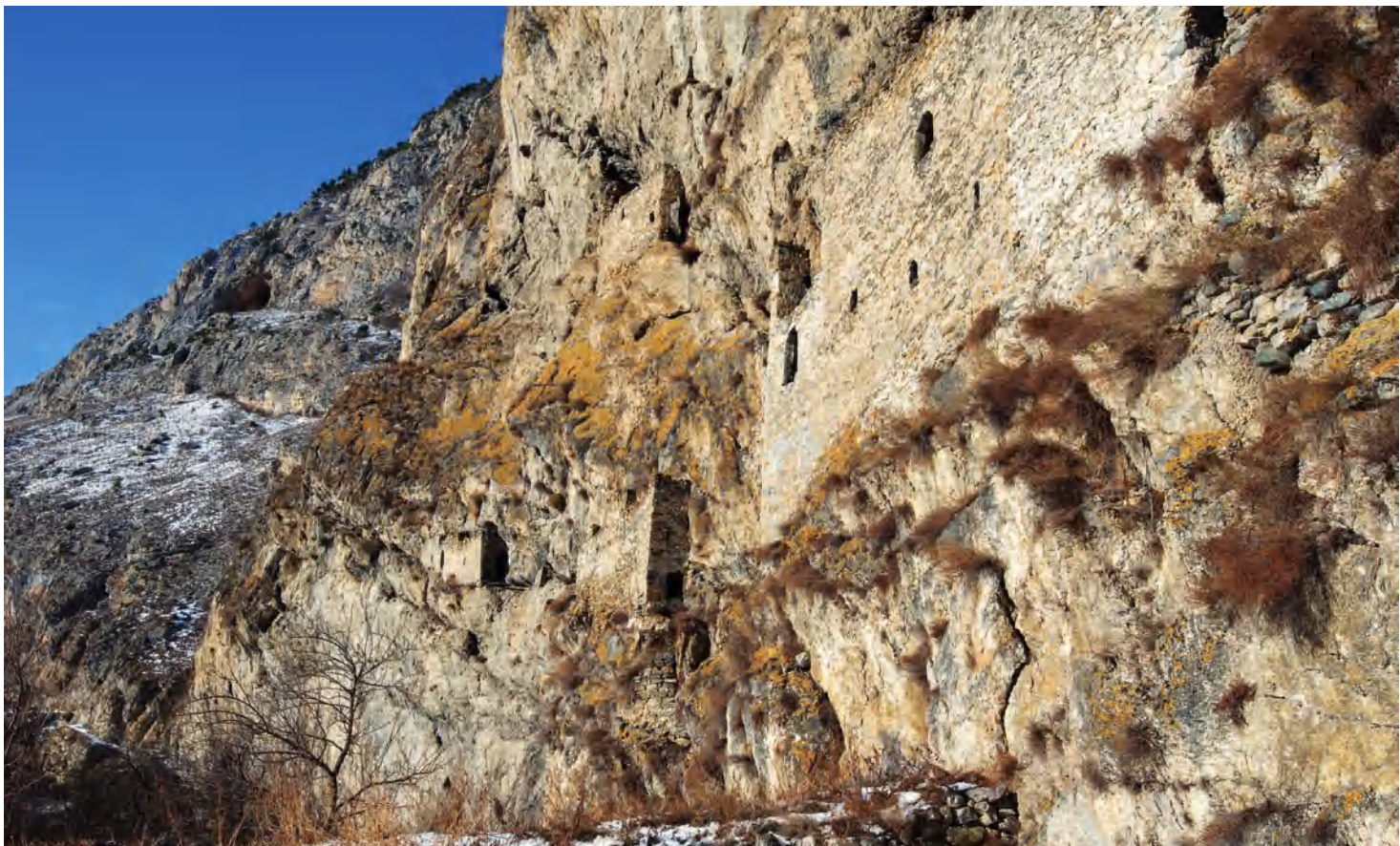
As neighbours of the Khazars, the Alans were also affected by the Khazar–Arab wars. After an Alanian–Khazar army had repulsed an Arab advance at the beginning of the 720s, the Umayyad prince Maslamah ibn Abd al-Malik (d. 738) crossed the Darial Pass in 728 and laid Alania to waste. He failed to weaken the Khazars, however. Nine years later, an Arab army advanced

against Alania as part of Marwan ibn Muhammad’s pincer attack on the Khazars. As a consequence of the joint Alanian–Khazarian defensive wars, the Alans wound up under a loose kind of Khazarian sovereignty. The Alans, nevertheless, managed to liberate themselves again towards the end of the ninth century. Their reclaimed sovereignty made possible a rapprochement with Byzantium, which led to the Christian missionary efforts of Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos. The Persian geographer Ibn Rustah, who visited Alania between 903 and 913, described the situation there before the missionary work: ‘The king of the Alans is Christian at heart, but all the people who inhabit his kingdom are heathens worshipping idols.’¹⁰¹ The downfall of the Khazar Empire gave the Alanian kingdom back its independence. The Alans used their political freedom to launch military campaigns in the southern Caucasus. Around the year 1030, the Alanian king Urdure (d. *ca.* 1030) plundered Kakheti, but was killed in a battle

by the Kakhetian king Kvirike III (r. 1010/14–1037). Seven years later, an Alanian slave took revenge for the fallen Alan king by murdering Kvirike.¹⁰²

The geographical position of Alania was of crucial importance. If inclined, the kingdom could shield Byzantium and especially Georgia from attacks by northern steppe peoples. On the other hand, King Urdure's army movements demonstrated that the dreaded Alanian horsemen warriors were a continuous threat to the South Caucasian states. For its part, the Alanian kingdom faced the threat of its Turkic-speaking neighbours along its northern border. Georgia and Byzantium consequently formed coalitions with the Alanian kings, who also provided them with mercenary troops. For instance, an Alanian contingent fought on the Byzantine side in the disastrous defeat of Manzikert in 1071. The alliances were sometimes consolidated by the marriage of Alanian princesses to the Byzantine or Georgian royalty. The most famous are Queen Borena, a sister of the Alanian king Durgulel, who married the Georgian king Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072),

and her daughter Maria, who was first married to the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas (r. 1065–1078) and afterwards to Nikephoros III (r. 1078–1081).¹⁰³ There was further intermarriage with the royal house of the Georgian Bagratids in the next century: the Alanian princess Burdukhan (d. before 1184) married King George III (r. 1156–1184). Her daughter, the celebrated Queen Tamar (r. 1184–1213), married in her second marriage in 1189 the Alanian prince David Soslan (d. *ca.* 1207), who proved to be an accomplished commander.¹⁰⁴ Byzantium and Georgia also endeavoured to bring the buffer state of Alania into line ideologically by spreading the Christian faith and building churches. The Byzantines were active in the western part of Alania, i.e. as far as Kabardino-Balkaria, while the Georgians were active in today's North Ossetia, in Ingushetia, and among the Avars in the south-western part of Dagestan, where the small Christian kingdom of Sarir was located. Georgian missionary work, on the other hand, barely reached Chechnya.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, these missionary efforts did not stop the Christian Alans from continuing to cultivate pagan customs, such



185. The medieval mountain and cave fortress of Dzivgis stands on the left bank of the River Fiagdon in the Kurtat Gorge, North Ossetia–Alania, Russian Federation. The cave fortress dates back to the thirteenth century and housed a garrison of more than one hundred fighters. Dzivgis and other North Caucasian mountain fortresses waged a tenacious war of resistance against the Mongol conquerors in the middle of the thirteenth century and against Timur-e Lang in the 1390s. The fortress was destroyed by the Russian military around 1830. Photo 2016.



186. Defence and watchtowers of Vovnushki in the Guloykhi river valley, Dzheirakh district, Ingushetia, Russian Federation. The towers, dating from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, have four floors and had embrasures for rifles and light mountain artillery. Photo 2017.

as burial gifts in the form of weapons and metal mirrors, the ritual burning of offerings or the sealing of graves with a millstone.¹⁰⁶

The military alliance between Alania and Georgia was also offensive in nature, as shown by two campaigns against the Muslim Emir of Ganja, Abu'l-Aswar Shavur al-Shaddadi (r. 1049–1067). The *Tarikh al-Bāb wa Sharvān* ('History of Derbent and Shirvan'), completed around the year 1106 and published by Vladimir Minorsky, tells us:

*In the year AH 454 [CE 1062] the Alans passed through the Alan Gates and penetrated into the territory of Aran and killed many people there, capturing more than 20,000 persons alive.*¹⁰⁷

This campaign took place in the context of the ongoing wars of the Georgian king Bagrat IV against the Turkic Seljuks, who constantly harassed him. Emir Abu'l-Aswar Shavur of Ganja

was in fact a Seljuk vassal. When the Seljuk Sultan Alp Arslan (r. 1063–1072) conquered the Armenian city of Ani in 1064 and appointed Aswar Shavur as governor, the kings Bagrat and Durgulel used the opportunity to attack Ganja once again:

*The Alans appeared in great force at the Alanian Gate in [1065] and passed through the territory and Kazran [Jurzan, Georgia]. Then, together with the unbelievers of Shakki, they invaded the territory of Aran [...] They raided Aran, killing the inhabitants and plundering the plains and highlands, and they encountered no obstacle. [...] They extended their raids to Ganja [...] Then the accursed invaders went on to Barda [Partav ...] They took a huge number of prisoners [...] beyond measure or reckoning.*¹⁰⁸

Alp Arslan invaded Georgia in 1067 in retaliation. But when Emir Fadhil II al-Shaddadi (r. 1067–1073) seized in 1068 the fortress of



187. The mountain fortress of Yernjak (Alinja) in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. The fortress, built in the seventh century CE, is perched on a steep, hardly accessible mountain and was fought over at the beginning of the tenth century by the Armenian king Smbat I Bagratuni and the Emir of Azerbaijan Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj. At the end of the tenth century, Yernjak was in the hands of the Armenian princes of Syunik. In the war against the conqueror Timur-e Lang, the fortress resisted a thirteen-year siege and only capitulated in 1401, after Emir Timur had personally brought in a powerful army from Samarkand (Bedrosian, in Hovannisian, *Armenian People* (1997), pp. 267f). The fortress was probably destroyed by the Persian Nadir Shah (r. 1736–47). Photo 2016.

Agarani south of Tbilisi, King Bagrat IV asked his brother-in-law Durgulel for help. Together they drove out the invader.¹⁰⁹

The demise of the kingdom of Alania seems to have started towards the end of the eleventh century. One possible sign of a loss of Alanian state unity is the merger of the archbishoprics of Alania and Soterioupolis (Soteropolis) into the single Metropolis of Alania and Soterioupolis, which took place before 1105, with the latter – most likely identical with the port city of Pitsunda on the eastern Black Sea – designated as the metropolitan seat.¹¹⁰ Additionally, the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* mentions several, presumably concurrently ruling Alanian kings at the beginning of the twelfth century.¹¹¹ Shortly thereafter, the neighbouring Christian kingdom of Sarir

also began to fall apart. Lacking a supreme monarch, Alania broke up into a multitude of feuding principalities and clans. The absence of political unity made it easier for the Mongolian generals Sübotai and Jebe, who commanded a mounted army of almost 30,000 men, to destroy a North Caucasian army of Alans, Cumans/Kipchaks and Lezgians in the winter of 1221/2. The Mongols, as they chased down the fleeing Shah of Khwarazm (Chorasmia) 'Ala al-Din Muhammad II (r. 1200–1220), crossed Persia and defeated the Georgians three times.¹¹² They now wanted to pass through the Caucasus on their return. When faced with the Alanian–Kipchak superiority at the Terek river, Sübotai resorted to a ruse. He bribed the Kipchak with gold and

horses to abandon their posts at night; the Mongols then defeated the Alans and Lezgians who were left behind. Afterwards, the Mongols proceeded to go after the overloaded and unsuspecting Kipchak to take back their riches. Those Kipchak who could not escape were massacred.¹¹³ In the winter of 1238/9, a Mongol army commanded by the future Great Khan Möngke once more penetrated the northern Caucasus from the north. Although it conquered Derbent and destroyed the ‘great city of the Ossetians’, presumably Maghas, some of the Alanian nobles in the mountains continued to put up tenacious resistance.¹¹⁴ Other nobles collaborated with the Mongols and supported them in the war against their own people. The Chinese chronicle of the Mongolian Yüan Dynasty *Yüan-Shi*, for example, highlights the bravery of the Alan Mataersha and his troops during the Mongolian conquest of the Alanian capital Maghas.¹¹⁵ The neighbouring Adygeans, on the other hand, were subjugated in 1238.

As the Catholic missionary-diplomats Carpini and Rubruck indicate, some Alanian communities living in the mountains remained independent.¹¹⁶ Khan Möngke Temür of the Golden Horde (r. 1266/67–80) was the first to pacify these mountain peoples somewhat. As the ridge of the Greater Caucasus formed the border between the partially Islamized Golden Horde in the north and the khanate of the more tolerant Il-Khanids in the south, numerous Alans fled to Georgia and settled in what is now South Ossetia.¹¹⁷ Many Alans were forcibly recruited by the Mongols as prized warriors. They formed the 30,000-strong Asud guard stationed around Khanbaliq (today’s Beijing) during the Mongolian Yüan Dynasty of China (1271–1368). Here, the Catholic Archbishop John of Montecorvino (d. ca. 1328) was able to persuade the Georgian Orthodox Asud to convert to the Roman Catholic Church. When the dynasty collapsed, the Asud joined the Chinese Mongols returning to Mongolia, where they remained an essential power factor up to the fifteenth century.¹¹⁸ Despite the deportation of many Alans, there remained in the fourteenth century in the North Caucasus three Byzantine-Orthodox metropolises: first the archbishopric of Zikhia and Matrarcha (Adygea and Tmutarakan), then that of Alania and Soterioupolis, and third that of Kaukasos in today’s North Ossetia.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, the Alans living in the Caucasus, who had again spread to the lower elevations, were ruthlessly massacred in 1395 by Timur-e Lang (r. 1370–1405). The survivors withdrew to the present region of Ossetia. It was from this time onward that the Ossetians emerged as a nation. Despite the devastation wrought by Timur, Catholic missionary work continued in the

North Caucasus; it had reached the Alans by 1330 at the latest and Dagestan by 1358. It even remained active after 1395. Thus, a papal bull of 1401 lists five dioceses in the North Caucasus, while Johannes Schiltberger (ca. 1380–after 1438), a German soldier in Timurid service who travelled to Dagestan around 1420, recorded:

*In a mountainous country called Sezalet [Julat/Dzhulad] there are many Christians who have a bishop there; their priests belong to the Order of the Shoeless [Franciscians], who do not know [use] Latin, and they sing and read their prayers in the Tatar tongue. It is found that thus the laity becomes stronger in the faith.*¹²⁰

Indeed, the ruins of four small churches have been discovered near Julat, which is located near the confluence of Malka and Terek in the border region of Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia–Alania.¹²¹



188. Medieval ceremonial bronze axe. Both the cheek of the axe and the lower half of the handle are in the shape of a fish. The decorations on the blade suggest a Chinese-looking mask. The axe was an import from eastern Central Asia and points to the medieval international trade. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Baku.

5. Muslim dynasties of Albania and the invasion of the Seljuks

The Kingdom of Albania offered relatively little resistance to the Arab invaders. Derbent capitulated without a fight in 642/3, and Shirvan and Shaki soon followed. King Juansher successfully manoeuvred for a long time between the hostile great powers, Persia, the Arabs and Byzantium, and adopted a wait-and-see attitude after the capture of Partav by the Arabs around 652. In 662, Juansher submitted to Caliph Mu'awiya and thereby secured his continued rule. The murdered Juansher was followed by his brother **Varaz-Trdat I** (Tiridates, r. ca. 680–705), who had to pay taxes from ca. 685 to 693 or 699 to Byzantium as well as the Caliphate and the Khazars. Upon his death, the Caliphate abolished the Albanian monarchy; the subsequent 'princes of Albania' were in reality merely princes of Gardman.¹²² It was not until 693 or 695 that the province of Arminiya, to which Albania

belonged, was incorporated into the Caliphate. From then on, the standing of the governors resembled that of a viceroy. However, the responsibilities of the Muslim governors residing in Dvin were limited to military affairs, internal security and tax collection. Day-to-day administration continued to be the responsibility of local princes under the direction of a supra-regional prince. Starting from the early ninth century, the Caliphate appointed one Armenian and one Iberian presiding prince, respectively. The term of office of Muslim governors was short: 43 governors succeeded each other within a little less than 200 years.

5.1 The Sajids

The last representative of the once royal dynasty, **Varaz-Tiridates II** (r. 821–822), was assassinated in 822. The Armenian **Sahl Smbatean** from Shaki (d. ca. 855) subsequently claimed the title of *Eranshahik* and extended his sphere of influence to Arran (Partav).¹²³ The political decline of the Abbasid Empire began in the first decades of the ninth century as a



189. The east side of the Naryn-Kala fortress and the old cemetery of Derbent, Dagestan. The dynasties of the Yazidids of Shirvan (861–1538) and the Hashimids of Derbent (869–1075), who were related by marriage, regularly fought for control of the strategically important city. Derbent was under Persian control from the beginning of the sixteenth century until 1806, with the exception of short interruptions by the Ottomans and Russians. Photo 2016.



190. The Friday Mosque of Shamakhi was first built in 743–4 and is probably the second oldest in the Caucasus after that of Derbent, which Maslamah ibn Abd al-Malik built in 734 (Bakikhanov, *Heavenly Rose-Garden* (2009), p. 47). The mosque was rebuilt in the years 2009–13. Photo 2016.

consequence of the fratricidal war between al-Amin (r. 809–813) and al-Mamun (r. 813–833). This period of vulnerability enabled the uprising of Babak al-Khurrami, who represented pro-Persian and anti-Arab positions, and gave the governors greater autonomy. After the death of Caliph al-Mutawakkil in 861, the governors of Arminiya lost further power until Caliph al-Mu'tamid (r. 870–892) appointed the outstanding general **Muhammad ibn Abi'l-Saj Devdad** (r. autonomously 889/90 or 892–901) as governor of Arminiya in the year 889/90 or 892. The caliph sought to keep the political expansion of the Armenian Bagratids in check and to curb the efforts of the local princes towards independence. General Muhammad, who was of Sogdian origin, was the son of the fortieth governor of Arminiya, **Abi'l-Saj Devdad** (in office 867–870). He had also participated in the war against Babak at a young age.¹²⁴ Following the dynasty of autonomous governors of the **Sajids** (889/90 or 892–929), Muslim hereditary dynasties dominated

Azerbaijani territory; they included the Sallarids (Musafirids), the Rawwadids, the Shaddadids of Ganja/Arran, the Yazidids of Shirvan and the Hashimids of Derbent.

Muhammad ibn Abi'l-Saj Devdad initially resided in Maragha south of Tabriz, but soon chose Partav as the seat of government. During his ten-year term of office, he waged numerous wars to consolidate the governor's authority, including against Tbilisi, Dvin, Vashpurakan and Kars. In the later 890s, he became de facto independent by taking the title of *Afshin* and retaining tax revenues owed to the caliph. The title permitted him to emphasize his Sogdian heritage, *Afshin* being the former designation of the rulers of the Sogdian kingdom of Osrushana. When Muhammad died, the army appointed his son **Devdad ibn Muhammad** (r. 901) as successor. Muhammad's brother **Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj** (r. 901–919, 922–28), however, overthrew him just a few months later. This series of events reveals that the caliph was no longer able to appoint



191. The west side of the so-called Maiden Tower (Qiz Qalasi) of Baku, Azerbaijan. The 29.5-m-high tower is shrouded in several legends. A first, smaller tower may have been built in the fifth/sixth century CE; today's construction dates from the twelfth. While the tower now stands about 200 m away from the shore of the Caspian Sea, in the Middle Ages the seawater probably nearly reached it. From the terrace of the tower one can see the underwater ruins of the Bayil Castle (or Bailov). It was completed around 1234/5 and then slid into the sea as a result of the earthquake of 1306; the inscribed reliefs carved in stone were archaeologically recovered in 1945–6 and are now exhibited in the museum of Shirvanshah Palace. Photo 2016.

governors at his discretion; he could only confirm them or fight against them militarily. Yusuf was the last governor who still exercised real control over the large province. In 903, he forced the Armenian king Smbat I to recognize his sovereignty. But, in 908, Caliph al-Muktafi (r. 902–908) sent an army against Yusuf and encouraged King Smbat to wage war against Yusuf as well. While the governor soon came to an understanding with Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–32), he did not forget that his vassal Smbat had been ready to heed al-Muktafi's call for a rebellion. Yusuf soon had a chance for revenge. Prince Gagik I Artsruni of Vashpurakan (r. 904–937 or 943) quarrelled with Smbat over the possession of Nakhchivan and volunteered to become Yusuf's vassal in exchange for military assistance. Yusuf made Gagik king in 908 and occupied Nakhchivan and Syunik, after which he spent the winter in Dvin. Once the alliance of Yusuf and Gagik I Artsruni had destroyed the army of King Smbat, the latter retreated to the impenetrable fortress of Berd Karoyt.

When Smbat concluded in 913 that his situation was hopeless, he surrendered. Yusuf initially treated him with respect. Soon, however, he transported the captive king to the besieged mountain fortress of Yernjak (Alinja, fig. 187) in Nakhchivan, where he had him tortured and killed in front of the insurgent garrison.¹²⁵ After the fall of Yernjak/Alinja, Yusuf founded here the small subservient emirate Goghtn (Goġtn).¹²⁶

In the mid 910s, Yusuf ceased paying tribute to the caliph and undertook a campaign to Qazvin and Ray near Tehran, allegedly to drive out a Samanid occupying force.¹²⁷ Yusuf was captured in 919 and spent three years in Baghdad. In Arminiya, the military slave **Nasr al-Subuk** (r. 919–922) ruled in his stead. After Subuk's death Yusuf was released from prison and appointed governor of Azerbaijan, Zanjan, Ray and Qazvin. Yusuf fell in 928 in battle against the radical Shiite Qarmatians. The dynasty of the Sajids ended with his nephew **Abu'l-Musafir al-Fath** (r. 928–929), who was poisoned by a slave in 929.¹²⁸

5.2 The Sallarids

In 938, the Kurd **Daysam ibn Ibrahim al-Kurdi** (r. 937/8–941/42) seized control in parts of Azerbaijan. To limit the power of his own restless Kurdish commanders, he promoted his general Saluk, who belonged to the Ismailite branch of the Shiites.¹²⁹ Saluk was a son of **Muhammad bin Musafir** (r. before 916–941, d. before 953), the founder of the dynasty of the **Sallarids** (before 916–983, also called **Musafirids**) whose ancestral lands at Tarum were south-west of Ardabil. Saluk was loyal to Daysam, but not his two brothers Marzuban and Vahsudan. They overthrew their father in 941, and held him captive. A short time later, **Sallar Marzuban ibn Muhammad** (r. 941/42–957) expelled the Kurd Daysam from Azerbaijan, who made a vain attempt to regain power in Azerbaijan in 953. When the Armenian king of Vashpurakan handed over the defeated Daysam, who had fled to Armenia, to Marzuban, the latter had Daysam blinded. Marzuban had been humiliated earlier in 943, when a fleet of Rus (Varangian) warriors coming from the Caspian Sea rowed up the Kura river and conquered Partav.¹³⁰ The Rus inflicted several defeats on Marzuban and returned only after several months with a tremendous amount of booty. The Varangian pirates had already plundered Baku, Shirvan and Arran in 913, but the Khazars ambushed them on their return journey in the Volga delta. The plundering campaigns of the Rus were very similar to those of the medieval Vikings to whom they were closely related and who travelled up Western European rivers in speedy expeditions to rob wealthy monasteries and cities. And much like the affected Western European states and principalities, the Azerbaijani emirates also lacked naval forces to fight the Rus pirates. Further Varangian raids into Azerbaijan took place in the years 987, 989, 1030, 1031, 1032 and 1173.¹³¹ Around the year 948, Sallar Marzuban foolishly attacked the town of Ray, which belonged to the Buyid Rukn al-Dawla's domain. Al-Dawla defeated the intruder and Sallar Marzuban spent four years in captivity. With varying degrees of success, Marzuban's brother and successor **Vahsudan** (r. 957–983) constantly clashed with his nephews Justan and Ibrahim. After Vahsudan's death in 983, individual Sallarids managed to assert themselves as local rulers in Daylam in north-western Iran. In Azerbaijan, however, power passed to the Rawwadids.

5.3. The Rawwadids

The Kurdish dynasty of the **Rawwadids** (ca. 956–1070/71), which was of Arab origin, goes back to **Muhammad ibn al-Husain al-Rawwadi** (d. before 956). Muhammad had occupied areas in south-eastern Azerbaijan during the imprisonment of Sallar Marzuban.¹³² Muhammad's son and successor **Husain ibn**

Muhammad (r. before 956–before 975) first had to pay tribute to Sallar Marzuban, but in 956 he conquered the city of Tabriz and elevated it to the capital of the Rawwadids. Husain was followed by his son **Muhammad (Mamlan) Abu'l-Hajja ibn Husain** (r. before 975–ca. 1014).¹³³ Mamlan Abu'l-Hajja tried in vain to hinder the expansion of David, *kouropalates* of Tao. During the first failed campaign of 983/4 to Tao, Mamlan sought to coerce David to make tribute payments. Ten years later, around 994, when David conquered the city of Manzikert and expelled the Muslim population, Mamlan sent a powerful army. However, it was confronted by the coalition of David, Gagik I and Bagrat III and retreated before fighting began. In 998, Mamlan once again led a numerically superior army to Tao, only to suffer an ignominious defeat.¹³⁴ According to written sources, Mamlan died in 989 or 1000. His son **Abu Nasr Husain** (d. 1025?) supposedly assumed



192. The medieval donjon of the Mardakan (Mərdəkan) Fortress, Absheron Peninsula, Azerbaijan. According to an inscription it was built in the years 1187–8 (Fatullaeu-Figarov, *Architecture of Absheron* (2013), pp. 105–10). The fortress was captured by Tsar Peter I during his Persian campaign of 1722–3. Photo 2016.

power, although numismatic indications contradict this. On the one hand, coins from 1002, 1009 and 1014 are in the name of Muhammad ibn Husain and, on the other, a coin from 1016 is in the name of Vahsudan ibn Mohammad. It is conceivable there was a temporary split of the Rawwadids' sphere of influence at the beginning of the eleventh century. Andrew Peacock believes that Vahsudan directly succeeded his father Mamlan, while Minorsky and Madelung maintain that it was an Emir Abu Nasr Husain.¹³⁵

The next Rawwadid, **Vahsudan ibn Mamlan** (r. ca. 1014/16–1059), witnessed the beginning of a violent migration and land grab. This development would not only shape the history of the South Caucasus but, four centuries later, would bring about the fall of the Byzantine Empire and fundamentally and permanently change the ethnic map of Asia Minor. In the South Caucasus, it led to the Turkification of north-western Iran and accelerated the Turkification of Albania, which had begun with the Khazars in northern regions. In 1029, the first bands of Turkic Oghuz appeared in Azerbaijan, who belonged to the

retinue of Arslan Isra'il ibn Seljuk (d. 1032) and had been expelled from Khorasan a year earlier by the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud (r. 998–1030).¹³⁶ The dates cited by Armenian sources for the first Oghuz migration wave of 1018 or 1021 are demonstrably too early.¹³⁷ As the medieval Muslim authors al-Muqaddasi, al-Athir and al-Biruni report, these Oghuz who converted to Islam were called 'Turkmen', 'Iraqi Turkmen', or members of the 'Iraqiyya'.¹³⁸ Vahsudan first welcomed the dreaded mounted archers and used them against Armenians and his rival, the Shaddadid Abu'l-Hasan Lashkari II (r. 1034–1049). But the undisciplined and rapacious Turkmen could not be controlled. When, in 1037/8, thousands more Iraqi Turkmen joined them, they began to attack and plunder cities. Once a city was thoroughly laid to waste, they moved on to the next like locusts. In 1040/41, Vahsudan had thirty leaders of the Iraqiyya assassinated at a banquet, whereupon the commanderless mounted warriors retreated to Mosul. While Vahsudan repeatedly managed to drive off invading Turkmen bands over the next three years, from 1044 they began



193. The so-called war cross of the Armenian king Ashot II Erkat (r. 914–28). The cross made of iron from the tenth or eleventh century is kept in a silver-plated shrine which dates from 1893 (Evans, *Armenia: Art, Religion and Trade* (2018), p. 78). Etchmiadzin Museum, Vagharshapat.



194. The Armenian Church of the Twelve Apostles in Kars, Eastern Anatolia, Turkey, built in the years 932–7 from basalt blocks. The tetraconch cathedral was frequently left in disuse; it variously served as a mosque, a Georgian church, a Russian church, a department store, a sports hall and, since 1993, again as a mosque. The frequent repurposing of the structure saved it from destruction. In the background, the fortress established by the Saltukids (1071–1202), which the Ottoman vizier Lala Mustafa Pasha had rebuilt in the 1580s after Mongol and Turkic destructions. Further reconstruction was carried out during the Crimean War in 1855. Photo 2016.

to settle in southern Azerbaijan. The Seljuk Sultan Tughril I (r. 1038–1063) resided in Ray and boasted a disciplined army. He skilfully used the Turkmen, who were closely related to the Oghuz Seljuks, for his own ends. He ordered them westward under the leadership of his half-brother Ibrahim Inal as the tip of the spear for future conquests. Ibrahim Inal formulated Tughril's strategy:

*My lands are too small to accommodate you [independent bands of Turkmen warriors] and to provide what you require. The best plan is for you to go and raid the Byzantines, to strive on the path of God and to gain booty. I shall follow in your tracks and aid you in your enterprise.*¹³⁹

The Turkmen were supposed to attack the Christian states, plunder their cities and destroy the infrastructure in order to pave the way for the regular Seljuk armies. This strategy employed by Tughril and Alp Arslan also had the advantage of keeping the insubordinate Iraqiyya Turkmen occupied outside the Seljuk Empire.

In 1054, Vasudan had to surrender to Tughril, pay tribute, and proclaim Tughril's name at the Friday sermon, the *khutba*. His successor **Mamlan II ibn Vahsudan** (r. 1059–1070/71) revolted as soon as he came to power, but, in 1062, Tughril forced him to submit and pay a high tribute. He then conquered Abu Dulaf of Nakhchivan.¹⁴⁰ Tughril's successor, Sultan Alp Arslan (r. 1063–1072), deposed Mamlan II in 1070 or 1071 and ended the dynasty of the Rawwadids of Arran. A short time later, his son and successor Malik Shah (r. 1072–1092) also put an end to the dynasty of the Shaddadids of Ganja. Under Tughril's rule, a rapid Turkification of present-day Azerbaijan was already underway, on the one hand, through the immigration of Turkmen horseback warriors and their families and other Turkic semi-nomads, and, on the other hand, as a result of the military fiefdoms called *iqta'*. Instead of receiving pay, professional officers of Turkish origin were given temporary land leases so that they could benefit from taxes and customs duties from their associated villages and estates. Vast areas of Azerbaijan had great appeal to



195. The Fortress and the Church of Our Lady of Amberd, Aragatsotn Province Armenia. The fortress was built by the Kamsarakan family around the seventh century CE and was captured by the Seljuks in the eleventh century. In 1197, the Armenian-Georgian commander Zakare Zakarian (Mkhargrdzeli) reconquered the region and had the fortress rebuilt. It was destroyed again by the Mongols forty years later. Photo 2017.

horse breeders because of their pastures. They had to equip and maintain a certain number of soldiers and provide horses for the riders. While this system relieved the state treasury, it also deprived it of tax and customs revenues. But, after a few decades, the temporary *iqta'* was transformed into a lifetime estate and later into hereditary land ownership. This created a patrimonial, feudal military aristocracy of Turkic tribal leaders. As a direct consequence, the western half of the Seljuk Empire became politically fragmented between the dynasties of provincial *atabegs*, the nominal tutors of Seljuk princely sons. In Azerbaijan, the *atabeg* dynasties of the Eldigüzids and the Ahmadilis prevailed.¹⁴¹

5.4 The Shaddadids

Like the Rawwadids, the dynasty of the Kurdish **Shaddadids** (ca. 951–1075 in Ganja, 1072–1198/99 in Ani) owed its rise to the power vacuum in Arran during the captivity of Sallar Marzuban.¹⁴² The Kurdish warlord **Muhammad ibn Shaddad** (r. 951–954, d. 955) occupied the Armenian town of Dvin in 951; only the citadel remained under the control of the Sallarid

garrison. Three years later, Sallar Marzuban, who had escaped his imprisonment, expelled the Shaddadid Muhammad, who fled to Vashpurakan and died there in 955. Muhammad's sons Lashkari and Fadhl (Fazl), however, successfully led an anti-Sallarid uprising in Ganja and took power. Emir **Lashkari I** of Arran (r. 971–978) withstood the siege of Sallar Ibrahim and afterwards conquered the cities of Shamkur and Partav. The next emir, the middle of the three brothers, named **Marzuban** (r. 978–985), proved to be incompetent, so the younger Fadhl killed him during a hunt. Emir **Fadhl I** (r. 985–1031) managed to expand his dominion and win back Dvin. However, his wars against Kvirike (Gurgen) I (r. 972/79–989) and David I Anhoghin (989–1048) of Lori-Tashir (Lori-Dzoraget), who called themselves 'Kings of Ałuank' (that is ancient Albania) as well as against Bagrat III of Georgia, were largely unsuccessful. Ultimately, the victor Bagrat forced Fadhl to pay tribute.¹⁴³ When Fadhl's son Askuya rebelled in 1030, another, more loyal son, **Abu'l-Fath Musa ibn Fadhl** (r. 1031–1034) paid the Rus, who had been plundering in Shirvan, to quell the uprising and execute Askuya. After just three years of rule, Musa

was murdered by his own son **Abu'l-Hasan Lashkari II Ali** (r. 1034–1049). Following a conflict with the Rawwadid Vahsudan and his Oghuz-Turkmen mercenaries, the two emirs responded to the intensified migration of Iraqiyya by staging a reconciliation. Nevertheless, their new alliance was powerless against an attack on Ganja towards the end of 1047 by the Iraqiyya, under the command of Seljuk Qutalmish ibn Isra'il. Qutalmish laid siege to Ganja for eighteen months, showing that he was not a plunderer but a conqueror who wanted to carve out his own sphere of power. Qutalmish only broke off the siege when a Byzantine–Georgian army under General Nikephoros drew near in 1049. The Byzantine–Georgian help came at a price, however. Lashkari had to recognize the sovereignty of Byzantium and ceded several border fortresses to Byzantium, Georgia and Kakhetia.¹⁴⁴

The underaged **Anushirvan** (r. 1049) sat nominally on the throne for only two months. **Abu'l-Aswar Shavur ibn Fadhl** (r. 1049–1067), who had ruled independently in Dvin since 1022, then came to power through a popular uprising in Ganja.

Abu'l-Aswar was an opportunistic warlord. In 1043, he formed an offensive alliance with the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055) to conquer the Armenian kingdom of Ani. The emperor promised that Abu'l-Aswar would be allowed to keep the Armenian fortresses he had captured. This alliance proposal shows that the Christian Byzantium was prepared to use a Muslim commander to subdue an Armenian kingdom. No sooner had Byzantium occupied Ani than the emperor demanded the surrender of the fortresses that had been conquered by Abu'l-Aswar. The latter refused and repulsed an initial Byzantine attack. But when General Nikephoros first approached Dvin on his advance towards Ganja, Abu'l-Aswar recognized the nominal sovereignty of Byzantium. Still, Ganja had to submit to Seljuk sovereignty in 1064, whereupon, after the conquest of Ani, Alp Arslan appointed Abu'l-Aswar as the first governor for a brief period.¹⁴⁵ The Alans exploited his absence to undertake a plundering raid to Ganja. Abu'l-Aswar's son and successor **Fadhl II** (r. 1067–1073) was afterwards forced



196. The eastern facade of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on the island of Aghtamar on Lake Van, Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. King Gagik I Artsruni of Vashpurakan (r. 904–37/43) had the monastery basilica built between the years 915 and 921; it was the seat of a tiny catholicosate from 1113 to 1895. Photo 2016.



197. In the central axis of the eastern facade of the church of Aghtamar, seated under John the Evangelist in the 'vine frieze', is the benefactor King Gagik, who holds a chalice and is highlighted by a nimbus. Photo 2016.

by Alp Arslan to pay an enormous tribute. After a year, Fadhl was captured by King Aghsartan I (r. 1058–1084) of Kakheti. Aghsartan was then a vassal of Sultan Alp Arslan and, according to the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, had converted to Islam.¹⁴⁶ The Georgian king Bagrat IV (r. 1027–1072) then bought the prisoner from the Khakhetian ruler and forced Fadhl under the threat of hanging to vacate the Emirate of Tbilisi. He subsequently transferred the emirate to his own Muslim vassal. Shortly after his release, Fadhl occupied the fortress of Agarani south of Tbilisi, from which Bagrat and the Ossetian ruler Durgulel quickly forced him to withdraw.¹⁴⁷ During Fadhl's absence, Turkmen marauders and neighbouring Shirvan used the opportunity to pillage Arran. In 1073, **Fadhl III (Fadhlun)** (r. 1073–1075) overthrew his father Fadhl II, only to be deposed two years later. He was imprisoned

by the Turkish military slave Savtegin,¹⁴⁸ which brought to an end the dynasty of the Shaddadids of Ganja. Savtegin's claim to power went back to the *iqta'* fiefdom that Alp Arslan had granted to him.¹⁴⁹ The secondary line of Ani, which Abu'l-Aswar's son Manuchihr (r. 1072–ca. 1118) founded, lasted until 1198/99.¹⁵⁰

5.5 The Yazidids and Hashimids

Owing to their strategic and adjacent location, the history of the medieval principalities of the **Yazidids of Shirvan** (861–1538) and the **Hashimids of Derbent** (869–1075) is closely interwoven. Although the two dynasties were related by marriage, they were also at loggerheads for decades. The foundation for the state of the Shirvanshahs was laid by the Arab governor **Yazid ibn Usayd (Asid) al-Sulami** (in office ca. 752–754, 759–770 and 775–780), who brought the naphtha (crude oil) wells and salt pans of the Absheron Peninsula, including the city of Baku, under Shirvan's control. As the oil wells and salt deposits already produced high yields at that time, their ownership remained a constant bone of contention between Shirvan and Derbent.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, the marriage of Yazid to a daughter of the Khazar Khagan, ordered by Caliph al-Mansur, proved to be a grave failure: when the bride suddenly died after two years of marriage, the Khagan suspected that his daughter had been poisoned. As a consequence, he invaded Azerbaijan and plundered its cities in 762.¹⁵² The actual founder of the Yazidid dynasty of Shirvan was the governor **Yazid ibn Mazyad al-Shaybani** (in office 787–789, 799–801). He successfully kept the Khazars in check and encouraged the settlement of Arab tribes.¹⁵³ According to tradition, **ostikan Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn Yazid** (in office 844–ca. 860) expanded the city of Ganja in 859, after Caliph al-Mutawakkil had transferred Derbent to him as a fiefdom in 851.¹⁵⁴

In the 790s, in Derbent, **al-Najm ibn Hashim** founded the dynasty of the **Hashimids**. His great-great grandson **Hashim ibn Suraqa ibn Salis** (r. 869–884) took advantage of the unrest that ensued in the caliphate after al-Mutawakkil's death to declare his independence. According to *Tarikh al-Bāb wa Sharvān*, Hashim distinguished himself through two plundering raids on the Christian kingdom of Sarir.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, in Shirvan, Muhammad's brother **Haytham ibn Khalid** (r. ca. 861–?) took note of the prevailing political chaos in the caliphate for the declaration of his own independence. Haytham adopted the traditional title *Shirvanshah*, signalling a turning away from the Arab heritage and towards pre-Islamic customs. Haytham's great-great-grandson Shirvanshah **Ali ibn Haytham** (r. 909 or 912–927) struck an offensive alliance with **Muhammad ibn Hashim ibn**

Suraqa (r. 885–915) of Derbent against three adversaries who had settled in the north: the kingdom of Sarir, the neighbouring Shandan, who belonged to the Dargin people of Dagestan, and the Khazars. The Muslim alliance suffered a heavy defeat, resulting in the capture of both leaders and thousands of soldiers. While Sarir quickly released its prisoners, the Dargins and Khazars sold their captives into slavery.¹⁵⁶ Shortly thereafter, Rus pirates plundered Shirvan and Arran in 913. Proving more successful was an attack by Shirvanshah **Muhammad ibn Ahmad** (r. 980/81–991) on the predominantly Christian city of Qabala (or Chukhur, fig. 113), which he wrested from Abd al-Barr, son of Anbasa al-'Awur ('one-eyed lion') in 981.¹⁵⁷ In Derbent, the tenth century was marked by unending feuds within the Hashimids. This circumstance was reflected by the fact that the Hashimids on the losing side summoned members of the Yazidids from Shirvan to assume the throne. Local leaders who feared a strong, unified rule over Derbent and Shirvan nonetheless usually expelled the Yazidid emirs of Derbent after just a few months.¹⁵⁸ The wars between

Shirvan and Derbent also persisted into the eleventh century. For instance, Shirvanshah **Manuchihr I ibn Yazid** (r. 1027–34) attacked Derbent in the year 1029, whereupon troops from Derbent pillaged Shirvan. A few months later, a raid of Rus defeated Manuchihr and plundered Shirvan. The Rus then returned the following year and arrived in Baku, only this time to be driven out by Manuchihr. In 1032, along with contingents from Alania and Sarir, the Rus attacked Shirvan's capital Yazidiyya (Shamakhi) yet again. They not only looted it, but now burned it to the ground. The emir of Derbent, **Mansur ibn Maymun** (r. with interruptions 1003–1034), though, attacked them on their return trip, taking their plunder and killing most of the invaders.¹⁵⁹

Shirvan remained unbowed, however. Two years later, **Abu Mansur Ali ibn Yazid** (r. 1034–1043) murdered his brother Manuchihr I with the aid of his wife, whom he married immediately after ascending the throne. The first attacks of the Iraqiyya Turkmen began during this time, which is why Shirvanshah **Qubad** (r. 1043–1049) had the capital fortified with a strong



198. Mural of the resurrection of Lazarus and Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Main apse of the church of Aghtamar, probably tenth century. Photo 2016.

defensive wall with iron gates. The new fortifications proved their worth shortly afterwards: the Seljuk army commander Qarategin attacked Yazidiyya and Baku twice in 1066–7, but failed to capture the capital. In return, Qarategin systematically laid waste to Shirvan: ‘the behaviour of Qara-tegin became a succession of looting, crucifying, murdering, destroying and burning on the tract stretching from Bakuya towards Shabran’, located halfway between Baku and Derbent.¹⁶⁰ It is striking that the Seljuk general Qarategin was just as destructive as an autonomous bandit chief of the Iraqiyya. In 1067, Savtegin occupied Derbent, but the inhabitants quickly expelled the governor he had appointed. In the winter of 1067/8, Alp Arslan forced Shah **Fariburz I ibn Sallar** (reg. 1063–ca. 1094) to submit and pay tribute to him.¹⁶¹ Eight

years later, in December 1075, Amir Savtegin won the surrender of Derbent and made certain that the *khutba* was preached in the name of the Seljuk Sultan Malik Shah.

On reflection, it becomes clear that the political fragmentation of Azerbaijan made it much easier for the Seljuk military leaders and sultans to bring to heel the majority Muslim region. The Seljuk–Turkmen warfare in the southern Caucasus – the fighting in Georgia and Armenia was on the same scale as in Azerbaijan – is also remarkable for its enormous destruction. On the one hand, the Khazars and Rus marauders were primarily interested in plunder, so that their destruction was mostly collateral damage. On the other hand, the looting raids of the Iraqiyya and the Seljuk war campaigns, which often personally



199. The Armenian monastery church of St Thomas known as Kamrak Vank, above the village of Altinsaç, is located on the southern shore of Lake Van, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The church dates from the tenth/eleventh century, the dome from 1518 and the walled enclosure the seventeenth/eighteenth century. Photo 2016.

involved the sultans Tughril, Alp Arslan and Malik Shah, were extraordinarily destructive. The Seljuk's campaigns typically took place in spring and early summer, which is why sowing and harvesting in the attacked regions were halted in their aftermath. Orchards were frequently systematically destroyed, towns burned to their foundations, and young men castrated. The sultans also carried with them detachments of *naffatun*, naphtha throwers, devices that were used to set fire to towns, villages, forests and orchards.¹⁶² While the Turkmen bands can be assumed to have taken a certain pleasure in the unrestrained use of force, the Seljuks in Azerbaijan and especially in the fertile plains of Georgia pursued a deliberate strategy.¹⁶³ Their armies mostly consisted of horsemen, and as each rider made use of several horses, the Seljuk armies needed ample land for grazing. The success of the Seljuk army commanders thus also depended on the number of available pastures. Villages and smaller towns as well as orchards and vineyards were thus deliberately set on fire in order to convert the populated agricultural areas into unpopulated lands for maintaining their horses. The Seljuks thus anticipated the strategy used by the Mongols in Central Asia and northern China, of forcibly converting agricultural areas into grazing land.¹⁶⁴

At the beginning of the twelfth century, the expanding Georgians focused their attention on the Seljuk vassals of Shirvan and Derbent. To secure his eastern flank, King David IV married his daughter Tamar around the year 1116 to the future Shirvanshah **Manuchihr III ibn Kasran** (r. 1120–1160). But the marriage did not protect Shirvan from Georgian military intervention. In 1117, David sent his son Demetre to Shirvan, where he stormed the citadel, held by a Seljuk garrison. King David then captured Qabala, Shirvan and Derbent in 1120 and plundered their riches. In the same year, Shirvanshah **Afridun I** (r. 1106–1120) was killed in action against Derbent. His successor Manuchihr III appears to have stopped paying tribute to the Seljuk sultan Mahmud (r. 1118–1131) after David's triumph over a Seljuk coalition at the Battle of Didgori in 1121. Mahmud then marched to Shirvan and occupied Shamakhi, only to withdraw when David approached. In 1123, David annexed the western half of Shirvan, handing its government over to his chancellor Simon, bishop of Bedia and Alaverdi. He left the eastern half to Manuchihr. He then advanced to the Caspian Sea in 1124 and seized Derbent. From that time on, Shirvan and Derbent were Georgian protectorates. After David's death in 1125, Shirvan and Derbent had to continue to recognize the Georgian sovereignty of King Demetre I (r. 1125–1156), despite attempts at independence and Seljuk interventions. Georgian dominance over Shirvan was

consolidated in 1195, when the Georgian prince consort of Queen Tamar, David Soslan, defeated the Eldigüzid *atabeg*, Nusrat al-Din Abu Bakr (r. 1191–1210) and then occupied Ganja. The Georgians next proceeded to take Nakhchivan in 1197. In 1192, when a severe earthquake destroyed Shamakhi, Shirvanshan **Akhistan I ibn Manuchihr** (r. 1160–ca. 1197) moved his capital to Baku on the Caspian Sea. There, he probably had the so-called Maiden Tower, Qiz Qalası, constructed as part of the city's fortifications (fig. 191).¹⁶⁵ Akhistan's lack of a male heir gave rise to a seven-year power struggle. **Gushtasp I** (r. 1204?–1225?) ultimately prevailed. The first Mongolian invasion dates to the later part of his reign.

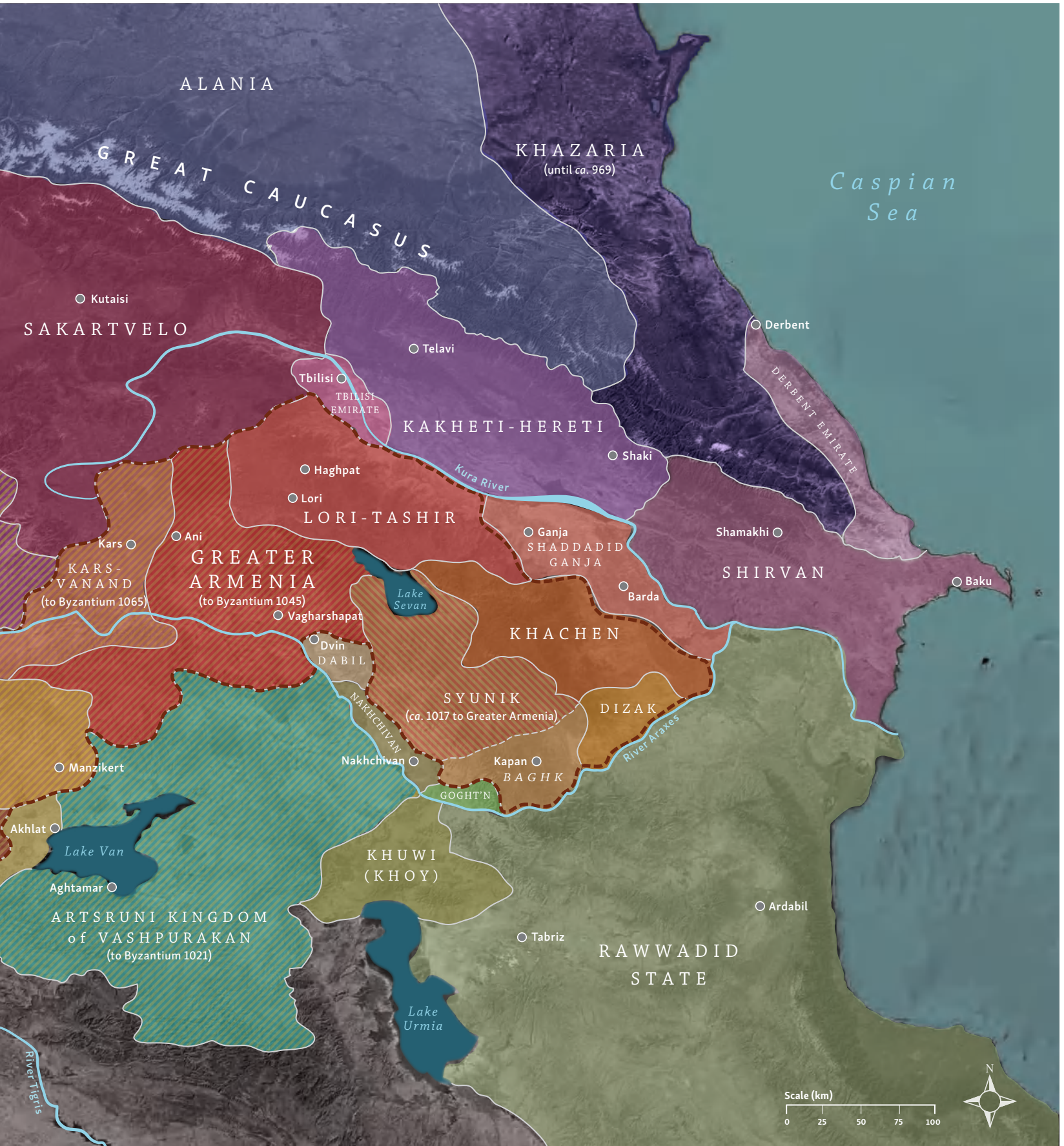
6. The kingdoms of Armenia, Byzantine rule and the Seljuk conquest

The coronation of Prince Ashot V as King Ashot I in 884 granted the ruler of Greater Armenia great prestige, but his actual sovereignty was limited.¹⁶⁶ For instance, he did not mint his own coins and he still had to pay tribute to the caliph. As the following decades showed, unlike in Georgia at the turn of the millennium, the conditions for Armenia's national unification were less auspicious. There were several reasons for this: first, Armenia was geographically much more exposed to the Byzantine expansion to the east than were Abkhazia and Kartli. Second, the king's power base was weak: the Armenian territory was interspersed with Muslim emirates and Azerbaijani quasi-exclaves, such as the seat of the *ostikans* in Dvin; and the legitimacy of the kings remained dependent on the Armenian Church or at least on patriarchal approval. Third, and most importantly, the *nakharar* lacked a unifying, national ideology. David III of Tao deliberately promoted the national unification of Tao, Abkhazia and Kartli; by contrast, the leading Armenian *nakharar* insisted on their independence and were even willingly exploited by Muslim governors and emirs of Azerbaijan. In this respect, the medieval *nakharar* acted like their ancient ancestors at the time of the Arsacids. Armenia's fragmentation proceeded rapidly: in 908, the dynasty of the Artsruni declared itself rulers of the Kingdom of **Vashpurakan**; in 961/2, **Mushegh Bagratuni** (r. 961/62–984) made himself king of **Kars** and **Vanand**,¹⁶⁷ independent of his brother King Ashot III Bagratuni; around the year 972, Ashot III transferred **Lori-Tashir** (Lori-Dzoraget) to his son Kvirike who called himself as of ca. 979 King of Albania. In the 970s **Syunik** too declared itself an independent kingdom.

Map 9. The Armenian and Georgian kingdoms and the eastern principalities around 1008 CE

- Towns and fortresses
- Rivers
- - - Armenian Bagratuni kingdoms, principalities and vassal states
- ▨ To Byzantium
- ▨ To Greater Armenia







In 1017, Lori annexed the small Armenian kingdom of Gardman and Parissos, which had been founded in 982.¹⁶⁸ By the end of the tenth century, together with the rump Kingdom of **Greater Armenia** and its capital Ani, there were five rival Armenian kingdoms. As Vashpurakan was divided among three brothers between 969/72 and 1003, five Armenian kingdoms and two Armenian principalities existed simultaneously.

200. The north-east side of the city walls of the medieval city of Ani, eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The city has a triangular plan and is protected on the western and eastern sides by two deep ravines, while on the northern side it is open to the plains. Although the whole city was walled in, in the second half of the tenth century the strongest walls were built on this vulnerable northern side. The city walls were repaired and reinforced several times up until the thirteenth century. Inscriptions show that individual towers were paid for by wealthy private individuals. The city enjoyed its final flourishing under the Zakarian dynasty who controlled the city until the 1330s, first as vassals of Georgia and later of the Mongols. Photo 2016.

6.1 The Armenian kingdoms

Ashot I's son King **Smbat I** (r. 890–913, d. 914) faced several adversaries. First, he had to prevail against his uncle Abas, Ashot's brother; he then succeeded in conquering Dvin. In December 893, a violent earthquake largely destroyed the city, and Catholicos George II (in office 877–897) moved his seat to Vagharshapat. The conquest of Dvin and Smbat's good relations with Byzantium aroused the suspicions of Afshin Muhammad ibn Abi'l-Saj of Ganja, who soon recaptured Dvin. Ahmad ibn Isa al-Shaybani (d. 898), the emir of Amida, exploited the ongoing conflict between Smbat and Afshin Muhammad to occupy Taron in 895. This principality was located south-west of Armenia and belonged in Smbat's sphere of influence. Smbat's bid to retake it ended in a heavy defeat following the betrayal of the regent of Vashpurakan, Gagik Apumrvan (Abu Morvan) Artsruni.



Although Gregory Bagratuni brought Taron under his control after Ahmad's death in 898, the principality became part of the Byzantine zone of influence and was lost to Armenia. The betrayal of Gagik Apumrvan deepened the enmity between the Bagratuni and Artsruni dynasties. Prior to this, Afshin Muhammad had again attacked Armenia, conquered the royal city of Kars and forced Smbat to pay tribute.¹⁶⁹ When Smbat and Prince Gagik I Artsruni of Vashpurakan (r. 904–937 or 943) quarrelled over Nakhchivan, *ostikan* Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj knew how to cleverly exploit the intra-Armenian hostilities. In 908, Yusuf appointed Gagik Artsruni as king of Vashpurakan, which was located south of Smbat's kingdom. This ended Armenia's political unity after only 24 years.¹⁷⁰ The allies Yusuf and Gagik jointly attacked the now-isolated King Smbat. Smbat capitulated in 913 and, the following year, he was tortured and beheaded.

Thanks to Yusuf's eastward orientation and his imprisonment in Baghdad the years 919–922, Smbat's successor **Ashot II Erkat**, called 'the Iron' (r. 914–928), was able to stabilize the northern Kingdom of Armenia. As King Gagik of Vashpurakan had distanced himself from his benefactor Yusuf after Smbat's execution, Yusuf now directed his attacks against Gagik. Ashot II, who had been waging a skilful guerrilla war against Yusuf, thus found some measure of relief. In return, Yusuf installed Ashot Erkat's cousin, **Ashot of Bagaran** (r. ca. 915–920), in Dvin as the anti-king of Greater Armenia. War then broke out within the Bagratuni family.¹⁷¹ In the words of Catholicos Yovhannes Draskhanakert'tsi, 'for a period of two years they fell upon one another like brigands'.¹⁷² Because Yusuf's advances in the meantime had aroused concern in Byzantium, the empire promised Ashot Erkat its support. Around the year 917, *ostikan*



201. The Armenian monastery of Haghpat in the province of Lori, Armenia is one of the best preserved medieval monasteries in Armenia. It was constructed around the year 976 by Queen Khosrovanuysh, wife of King Ashot III (r. 953–77), and expanded by her sons Smbat and Kvirike. In the picture from left to right, the building of Abbot Hamazasp (1257), the small Chapel of Our Lady, behind it the detached bell tower from 1245, and on the right, the Holy Cross Church of Surb Nshan dating from 1201 with a large *gavit* in front. The *gavit* was a mostly square vestibule that served as a burial place for nobles and clerics, as well as a meeting place for the congregation and a courtroom. Photo 2013.

Yusuf performed a political volte-face when he recognized Smbat's son Ashot II as king and delivered a crown to him.¹⁷³ Nevertheless, the war between the two kings continued. Ashot II attacked his namesake Ashot of Bagaran near Dvin immediately after the *ostikan's* recognition. Ashot II lost an initial battle, prompting Catholicos Yovhannes Draskhanakert'tsi to mediate a ceasefire. In his historical writings, the catholicos regretfully notes how the three Armenian kings allowed themselves to be manipulated and incited against each other by Yusuf, putting an end to the prospect of a united Armenia.

The outcome of the war was not decided until *ostikan* Nasr al-Subuk recognized Ashot II Bagratuni as king and granted him the title of Shahanshah. He also withdrew his support from the anti-king, which is why he had to retreat to Bagaran around 920.¹⁷⁴ In 922, when the Byzantine general Yovhannes Kurkuas first attacked Armenia and then besieged Dvin, it was jointly defended by *ostikan* al-Subuk and Ashot II.¹⁷⁵ Since after his

release Yusuf was responsible for northern Iran in addition to Azerbaijan, there was less pressure on Ashot. But when Yusuf's new deputy came to Dvin with the captured princes of Syunik, Yovhannes Draskhanakert'tsi decided to leave the traditional seat of the Catholicosate for good.¹⁷⁶ From then on, the Catholicosate moved around and usually settled either in the respective centre of power of a ruler or in fortified monasteries. Yovhannes moved first to the cave monastery of Geghard, then to the fortress of Amberd near Biwrakan (fig. 195), later to Bagaran, and finally to the island of Aghtamar (Ałtamar; fig. 196) on Lake Van. From there, the Catholicosate moved to Argina, north of Ani, around 943, and to Ani in 992. After the Byzantine annexation of Ani in 1045, the next stations of the Catholicosate were Artsn near Erzurum, Sebasteia (Sivas), Tavblur near Melitene, Tsamndav near Caesarea (1066–1116), the fortress of Dzovk or Tsovk (1116–1149) in the county of Edessa, the powerful fortress of Hromkla (Qal'at al-Rum) west of Edessa (1149–1293), the fortress of Sis in Cilicia

(1293–1441) and, in 1441, back to Armenia in Etchmiadzin.¹⁷⁷ Since King Ashot II died without male heirs, his brother **Abas** (r. 928–953) succeeded him. He managed to guarantee peace and prosperity in Armenia for a quarter of a century. In his capital Kars, Abas had a new tetraconch cathedral with a central dome built from basalt blocks (fig. 194).

In the first half of the tenth century, **Gagik I Artsruni** of **Vashpurakan** (r. 904–937 or 943) was the most prominent Armenian ruler. Vashpurakan was the ancestral land of the Artsruni dynasty and primarily extended east and south-east of Lake Van. The ruling family was reluctant to be ranked below the Bagratid kings. Gagik's older brother **Ashot Artsruni** (r. nominally 887–894/6, actually 898–903) therefore unsuccessfully intervened with the *ostikan* Afshin as early as 894 in order to obtain independence for his principality from the Armenian king. In response, the enraged Smbat most likely initiated the putsch of Gagik's regent Abu Morvan (Apumrvan) Artsruni (regent 887–894/6, r. 894/96–898), when he had the young princes arrested between 894 and 896. Smbat's intrigue laid the foundation for the hostility between the two leading Armenian dynasties of Artsruni and Bagratuni. Gagik, however, managed to have the usurper murdered and put his brother Ashot back on the throne.¹⁷⁸ As already mentioned, Gagik formed a military alliance with Yusuf against King Smbat and in return was elevated by the *ostikan* to King of Vashpurakan in 908. Since Gagik wanted to withdraw from the alliance with Yusuf about six years later, he had to flee to the mountains south of Lake Van to escape Yusuf's retaliation. The king finally purchased Yusuf's concession with a high tribute payment. Upon the death of the northern Armenian king Ashot II, he called upon the most influential *nakharrar* to recognize his brother Abas as king, which helped stabilize northern Armenia.¹⁷⁹

Between 915 and 921, King Gagik had a palace, now lost to us, and the famous monastery church of the Holy Cross built of tuff stone on the island of Aghtamar (Ałtamar, fig. 196).¹⁸⁰ The four-apsidal church, whose floor plan is based on that of the Rhipsime church in Vagharshapat, is renowned for the distinctive reliefs that decorate the outer walls (fig. 197). The reliefs depict important biblical scenes such as Moses with the tablets of the Law, the sacrifice of Isaac, the fight of David against Goliath, the legends of Jonah and Daniel in the lion's den, Christ and Mary, and several military saints. The reliefs also glorify the Artsruni, especially King Gagik. On the west-facing side, the king, whose head is surrounded by a halo, offers Christ a replica of the church. Gagik's glorification is further expressed by his dimensions, for he is represented as having the same height as Christ. On the

east-facing side, the seated king is surrounded by companions and servants. This depiction is redolent of images of the then ruling caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 908–932) on his silver coins (fig. 197).¹⁸¹ Later, between 1113 and 1895, the monastery was the seat of the small Catholicosate of Aghtamar.¹⁸² The monastery was destroyed during the Armenian genocide of 1915, while the church escaped demolition in 1951 only by chance. Apart from that, the reliefs often suffered from vandalism in the twentieth century, being used for target practice.¹⁸³

Under Gagik's son and successor **Derenik-Ashot Artsruni** (r. 937 or 943–953), Vashpurakan experienced a gradual decline. Shortly after his enthronement, he was held prisoner for a short time by the emir of Her (Khoy, north-western Iran).¹⁸⁴ And, soon thereafter, the later emir of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945–967) of the **Hamdanid** dynasty forced him to cede two strategic fortresses.¹⁸⁵ The childless Derenik was followed by his brother **Abu Sahl Hamazasp** (r. 953–969 or 972), who was exposed to increasing Byzantine pressure. After his death, the kingdom was divided territorially between his three sons Ashot-Sahak, Gurgen-Khatchik and Senekerim-Hovhannes.¹⁸⁶ During the reign of **Ashot-Sahak** (r. 969/72–991), the Byzantine pressure on the two Armenian kingdoms waned temporarily due to the rebellions of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phocas. However, the king



202. Relief on the east side of the library of Haghpat monastery, thirteenth century, Armenia. The relief shows the two brothers who, along with their mother Khosrovanuysh, founded the monastery of Haghpat. Together, they hold a model of the Holy Cross Church. On the left is King Kvirike of Lori-Tashir (r. 972–89), on the right King Smbat II (r. 977–89) from Armenia. Smbat wears a turban with an Arabic inscription identifying him as 'Shahanshah [Great King], King of Ani'. Photo 2013.



203. The All-Saviour cross-stone, Armenian *khachkar*, in the passage between Surb Nshan and the Hamazasp building of Haghpat Monastery, Armenia. The approximately 2-m-high *khachkar* was made in 1273 and shows the crucifixion of Jesus in the middle, flanked by Mary and Mary Magdalene and, below them, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; on the very outside are the Twelve Apostles. Above the horizontal arm of the cross are the apostles Taddeus and Bartholomew; the sun and moon and two angels are also shown. At the top, Christ's resurrection is portrayed; he is surrounded by the archangels Gabriel and Michael and by Peter and Paul. Photo 2013.

suffered a bitter defeat against the Emirate of Goghtn around the year 989.¹⁸⁷ When Ashot died, his brother **Gurgen-Khatchik** (r. 991–1003) thrust Ashtot's sons aside and assumed the title of king. In 1001, Gurgen, together with his brother Senekerim-Hovhannes, had to swear an oath of allegiance to Emperor Basil II, which further undermined Vashpurakan's sovereignty. As Gurgen had done, his brother **Senekerim-Hovhannes** (r. 1003–1021, d. 1025 or 1027) denied his nephew the succession to the throne and instead declared himself king. At the same time, he abolished the former division of Vashpurakan, putting the entire territory under his direct control. Senekerim faced three different threats: First, supporters of the two dispossessed Artsruni secondary lines challenged his rule; second, Vashpurakan's army was unable to stop the devastating raids of Turkic horsemen from Azerbaijan, as was shown between 1016 and 1021;¹⁸⁸ third, it also was not able to halt a Byzantine invasion.

6.2 The Byzantine annexation of Armenia

Like the kingdoms and emirates of South Caucasus, Byzantium used the slowly emerging weakness of the Abbasids after the death of al-Mutawakkil to regain areas lost in the east. However, the reconquest of Northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Cilicia had top priority. The wars against the neighbouring Kingdom of Bulgaria repeatedly interrupted the Byzantine eastern offensive, which only regained its intensity after the Byzantine–Bulgarian peace treaty of 927. Melitene was captured in 934, Amida in 942, Theodosiopolis (today's Erzurum) in 949, Tarsos in Cilicia in 965, Taron in 968 and Antioch in 969.¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, two assaults on Dvin failed in the 920s, and in the year 974 Emperor John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976) had to break off his campaign against Ashot III of Ani (r. 953–977) empty-handed. As the historian Matthew of Edessa (d. ca. 1144) reports, the Armenian princes – including Ashot-Sahak of Vashpurakan – for once rallied around King Ashot III when the emperor advanced. Faced with an Armenian army of 80,000 men, the emperor negotiated peace with Ashot. The latter, though, had to provide the emperor, for a fee, with 10,000 men for his campaign against the Abbasids.¹⁹⁰ Finally, in three campaigns (1001, 1014, and 1021/2), Basil II reconquered all the territories he had ceded to David of Tao in 979, as well as David's ancestral land of Tao. As his next goal, Basil had his eyes on the annexation of the Armenian plateau. In light of his military inferiority and growing pressure from Byzantium, Senekerim-Hovhannes lost his nerve. Towards the end of 1021, he surrendered his kingdom to Emperor Basil, who assigned to him vast territory in the region of Sebasteia (Sivas).¹⁹¹ Basil quickly

sent imperial troops to Vashpurakan, where he placed the new province under the command of a *strategos*. From then on, Basil increased the pressure on the northern Armenian kingdom.

In Kars, King Abas was succeeded by his son **Ashot III** (r. 953–977), during whose reign the Catholicos Anania Mokatsi (in office ca. 943–967) tried to further strengthen the independence of the Armenian Church. He interrupted the existing theological discussions with Byzantium and refused to recognize the validity of Byzantine Orthodox baptism. This meant that Orthodox Armenians who had been baptized had to be baptized a second time, contradicting the canonical prohibition on administering baptism twice. In 958, Anania put an end to the imminent schism with the Archdiocese of Syunik by appointing a new metropolitan bishop for the insubordinate see. The ousted prelate had been in discussion with the Albanian Catholicosate to accept the Chalcedonian Creed. The abrupt breakdown of the dialogue with Byzantium mirrored the increasing political tensions. Thus when Anania's successor Vahan I (in office ca. 967–969) began to move closer to the Chalcedonian tradition and creed, Ashot III had him immediately deposed. Vahan then fled to Vashpurakan.¹⁹² In the first year of his reign, Ashot attempted to conquer the small Emirate of Dabil (Dvin), which formed a wedge in the territory of Greater Armenia. His attack failed, however, because of the strong fortifications of Dvin. A year later, a Sallarid army drove out the Shaddadid occupiers.¹⁹³ In 961, Ashot moved the capital from Kars to the nearby town of Ani, where he began to build a massive ring wall (fig. 200). Since Ani was situated along the very important trade route from Baghdad to Trabzon on the Black Sea, the city grew rapidly at the expense of the older trading metropolis of Dvin. In the same year, Ashot was forced to hand over the old capital of Kars in the region of Vanand to his brother **Mushegh** (r. 961/62–984) and to grant him the title of king. In 972, he transferred the district of Lori-Tashir to his youngest son **Kvirike** (r. 972–989), who also declared himself king seven years later. Northern Armenia now consisted of one kingdom and two sub-kingdoms, making it even more difficult to arrive at a unified strategy in the face of hostile neighbours. Although Ashot managed to mobilize the military support of all the important Armenian princes in response to the threat of invasion by John Tzimiskes, this remained an exception. Ashot's successor was his oldest son **Smbat II** (r. 977–989), whose accession to the throne was challenged by his jealous uncle Mushegh of Kars. Smbat continued with the capital's fortification begun by his father.

Following Smbat was his brother **Gagik I** of Ani (r. 989–1017 or 1020). He had a powerful army, which prevented

Emperor Basil from attacking Ani head-on. Gagik pursued an active foreign policy and, in the 990s, he participated in the coalition led by David of Tao against the emir of the Rawwadids, Muhammad Abu'l-Haija.¹⁹⁴ Gagik also managed to gain control of Dvin, Goghtn, Tashir-Dzoraget and Vayots Dzor.¹⁹⁵ Above all, he further promoted the capital's expansion.¹⁹⁶ Among the outstanding buildings is the cathedral completed in 1010, whose nave was decorated on the interior with tapestries (fig. 207).¹⁹⁷ Equally impressive were the Gregory Church donated by Prince Grigor Pahlavuni, with a dodecagonal exterior, and the Gregory Church donated by King Gagik, whose model was the already-collapsed Cathedral of Zvartnots (fig. 204). As Stepanos Taronetsi (Asofik) observed:

At that time, when the year 1000 from the Incarnation or becoming man of our Lord was finally reached, in the days of the Emperor Basil, Gagik, king of Armenia, conceived an excellent idea. He planned to fashion in the city of Ani a replica, both in terms of size and decoration,

of the magnificent church build in K'atak'udašt [Vagharshapat] in the name of St. Grigor, which had fallen down and was in ruins.¹⁹⁸

The outer ground plan of King Gagik's church was in the shape of a thirty-two-sided polygon; however, the presumably three-stepped rotunda had been built without buttressing and therefore had to be reinforced in 1013. Despite this measure, the church still toppled in the eleventh century. Another stunning example at Ani was the Church of the Redeemer, consecrated in 1036. It featured a circular floor plan consisting of a polygon with nineteen sides. Above it was a tambour with 24 blind arcades, while the interior was divided into eight apses. The division of the ground plan into nineteen segments was unusual for the time. Its symbolism, moreover, is uncertain.¹⁹⁹ The nineteen may stand for the sum of twelve, symbolizing the twelve apostles, and seven, indicating the seven days of creation. Or perhaps the architect aimed for a perfect proportion: calculating the square root of 360°, which is 18.97, he may have rounded up to 19.²⁰⁰



204. The Armenian Gregory church in Ani, which was founded by King Gagik and modelled after Zvartnots Cathedral. The audacious structure was erected between 1001 and 1005, but collapsed later in the eleventh century. It was never rebuilt. Eastern Anatolia, Turkey. Photo 2016.



205. The former Marmashen monastery, Shirak Province, Armenia, served as the burial place for the Pahlavuni dynasty. The cathedral on the left was consecrated according to an inscription in 1029, plundered by the Seljuks in 1064, and rebuilt under the Zakarids in 1225. On the right is the smaller St Peter's Church from the eleventh century. Photo 2015.

After Gagik's death, the political situation of the northern Armenian kingdom deteriorated rapidly. His sons **Hovhannes-Smbat III** (r. 1017/20–1040/41) and **Ashot IV** (r. 1017/20–1040/41) quarrelled fiercely and divided the kingdom. The eldest son, Hovhannes, took over Ani and the surrounding area while Ashot resided in Talin. Dvin, however, had fallen to the Shaddadids. As Hovhannes was beleaguered by the Bagratid king of Kars **Abas** (r. 984–1029) and feared the revenge of Emperor Basil because he had supported the Georgian king in the Byzantine–Georgian war of 1021/2, he decided to defuse the imminent conflict with Basil by offering a deferred surrender. To this end, Hovhannes dispatched Catholicos Petros I Getadartz (in office 1019–1054) to deliver his will to Basil. The fearful king of Ani proposed bequeathing Armenia to Basil if the emperor granted him a reprieve until his death. Basil agreed. The two enemy brothers, Hovhannes and Ashot, died almost simultaneously around 1040/41, after Ashot had tried to have his brother murdered; Byzantium then immediately claimed the pledged inheritance. In Ani, a power

struggle instantly broke out between the *sparapet* Vahram Pahlavuni, who placed Ashot IV's son **Gagik II** (r. 1042–1045, d. 1079) on the throne in a bid to preserve Armenia's independence, and the pro-Byzantine minister Sargis Haykazn. Gagik managed to stand his ground for two years and fended off an attack by the Muslim governor of Dvin, Abu'l-Aswar Shavur. But Gagik then imprudently took the advice of the disloyal minister Sargis to negotiate in Constantinople. When he arrived there, Emperor Constantine IX detained him and forced him to cede Armenia.²⁰¹ Constantine proceeded to order a large army to Ani, but it failed against the heavily fortified city and was defeated in an Armenian sortie. In 1045, Catholicos Petros, who served as governor, capitulated against the will of the nobles and surrendered the city to the Byzantines, who appointed their own governor. However, the Byzantine attack on Dvin foundered in 1046, and King **Gagik-Abas II** of Kars (r. 1029–1065, d. 1080) only handed over his small kingdom to Byzantium in 1065, one year after the Seljuks had conquered the neighbouring town of Ani. As with Gagik II before him, lands in



206. The former Armenian monastery of Vorotnavank is located in the valley of the River Vorotan; like the monastery of Haghpat, it was donated by Queen Khosrovanuysh. The large church of St Stepanos dates from the 990s, the smaller one next to it on the left from the eleventh century. Photo 2015.

Cappadocia were conceded to Gagik-Abas, which were actually south of the ones that had been given to the Artsruni in 1021.²⁰² From this point on, it would take another 853 years before a truly sovereign Armenian state would once again emerge on the Armenian plateau.²⁰³

However, the ex-king Gagik II, who was expelled from his kingdom, nurtured an irrepressible hatred of the Byzantines who had robbed him of his heritage, as can be seen in a legendary episode narrated by Kirakos Gandzaketsi:

Gagik, king of Kars [in fact Ani] went to see the Byzantine emperor, since he was under his authority. Returning home, he went to Caesarea. He had heard that a certain Markos, the metropolitan of Caesarea, had a dog which was given the name Armen, on account of the hatred which the Greeks have toward the Armenians [...] King Gagik went and took lodging with the metropolitan, who received him gladly. When they were in their cups, the king spoke: 'I have heard that you have a fine dog. Show me, let me see him.' The metropolitan said: 'There he is, by the door across from us.' And the king said: 'Call him so he will come here.' The metropolitan then called the dog, but by another name, not its real one. However, the dog did not jump up, and did not come in. The king said: 'Now call him by his real name.' And as soon as the metropolitan

uttered 'Armen, Armen' the dog immediately bounded up and came. The king asked: 'Why do you call him by that name?' The metropolitan answered: 'Because he is small [i.e. brave]'. Then the king ordered his servants: 'Bring a large sack and throw the dog in it.' They were barely able to do this.[...] Then the king said: 'Throw the bishop in there too, so I may see if the dog is as brave as he says.' Now the bishop wept and pleaded with the king to forgive his crime. But the king angrily declaimed: 'Strike that dog with a goad so they will eat each other up.' And they struck the dog. The animal, smarting from the pain, mauled the metropolitan, tearing him to bits with its teeth and paws until he died. Then the king said: 'Now you know whether Armen is brave or not.' Then [Gagik] sacked the bishopric.

Years later, Byzantines captured Gagik and threw him from the battlements of a fortress to the ground to avenge Metropolitan Markos.²⁰⁴ The Byzantine expansion to the north-east had in the eleventh century a new quality that distinguished it from its previous offensive policy and from the Arab wars of conquest. Whereas their previous military operations usually left the leading *nakharar* in their functions and estates, provided they subordinated themselves, paid tribute and provided cavalries, Byzantium now pursued a strategy of resettlement. Initially it

concerned 'heretical' Paulicians and Tondrakians, but now it was the nobles and their retinues. As the ensuing 25 years would bear out, Byzantium committed a grave and irreparable strategic error with the destruction of the kingdoms of Vashpurakan and northern Armenia. The dissolution of Armenia, whose people had exhibited fierce resistance in prior centuries, meant that Byzantium had also ruined two buffer states that could quickly mobilize an army of 80,000 warriors. This ability was demonstrated in 974 under the threat of John Tzimiskes. Now, most of the *nakharar*,²⁰⁵ who had their own troops, had left their homeland for Cappadocia or Cilicia, either voluntarily or under pressure. Because many of the nobles had settled in Cappadocia and disbanded their private troops, they hardly resisted the Seljuk onslaught, and several abandoned districts were seized by Muslim Kurds.²⁰⁶ Rather than ward off the incursion that began in 1057/58 with the plundering of Melitene and continued

with the pillaging of Sebasteia (1059) and Caesarea (1067), the displaced nobles fled to Cilicia. Other *nakharar* had kept their small private armies and moved into the high valleys of the southern Taurus Mountains, where they entrenched themselves in heavily barricaded castles. These included the ancestors of the royal Rubenids and Hethumids, who from 1080 challenged the authority of the Byzantine governors and formed autonomous enclaves.²⁰⁷ Cilicia was one of the few regions of Anatolia that was not controlled by the Seljuks. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the *nakharar* began to occupy the plains of Cilicia and lay the groundwork of the exile state of Armenian Cilicia.²⁰⁸ However, several members of important Armenian aristocratic dynasties, as well as numerous representatives of the lower nobility, known as *azat*, fled to Georgia, where they were held in high esteem because of their military fighting strength. Among the great Armenian dynasties that rose to



207. In the front left, the mosque of Ani, eastern Anatolia, Turkey, which is thought to have been built by Emir Manuchihr (r. 1072–ca. 1118). Whether the minaret and the prayer hall were built at the same time is debated. It is conceivable that the emir first had the minaret built as a free-standing victory tower, analogous to the Karakhanid or Ghaznavid victory towers of Central Asia, and that the prayer house was added in the twelfth century. In the centre of the picture stands the cathedral, consecrated in 1010; its architect, the Armenian Trdat, was active in both Armenia and Byzantium. Between 989 and 994, Trdat rebuilt the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which collapsed as a result of an earthquake. In the background, right, the south-western half of the Church of the Redeemer from the year 1036, whose north-eastern half has collapsed. Photo 2016.



208. The church of St Gregory, founded around 1215 by the merchant Tigran Honents in Ani; on the right in the picture is the River Achuryan, which here forms the border between Armenia and Turkey. The *gavit* in front of the church has collapsed. Photo 2016.

the innermost circle of power in Georgia were the families of Zakarian, known in Georgia as Mkhargrdzeli, Orbelian (Orbeli) and Artsruni (Mankaberdeli). Other Armenians fled from the Seljuks either to Crimea, where Armenian communities had existed since the eighth century, or to Galicia, Volhynia and Podolia in the Principality of Kiev.

The *theme* (province) of Armenia was now deprived of its native defensive power, and the Byzantine garrisons were so weak that the Byzantine north-eastern border was virtually defenceless. Emperor Constantine IX had not only deported the *nakharar* and their followers into the interior of the empire, but had also disbanded the Armenian border troops of the *theme*, which consisted of paramilitary peasants, in order to maximize tax revenues. The twelfth-century Byzantine historian Ioannis Zonaras critically noted:

*Since there were territories that did not pay tribute to the emperors but [...] guarded the bottlenecks and blocked the barbarians' passage to the countries under Roman control, he now imposed taxes on these territories and dismissed the guards [border troops]. And therefore it was made very easy for the barbarians to invade the Roman lands.*²⁰⁹

Furthermore, the Byzantine armies consisted of heterogeneous and poorly motivated troop units, which sometimes behaved disloyally.

In the end, the stationing of Byzantine garrisons and administrations in the Armenian territories led to the establishment of a Byzantine Orthodox clergy, while, conversely, the exodus of tens of thousands of Armenians to Asia Minor resulted in the rapid expansion of the Armenian-Miaphysite church in the empire. In short, Church hierarchies emerged in parallel that were more or less opposed to each other.

6.3 The Seljuks conquer Armenia

The first two decades of Turkmen looting campaigns were instigated by individual autonomous tribal leaders operating from Azerbaijan or Mesopotamia. The decisive victory of the Oghuz brothers Tughril and Chaghri over the Ghaznavid Kingdom at the Battle of Dandankan in 1040 fundamentally changed the lie of the land, as the brothers divided up the territory between Tashkent and Byzantium. On the one hand, Chaghri kept the already conquered territories in Central Asia including Khorasan; on the other hand, Sultan Tughril and his descendants were allotted all the lands they were to later seize west of Khorasan, i.e. the Abbasid Empire and the Byzantine Empire.²¹⁰ From then on, the Iraqiyya's campaigns formed part of the Seljuk conquest strategy. These included the attacks on Vashpurakan in 1045 and 1047, on Artsn near Erzurum (1048), on Melitene (1057/8) and on Sebasteia (1059).²¹¹ Sultan Tughril also led campaigns himself, not only against the Abbasids, but also in Azerbaijan and in 1054 against Theodosiopolis, which he ultimately failed to capture. Tughril's conquest of Baghdad in 1055 and his return there three years later interrupted the war campaigns against Byzantium headed by the sultan. They were resumed by his successor Alp Arslan, however, with even greater intensity. He conquered Ani in 1064 and Kars in 1065; on 26 August 1071 at Manzikert, north of Lake Van, he claimed an outstanding victory over Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (r. 1068–1071, d. 1072), whom he took prisoner. The sultan was tactically second to none and benefited from a superior intelligence network. By contrast, the imperial army was made up of ten different ethnic groups and unreliable. Even before the battle began, the Norman mercenary leader Ursel de Bailleul (d. 1078) refused to fight; soon after, the Pecheneg and Kipchak mercenaries of Turkic origin defected to the Seljuks. The decisive factor, however, was the betrayal of the commander of the strategic reserves, Andronikos Doukas. During the battle, he spread the baseless rumour that the emperor had been killed and he cleared the battlefield with the rearguard. Romanos and the main troops were then quickly surrounded and the emperor captured.²¹² Andronikos Doukas sabotaged the outcome of the battle because he, as a representative of the Doukas family, under no circumstances wanted to grant victory to the emperor, who came from the rival Diogenes family. The Seljuk conquest of Armenia accelerated the Armenian emigration to Cappadocia and Cilicia.

The defeat at Manzikert turned into an existential catastrophe for the Byzantine Empire owing to the intrigues of the

Doukas family, which triggered a ten-year civil war. In addition, Emperor Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–1078) revoked the peace treaty concluded by the overthrown Emperor Romanos with Alp Arslan, which induced the enraged Sultan to carry on the war.²¹³ Only now did the Seljuks begin a large-scale conquest of Asia Minor, which culminated in the establishment of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum (1077–1243); Byzantium could only manage to hold on to coastal regions in Asia Minor. The Byzantine pretenders to the throne and insurgent military leaders even hastened the Seljuk conquest of Anatolia and the Turkification of Asia Minor themselves by recruiting Turkish warlords and mercenaries to fight their Byzantine rivals. For example, in 1077, the general Nikephoros Botaneiates recruited the Seljuk army commander and future Sultan of Rum, Süleyman ibn Qutalmış (d. 1086), to overthrow Emperor Michael VII, which opened the way for the Seljuks to the Aegean coast. A short time earlier, Byzantium had commissioned the Turkish warlord Artuq ibn Aksab to eliminate the rebellious Norman de Bailleul from Galatia.²¹⁴ The ruthless pretenders to the throne ignored the fact that Turkmen and Seljuks were now not mere mercenaries like the Pechenegs and Kipchaks, but conquerors who came to stay. The aspirants to the imperial crown were so deluded that they sold Anatolia to the Seljuks and Turkmen in order to acquire Constantinople. As a consequence, they not only lost most of Anatolia, but also abandoned any hope of ever regaining a foothold in the South Caucasus. Unsurprisingly, in 1074 the Byzantine commander for the north-east, Gregory Pakourianos, handed over all the fortresses and territories still under his control to the Georgian king George II (r. 1072–1089) and then returned to Constantinople.²¹⁵

Not all Armenian nobles fled the Seljuks; some sided with the invaders. Among them was the founder of the Muslim Danishmendid dynasty. If we follow the historian Seta Dadoyan, two sons of the Byzantine general Liparit III called Ivane and Hrahad joined the Seljuks. Ivane rebelled against the Byzantines when he was forbidden to acquire the city of Theodosiopolis, and offered his services to the Seljuks. If Ivane was an opportunist, Hrahad (d. 1104) was a loyal follower of the Seljuks. He grew up as hostage of Sultan Tughril and converted to Islam. He advanced to commander and courtier of Alp Arslan as well as becoming tutor (Persian *danishmend*) of his sons. After the Battle of Manzikert, Hrahad, who was called Gümüştegin in Turkish, conquered areas in northern Cappadocia.²¹⁶ There he founded the dynasty of the **Danishmendids** (later 1070s–ca. 1173), whose territory bordered the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and included Neocaesarea

(Niksar), Sivas, Caesarea and Melitene. According to Matthew of Edessa, Emir Danishmend was indeed of Armenian descent.²¹⁷

In Anatolia and South Caucasus, the Seljuks did not rule directly, but transferred conquered lands to Turkish or Turkmen commanders who took the oath of allegiance; they also occasionally left Christian rulers in their domains. Several principalities, called *beyliks* in Turkish, were formed in the once Armenian east of Anatolia. The largest *beylik* was that of the **Akhlat-shahs**, who also called themselves **Shah Armen** (King of the Armenians) (1100–1207), whose territory spanned around Lake Van. Neighbouring *beyliks* included those of the **Saltukids** (1071–1202) near Erzurum, who were allied with the small **emirate of Kars**, and the **Mangujakids** in the area of Tephrike and Keltzine (Erzincan). The latter existed until 1252. On the other hand, the Greek dynasty of **Gabras** had ruled (with interruptions) quasi-autonomously in the former *theme* of **Khaldia** (ca. 1075–1204) on the Pontic Black Sea coast since Theodore Gabras (d. 1099) reconquered Trabzon from the Seljuks in around 1075.²¹⁸ Two smaller kingdoms of Armenia remained as vassal states. Lori submitted to Alp Arslan in 1064 and was annexed by Georgia in 1118. Lori, however, retained the rank of an Armenian kingdom.²¹⁹ Finally, Syunik escaped a Seljuk attack because King Senekerim went to Isfahan to submit to Sultan Malik Shah (r. 1072–1092) in person. Nevertheless, Turkmen regularly plundered Syunik until its collapse in 1166.²²⁰

6.4 Ani under the rule of the Shaddadids

A few years after conquering Ani, Sultan Alp Arslan entrusted the former kingdom of Ani to the Shaddadid **Manuchihr** (r. 1072–ca. 1118), who was solemnly installed as ruler in 1072.²²¹ The emir invited the exiled Armenian nobles to return and repaired the war damage. He also supposedly had a large mosque built. In 1092, Ani resisted the siege by Najm al-Din al-Ghazi ibn Artuq (d. 1122), the future ruler of Mardin. Manuchihr's successor **Abu'l-Aswar Shavur** (r. ca. 1118–1124) lacked his father's resilience. In view of the threat from neighbouring warlords, he wanted to sell Ani to the emir of Kars. In response, the Armenian majority of Ani turned to the Georgian King David IV, who took the city without a fight in 1124 and exiled the emir to Abkhazia. King David appointed **Abuleth Orbelian** (in office 1124–1126) as governor.²²² But Abu'l-Aswar's son **Fadhl IV** (r. 1126–1130) escaped from exile and acquired troops from the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar (r. 1118–1153), which he used to lay siege to Ani. Since David's successor King Demetre (r. 1125–1156) did not send reinforcements to relieve Ani, Abuleth surrendered the city to Fadhl. Four years

later, Fadhl was strangled by a traitor, and he was followed by his brothers **Khushchikr** (r. 1130–?) and **Mahmud** (dates unknown). In 1154, Mahmud's son **Fakr al-Din** (r. ?–1155), together with the Georgian king Demetre, lured the Saltukid emir Izz al-Din into a trap. Izz al-Din had refused to give him his daughter as his wife. The Georgians destroyed the Saltukid army, while the captured Izz al-Din was released only after paying a high ransom.

Unrest within the population led to the fall of the emirs Fakr and **Fadhl V ibn Mahmud** (r. 1155–1161). The Georgian king George III (r. 1156–1184) subsequently occupied Ani in 1161 and appointed **Ivane Orbelian** (in office 1161–1164) as governor. A Muslim coalition of the *beyliks* of the Akhlat-shahs, Saltukids and Artuqids suffered a total defeat in the same year when they tried to snatch Ani back from the Georgians. Two years later, however, a second coalition led by *atabeg* Shams al-Din Eldigüz defeated the Georgian king, who was forced to hand over Ani to Fadhl's brother **Shahanshah ibn Mahmud** (r. 1164–1174). Then, ten years later in 1174, George reoccupied Ani and re-appointed **Ivane Orbelian** (in office 1174–1176) as governor. But, already in 1176, he returned the city to Shahanshah, who most likely had to recognize Georgian sovereignty. It is uncertain why King George again installed **Shahanshah** alias **Sultan ibn Mahmud** (second reign 1176–1198/99). He may have fallen under renewed pressure from the Eldigüzids. Alternatively, the rebellion led by Ivane Orbelian in 1177 may have been on the horizon, so that the king preferred to give Ani back to the emir rather than to leave this important city in the hands of the recalcitrant Ivane. The emir died in the year 1198/9, and the city fell to the brothers Zakare (d. 1212) and Ivane (d. 1227) Mkhargrdzeli (in Armenian, Zakarian); they were the two leading commanders of Armenian origin under the Georgian queen Tamar (r. 1184–1213). In 1201, Tamar confirmed the brothers as feudal lords of Ani. The city experienced a final period of prosperity under the Zakarians and benefited from the overall upswing of the cities in the Georgian Kingdom as well as from the revival of international trade. The previous rule of the Shaddadids had promoted the urban development and monetarization of Ani and the surrounding region, thus laying the foundations for economic growth. However, Ani suffered a setback when the Sultan of Ardabil attacked and looted Ani during Lent in 1208. Zakare Mkhargrdzeli retaliated a year later during Ramadan with an equally brutal attack on Ardabil.²²³

In 1226, the garrison of Ani commanded by the septuagenarian Ivane Zakarian succeeded in resisting the siege by Shah Jalal al-Din Manguberdi (r. 1224–1231) of Khwarazm. Ten or thirteen years later, however, the Mongols demanded the city's

209. The evangelist Matthew. The Mughni Gospels, eleventh century cod. 7736, from Matenadaran, Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Armenia.



surrender.²²⁴ As the contemporary Kirakos Gandzaketsi reports, the inhabitants made the grave mistake of killing the Mongolian ambassador. The Mongols, under the command of their general Chormaqan, stormed the city and massacred the entire population, heralding the decline of Ani. The fate of the neighbouring town of Kars showed that even an immediate surrender did not save a town from destruction. Kirakos reports:

*When this city saw what the Tartars had done to the city of Ani, it brought the key of the city before them conscientiously and with haste. But [... the Tartars] did the same to them as they did to Ani, by robbing it of its possessions and killing its inhabitants and destroying the city.*²²⁵

As Rubruck and the Nestorian monks Markos and Rabban Bar Sauma confirmed, Ani was subsequently rebuilt. Rubruck visited the city on 2 February 1255 and was greatly impressed by the defensive walls,²²⁶ and the two Nestorian monks from China visited Ani in 1280.

*And when they arrived at the city of Animto [Ani], and saw the monasteries and churches therein, they marvelled at the great extent of the buildings and at their magnificence.*²²⁷

About eight years after Rubruck's visit of Ani, the Mkhargrdzeli family had to sell the city to the famous Persian *sahib-e divan* (vizier and finance minister) in the service of four Mongol Ilkhans Shams al-Din Juvaini.²²⁸ The city's final decline began in the fourteenth century.

The history of cities like Ani, Ganja or Dvin during the early Middle Ages is illustrative of the events in the whole southern Caucasus. Although the region was largely part of the two great powers, Byzantium and the Caliphate, there was rarely a lasting peace. This can be attributed to four main factors: firstly, the southern Caucasus was a border region fought over between the often hostile great powers. Secondly, there was a strong desire for independence in the mountainous area, so that any attempt to impose sovereignty by larger states was resisted. Thirdly, religious animosities between the two great monotheistic religions accentuated the differences between the great powers and offered religious fanatics justification for violent acts of repression. Nonetheless, at the local level, the question of religious affiliation was seldom an obstacle to cross-religious alliances. Christian princes in particular were not afraid to enter into a military alliance with a Muslim ruler against another Christian prince. The reverse was rarer, though, as intra-Muslim cohesion was stronger. At the same time, neither religion was a monolith, but marked by interdenominational conflicts. Fourthly, the area was repeatedly the target of raids from the northern Caucasus, in which invaders were able to quickly retreat with their spoils behind the Greater Caucasus. On the other hand, many of these clashes took place between armies of various sizes, and, except for the looting, the civilian population was spared to some extent. With the emergence of the Iraqiyya nomads, a new dimension of war appeared, namely the deliberate, comprehensive destruction of agricultural zones for the purpose of converting them into horse pastures. In this respect, then, warfare was also specifically directed against the civilian population.

IX

Outlook

'It is as difficult to subdue the Chechens as it is to erase the Caucasus.'

Russian General and Decembrist revolutionary MIKHAIL FYODOROVICH ORLOV (1788–1842)¹



210. The medieval fortress of Levonkla, called Şahmeran Kale in Turkish, Cilicia, south-eastern Anatolia, Turkey. The fortress was probably constructed by the Armenian ruler Leon I (r. as prince 1187–98/9, as king of Armenian Cilicia 1198/9–1219). The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia was an Armenian exile kingdom; it existed from 1198/9 to 1375; before that, there were autonomous Armenian principalities in Cilicia from the 1070s. It owed its long existence to a skilful see-saw policy between crusaders and Mongols, which permitted it to hold its ground against Byzantium and neighbouring Muslim states. Photo 2018.

For the Caucasus region, the beginning of the High Middle Ages in the eleventh century marked a turning point involving far-reaching ethnic and political upheavals. These changes were triggered by the migrations of Turco-Mongolian peoples and the forcible land seizures they made. While the earlier immigration of tribes of Western Turks, which gave rise to the Khazars, had been limited to the north-east of the Caucasus, the immigration of the Oghuz Iraqiyya Turkmen and the closely related Seljuks now concerned not only the entire South Caucasus, but also the neighbouring great powers: Byzantium and the Abbasid Caliphate. The Seljuks took over political power in the caliphate and left spiritual authority to the caliph; at the same time, Turkic Oghuz tribes settled in large numbers in north-western Iran, where today they form the majority of the population. These four provinces² contain about eight million Turkic-speaking Azeris,³ the other

Iranian provinces a further 8 million. The neighbouring Republic of Azerbaijan has about 9 million, which makes a total of about 25 million Azeris. The present call for unification of North and South Azerbaijan has caused tensions and mistrust between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. For the Christian empire of Byzantium, the effects of the expansion of Turkic-speaking peoples were even more dramatic: Byzantium disappeared as a political entity in 1453, and by the time the Turkish Republic was founded at the end of October 1923, the combined Greek and Armenian population of Turkey had fallen below 1 per cent.

As explained in the second volume of the present work, the neighbouring kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia experienced a diametrically different fate in the eleventh century. Armenia continued to be shaped by the political rivalries among the leading *nakharars*, which made the formation of a unified state impossible.

As a result, the relatively small Armenian kingdoms were easy prey for the Byzantine expansion to the east, which resulted in many nobles settling in Cilicia together with their armed cohorts. The Armenian exile state in Cilicia soon became independent from Byzantium and conducted a shrewd balancing act between crusaders, local emirs, Byzantium, Mamluks and Mongols. But bloody disagreements over the questions of royal succession heralded the decline at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The young Kingdom of Georgia, on the other hand, remained intact despite rebellious aristocrats and Seljuk attacks. Thanks to a standing army, it became a regional great power by the beginning of the twelfth century, only to bow to the practically invincible Mongols in the 1220s and 1230s. Although Georgia did not actually perish, it nonetheless disintegrated into small vassal kingdoms and principalities, which managed to survive until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Turkic peoples, the numerically few Mongols never settled in the Caucasus.

The Mongols marked the beginning of a 750-year period of foreign rule in the Caucasus, almost 600 years of which were under Muslim domination. For the more or less autonomous Muslim emirates of Azerbaijan, the vassal status under another Muslim power was less oppressive than for the Christian populations of Georgia and Armenia. The northern Caucasus belonged to the Mongol Khanate of the Golden Horde, the southern Caucasus to the Mongol Il-Khanate of Iran, and then to the Turkmen tribal federations of the Qara Qoyunlu and the Aq Qoyunlu. The campaigns of the Central Asian emir Timur-e Lang in the southern Caucasus wreaked havoc in the last two decades of the fourteenth century. Nevertheless, Timur neither succeeded in subjugating Georgia nor in Islamizing the Georgians. He was forced to recognize the kingdom as a Christian state. From the sixteenth century onwards, the South Caucasus was again fought over by two regional great powers of different denominations and divided among them. In the west, the Sunni Ottomans were dominant; in the east it was Persia's Shiite Safavids. The political situation thus resembled earlier circumstances, in which the South Caucasian peoples had been controlled in essential questions by the neighbouring great powers, Rome and later Byzantium, and Persia and the caliphate. The Christian religion played an important role in both Armenia and Georgia in preserving national identity.

The Caucasus came into Russia's sights towards the end of the eighteenth century. After the decisive victory over the Khanate of Crimea in 1783, Russia's next strategic goal was to conquer Constantinople and thus gain control of the Bosphorus

and Dardanelles. This way it would be able to gain year-round ice-free access to the open seas. A second long-term goal was to gain access to the Persian Gulf and thus to the Indian Ocean. Since both objectives could be achieved via the Caucasus, the tsarist empire penetrated this region in stages. Following the annexation of Georgia, two wars were fought against Persia until 1828, in which most of the South Caucasus was conquered. Georgia in particular was subjected to intensive Russification campaigns. Ultimately, Russia did not achieve its strategic goals because of the superior British fleet, which in the nineteenth century repeatedly rescued Constantinople from a Russian takeover. While the Christian peoples of the South Caucasus initially welcomed the Russians and resistance in Azerbaijan was limited, the Muslim mountain peoples of the North Caucasus put up bitter resistance for decades. This only began to crumble in 1859 with the capitulation of Shamil, the political leader and imam of the Muslim mountain peoples of Dagestan.

The First World War precipitated major political upheavals in the Caucasus region. The regions of western Armenia suffered greatly from the Russian-Turkish war, especially Erzurum, Kars and Van, whereas the majority of the other regions of the Caucasus were initially spared from the fighting. The Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire, however, faced systematic persecution and mass deportation from 1915 onwards. There had already been serious Armenian pogroms in the years 1894-6. When the Armenians successfully resisted land seizures by the Kurds, the Ottoman military and irregular troops intervened on the Kurds' behalf. Tens of thousands of Armenians subsequently took flight to the Russian Empire. The First Balkan War of 1912-13 only heightened tensions between the Turks, Kurds and Armenians, who were considered disloyal sympathizers of Russia in Ottoman government circles, since the Muslim refugees from the Balkans were also settled in Eastern Anatolia. After the disastrous Ottoman defeat against Russia in the battle of Sarıkamış near Erzurum in the winter of 1914-15, the army commander and war minister Enver Pasha sought to divert attention from his own strategic mistakes. He therefore branded the Armenians as traitors and internal enemies and ordered the ethnic cleansing of the Turkish Empire of its Armenians and Christian Assyrians. An estimated one million Armenians and 250,000 Assyrians lost their lives in the genocide; 600,000 to 800,000 fled to Russia or to the large cities such as Istanbul or Smyrna (İzmir).

The collapse of the Russian army after the October Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918 were exploited by the peoples of the Caucasus to declare their

sovereignty. In the north, the Republic of the Union of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, also called the Mountain Republic of the North Caucasus, came into being, while, in the south, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic was established. Nonetheless, at the end of May 1918, after five weeks of internal tensions, the Transcaucasian Federal Republic split up again into the republics of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. But the young republics of the South Caucasus were granted no reprieve in order to constitute their institutional structures and resolve their conflicts. In the end, the withdrawal of Soviet Russia from the war offered the Ottoman Empire the opportunity not only to secure land in the South Caucasus to compensate for the loss of territory in Palestine and Mesopotamia, but also to gain access to the Azerbaijani oil fields of Baku, where the Baku Soviet Commune had seized power. Enver Pasha's Pan-Turkish vision was even more ambitious: alongside the conquest of the South Caucasus, he wanted to occupy northern Iran in order to establish a territorial link with the new, conservative and mostly Muslim republics of Central Asia and with Afghanistan. This Pan-Turkish alliance was then to attack British India from Afghanistan, which was exposed militarily because so many Indian troops were occupied on the Western Front. In this turbulent situation, the Caucasian republics ended up losing control of their own destiny. Armenia had to agree to a humiliating peace treaty with the Ottomans and Georgia placed itself under a German quasi-protectorate in order to avert an Ottoman attack. In Azerbaijan, a Turkish army occupied Baku and Great Britain intervened twice militarily.

After the end of the First World War, the sovereignty of the Caucasus states did not last long, because Soviet Russia claimed all the territories that had been under the tsarist empire. The Union of the Mountain Peoples had already been largely smashed by the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army under Anton Denikin in the winter of 1918–19, and the Red Army occupied the territory in March 1920. In the south, Soviet Russia took over Azerbaijan in April 1920, Armenia in November 1920 and Georgia in March 1921, putting an end to the independence aspirations of Caucasian peoples for another seventy years. As in Central Asia, it became apparent that Lenin's declaration of the right of self-determination of peoples applied only to Western European colonies, but not to Russia's peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus. And, as in Central Asia, some of the border demarcations between the Soviet republics and autonomous regions in the Caucasus proved disastrous as soon as the Soviet republics became sovereign states following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, to accommodate the then leading

Turkish politician and army commander Mustafa Kemal, later called Atatürk, the Russian Soviet Republic assigned in 1921 the regions Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan, which were inhabited by large communities of Armenians, to mainly Muslim Azerbaijan. This laid the foundation for the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey that has been going on now for more than thirty years.

In contrast to Central Asia, whose politicians played a subordinate role in the centres of power of Moscow and Leningrad, several political figures from the Caucasus wielded power in the first few decades of Soviet history, above all the Georgian Josef Stalin (Jughashvili), General Secretary of the CPSU and de facto dictator of the Soviet Union; his compatriots included Lavrenti Beria, People's Commissar of the Interior (security services and the secret police NKVD) and Grigol ('Sergo') Ordzhonikidze, member of the Central Committee and the Politburo and the man responsible for bringing the South Caucasian republics into line. The Armenian Anastas Mikoyan, for his part, was a frequent minister of the Soviet Union and head of state; his brother Artyom Mikoyan was an aircraft designer who, together with Mikhail I. Gurevitch, developed the world-famous MiG fighters from the 1940s to the 1960s.

The Caucasus was also hard hit by the Second World War, as the oil fields of Maikop, Grozny and Baku, together with Stalingrad, were the main targets of the German summer offensive of 1942. Due to the fragmentation of the German forces, both operations failed. In the Caucasus, German forces reached Maikop but foundered outside Grozny, and Baku remained out of reach. The German offensive came to a halt in the Greater Caucasus and the retreat began on 31 December 1942. Although the territories of the South Caucasian Soviet republics were spared from the fighting of the Second World War, about 1.6 to 2 million Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani soldiers and officers fought on the Soviet side. Of these, about 680,000 to 820,000 died or remained missing.

In the years 1988–1991, the gradual loss of control and disintegration of the Soviet Union held out the prospect of long-awaited independence to the Caucasian Soviet republics. In the wake of these events, old conflicts began to break out. Efforts to achieve independence failed in the North Caucasus, either because of a lack of economic viability or because of Russia's resistance. The two Chechen conflicts had some parallels with the wars in Afghanistan: the local Muslim Chechens were reinforced by Islamist Afghanistan veterans and backed financially by Salafist circles. In addition, there were Islamist terrorist attacks against

civilians inside and outside Chechnya as well as brutally harsh warfare on the part of Russian troops. As the insurgents failed to internationalize the conflict, Russia maintained the upper hand. Today, the situation in Chechnya and the neighbouring republics is marked by a fragile peace.

Even though the former Soviet republics gained independence in the South Caucasus, intra-Caucasian wars and conflicts broke out at the same time – and these are still unresolved in the early 2020s. Thanks to its oil and natural gas resources, Azerbaijan is the richest country of the three states in economic terms, yet it is divided into two parts by south-eastern Armenia, connected only by air or overland via Iran. Azerbaijan has been at war with Armenia over Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh since its independence, and Armenia occupied around 10 per cent of further Azerbaijani territory until November 2020. Both countries experienced mass expulsions and refugees between 1988 and 1993, with hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis and Armenians displaced. The present ethnic homogeneity of Armenia and Azerbaijan is by no means a historical phenomenon, but began after the Russian–Ottoman Treaty of Turkmenchay of 1828 and reached its peak in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Armenia remains a relatively poor country whose economic growth is severely hampered by border blockades and a lack of diplomatic relations with its two neighbours, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Turkey's obstinate refusal to acknowledge the 1915 genocide is another obstacle on the path towards normalizing relations. Armenia has no access to the world's oceans and no common border with its main ally Russia. The country is heavily dependent on the capital flows from the diaspora. Georgia, on the other hand, maintains good diplomatic and economic relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, which have been further strengthened in modern times by the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline. One of Georgia's main political problems is also rooted in the Soviet legacy: within the territory of the Soviet Republic of Georgia, there existed the ethnically based Autonomous Soviet Republics of Abkhazia and Adjara (Adzhara) and the Autonomous Oblast of South Ossetia. After Georgia's independence, the central government succeeded in incorporating only Adjara; Abkhazia and South Ossetia became de facto independent after armed conflicts, and enjoy the protection and support of Russia. Nonetheless, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are barely recognized internationally. The ill-fated attempt by Georgian President Saakashvili to



211. The St George monastery of Alaverdi, Kakheti, Georgia, surrounded by a defensive wall. The church was originally built in the sixth or seventh century. It was founded by Joseph Alaverdeli, a disciple of the 'Syrian Father' named John (Synek, *Life of St Nino* (1997), p. 146). Today's cathedral was built during the reign of the Kakheti king Kvirike III (r. 1010/14–37) and is the third-largest medieval church in Georgia after the cathedrals of Sveti Tskhoveli and Kutaisi. Photo 2013.





bind South Ossetia closer to Georgia in 2008 led to a brief war with Russia, which further deepened the rift between Georgia and the breakaway republic. Additionally, Georgia's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union have been pushed into the distant future and diplomatic relations between Tbilisi and Moscow have broken off. In spite of some negotiations, they had not been resumed by December 2020.

The recent history of the Caucasian republics north and south of the mountain ridge shows that regional ethnic diversity is still a major obstacle to the formation of multi-ethnic states. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the ethnic animosities are further intensified by the different religious affiliations. The political fragmentation of the Caucasus is not in itself a disadvantage, but the unsatisfactory or even non-existent cooperation between the individual states is. In the southern Caucasus in particular, military expenditure is so high owing to the latent risks of war that there is often a lack of funds for other purposes. While the political situation in Azerbaijan is fairly stable thanks to the authoritarian presidential system of government of the Aliyev family dynasty established in 1993 and the steady income from fossil fuels, the political situation in Armenia and Georgia remains crisis-prone. Since the revolution of 2003, politics in Georgia has been shaped by the multi-billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who alternately acts in the open as an active politician and in secret behind closed doors. In Armenia, the bloodless revolution of April 2018 raised hopes for an efficacious fight against corruption and nepotism. At the same time, the internationally unrecognized political entities of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia would hardly be economically viable without Armenia and Russia as their sponsors. The republics and regions in the North Caucasus belonging to the Russian Federation are heavily dependent on internal Russian economic relations and rely on financial support from Moscow.

From a geopolitical perspective, the only three countries with a long-term and strategic interest in the Caucasus region are Russia, Turkey and, to a lesser degree, Iran. Moscow is engaged in the Caucasus in order to secure its southern flank, whether against Islamist infiltrations or an advance by NATO. Russia has clearly stated on several occasions that it would not tolerate Georgia's admission to the US-dominated military alliance any

more than it would for Ukraine. Turkey, on the other hand, sees itself as the leading power of the Turkic-speaking nations and is therefore focusing on Azerbaijan and Central Asia. The Turkey–Azerbaijan axis is also of great importance to Ankara with regard to energy policy, as it obtains crude oil and natural gas from Azerbaijan via the BTC and BTE pipelines. Iran's main interest is to ensure that no political movement for the unification of Azerbaijani and Iranian Azeris emerges under the leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In the past Iran supported Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in order to keep pressure on Azerbaijan not to meddle in domestic Iranian ethno-linguistic issues. But for domestic reasons, Iran stayed neutral during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020.

In terms of the US global strategy, however, the states of the South Caucasus play at best a secondary role. The European Union also does not regard this region as a priority. As far as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is concerned, the Caucasus states are threatened with further isolation from global trade flows. The planned northern main artery runs from China via Kazakhstan and Moscow to Germany and Rotterdam, while the southern main artery crosses Central Asia, northern Iran and Turkey to reach Western Europe via the Balkans.⁴ At most as a secondary route, there are plans for a section parallel to the BTC pipeline, which would again bypass Armenia. Ultimately, internal stability and prosperity in the southern Caucasus can only be ensured over the long run if the three Gordian knots of Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be severed. Concerning Karabakh, after a diplomatic deadlock lasting almost three decades, with Turkish support Azerbaijan attacked the self-declared Republic of Artsakh and its close ally Armenia on 27 September 2020, in order to reclaim its territory occupied by Armenia. The war lasted 44 days and ended with an Azerbaijani victory. The ceasefire sponsored by Russia stipulates that Azerbaijan regains full control over all occupied territories plus Shusha and furthermore obtains a land corridor through Armenia to its exclave Nakhchivan. The future status of rump Nagorno-Karabakh is yet to be defined. A Russian peacekeeping force will be deployed for at least five years along the line of contact and will guarantee the Lachin corridor linking Karabakh with Armenia. However, without willingness to compromise by all parties, including Russia and Turkey, there will be no lasting peace.

212. (previous pages) Baku and the so-called Flame Towers, Azerbaijan. The three towers, which range in size from 161 to 182 m, were built between 2007 and 2013. The Flame Towers are completely covered with LED screens; they display various motifs: static red, blue and green flames, blazing flames, the colours of the Azerbaijani flag, and a figure waving the national flag. Photo 2016.

Appendices

Appendix I: Population statistics by country

REGION	POPULATION IN THOUSANDS	COMPOSITION	NATIONAL FIGURES
Abkhazia	243	51% Abkhazian, 19% Georgian, 17% Armenian, 9% Russian	2011 census
Adygea	453	64% Russian, 26% Adygean	2018 estimate
Armenia*	2,925	96–97% Armenian	2016 estimate
Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh	146	95% Armenian	2012 estimate
Azerbaijan**	9,810	88–90% Azerbaijani	2017 estimate
Chechnya	1,269	95% Chechen, 2% Russian	2010 census
Dagestan	2,910	29% Avar (collective term for 14 ethnic groups) 17% Dargin (collective term for three ethnic groups) 15% Kumyk 13% Lezgian 5% Lak In total, about 30 indigenous languages and almost 80 dialects	2010 census
Georgia***	3,730	84–85% Georgian	2015 census
Ingushetia	413	93% Ingush, 5% Chechen	2010 census
Kabardino-Balkaria	860	57% Kabardian, 22% Russian, 13% Balkar	2010 census
Kalmykia	289	57% Kalmyk, 30% Russian	2010 census
Karachay-Cherkessia	478	41% Karachay, 31% Russian, 12% Cherkess (Circassian)	2010 census
Krasnodar Krai	5,227	87% Russian, 5% Armenian	2010 census
North Ossetia–Alania	713	65% Ossetian, 26% Russian	2010 census
Rostov Oblast	4,278	90% Russian, 3% Armenian	2010 census
South Ossetia	54	Mostly Ossetian	2015 estimate
Stavropol Krai	2,786	82% Russian, 6% Armenian	2010 census
Total	36,584	Approx. 8.5 to 9 million (23–25%) have an indigenous, Caucasian mother tongue	

* Since 1988, about 470,000 Armenians have fled from Azerbaijan (Memorandum from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, 13 June 1993).

** According to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR (report dated 1 May 1996), since 1988 approx. 185,000 Azerbaijanis have been displaced from Armenia and approx. 684,000 from Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the seven territories occupied by Armenia; approx. 25,000 Azerbaijanis had returned by 2006 to the Fuzuli Rayon, making a total of about 844,000 displaced persons. www.unhcr.org/publications/refugeemag/3b5583fd4/unhcr-publication-cis-conference-displacement-cis-conflicts-caucasus.html.

*** Since 1991, about 280,000 Georgians have had to permanently leave Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Human Rights Watch: Report Georgia/Abkhazia, March 1995: www.hrw.org/reports/1995/Georgia2.htm.

Human Rights Watch, Report, Russia: 'The Ingush–Ossetian Conflict in the Prigorodnyi Region', May 1996, www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Russia.htm.

Sources: Coene, *Caucasus* (2010), pp. 70–73, 214–16; Gumpfenberg and Steinbach, *Kaukasus* (2018). Censuses and estimates from internet, mostly Wikipedia.

Appendix II: Long-established languages of the Caucasus* by language family

A. Caucasian languages

LANGUAGE GROUP	SUBDIVISIONS	SUBGROUP	INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	NATIVE SPEAKERS IN THOUSANDS
South Caucasian				4,850
			Georgian (Kartuli)	4,300
			Mingrelian	500
			Laz	35
			Svan	15
North-West Caucasian				2,270
	Abkhazian		Abkhazian	120
			Abazian	50
	Cherkess–Ubykh	Cherkess (Circassian)	Adygean (West Cherkess)**	500
			Kabardian (East Cherkess)**	1,600
		Ubykh	Ubykh	(† 1992)
North-East Caucasian				4,339
	Hurrian–Uartian ***		Hurrian	(† end of second millennium BCE)
			Uartian	(† middle first millennium BCE)
	Nakhian	Vainakhian	Chechen	1,300
			Ingush	415
		Bats	Batsbi (Tsova-Tush)	3.5
	Lak–Darginian		Lak	165
			Dargin (Dargwa)****	510

Caucasian languages (*continued*)

LANGUAGE GROUP	SUBDIVISIONS	SUBGROUP	INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	NATIVE SPEAKERS IN THOUSANDS
North-East Caucasian (contd)	Avar–Andi–Dido		Avaric	800
		Andean	Andean	22
			Godoberi	3
			Botlikh	5.5
			Karata	5
			Akhvakh	6.5
			Bagvalal (Bagulal)	6.5
			Tindi	5
			Chamalal	5
		Dido	Dido (Tsez)	15
			Khvarshi	1.9
			Hinuq	0.55
			Bezhta (Kapucha)	6.2
			Hunzib	1.8
		Lezgian	Lezgian	800
			Tabasaran	130
			Aghul	28
			Rutul	30
			Tsakhur	30
			Kryts	25
			Jek	6
			Budukh	1
			Archi	1.2
			Udi Aghwan, Old Udi New Udi****	† 8.5
			Khinalug	1.5

In total about 41 ancient Caucasian languages and approx. 11.46 million native speakers, including those in the diaspora.

* The list refers to the Caucasus in the narrower sense and excludes the north-east of Turkey.

** About 1 million East and West Cherkess speakers live in Turkey today.

*** Whether the Hurrian–Urartian group is related to the North-East Caucasian languages remains disputed.

**** Dargin breaks up into about eleven dialects that are difficult to understand among themselves.

***** The Udis are one of the descendants of the Caucasian Albanians; Old Udi was the church language of the Albanian Orthodox Church.

The number of native speakers includes estimates for the respective diaspora; on average, approx. 80–90% live in the Caucasus, with the exception of the Kabardians (approx. 31%). Many speakers of very small languages are bilingual.

Sources: Coene, *The Caucasus* (2010), pp. 70–73, 214–16; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 222f; Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt*, part 1 (2010), pp. 232–7, 305–11.

B. Indo-European languages

LANGUAGE GROUP	INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	NATIVE SPEAKERS IN THOUSANDS	COMMENT
Armenian	Classical Armenian (Grabar)		Independent language without close relationship to another Indo-European language Church language
	East Armenian dialect (Arevelian Hayeren)	4,000	In the Caucasus and Russia; official language in Armenia and Artsakh
	West Armenian dialect (Arevmdian Hayeren)	3,500*	Mostly in the Western Diaspora
East Iranian Group	Ossetian	600*	
	♦ Iron dialect	480*	
	♦ Digor dialect	120*	
North-West Iranian Group	Kurdish		
	♦ Kurmanji	96	
	♦ Of this Yazidis	68	
	Talysh	77	
South-Western Group	Tat (New Persian dialect)		
	♦ Mountain/Judeo-Tat	10	
	♦ Muslim Tat	26	
	♦ Armeno Tat	17	
Indo-Aryan Group	Romani	50 ?	
	Lomavren	0.055	Status 2004
Slavonic	Russian	11,845	In the Caucasus

*The number of native speakers includes estimates for the respective diasporas.

C. Altaic languages

	SUBDIVISION	INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	NATIVE SPEAKERS IN THOUSANDS	COMMENT
Turkic languages	Oghuz	Azeri (Azerbaijani)	9,000*	In the Caucasus
		♦ North Azeri	16,000 or more	In Iran
		♦ South Azeri		
		Karapapak	n.a.	Dialect of Azerbaijani, speakers subsumed within Azeri
		Meskhetian	45*	East Anatolian dialect of Turkish
		Turkmen	14*	
	Kipchak	Urumian	88* (?)	Turkic-speaking Greeks**
		Kumyk	396*	
		Karachay-Balkarian	300*	
		Tatar	104*	
Nogai		78*		
Mongolian languages	West Mongolian	Kalmyk	185***	

* Native speakers living in the Caucasus

** Urumian is very close to Crimean Tatar and is also classified as an Oghuz language.

*** Of Russia's 185,000 ethnic Kalmyks, 150,000 live in the Republic of Kalmykia; 93% of them are native speakers, of which 87% are bilingual in Kalmyk and Russian.

D. Semitic languages

ARAMAIC	NEW ARAMAIC	INDIVIDUAL LANGUAGES	NATIVE SPEAKERS IN THOUSANDS
		North-eastern Neo-Aramaic	
		Assyrian Neo-Aramaic	14
		Jewish Neo-Aramaic	n.a.

Sources: Coene, *The Caucasus* (2010), pp. 56–76, 214–16; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 222f; Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt*, part 1 (2010). *Wieser Enzyklopädie des Europäischen Ostens*, vol 10 (2002).

Languages spoken in the Caucasus from the nineteenth century onwards, such as Ukrainian, Belarusian, German, Polish, Latvian, Estonian, Moldavian, Moravian, Chuvash, Bashkir, Udmurt, Kazakh, Uzbek, Korean, etc. are not listed here.

Appendix III: Chronology of the most important Caucasian dynasties

Urartu/Biainili (before 858–last quarter seventh century BCE)

Aramu, possibly Erimena I (r. ca. before 858–ca. 843 BCE)

Sarduri I, son of Lutipri, dynasty founder (r. ca. 840–ca. 828/25 BCE)

Ishpuini, son of Sarduri (r. ca. 828/25–810 BCE)

Ishpuini and Minua co-rulers (r. ca. 820–810 BCE)

Minua, son of Ishpuini (r. ca. 810–785/80 BCE)

Argishti I, son of Minua (r. ca. 785/80–756 BCE)

Sarduri II, son of Argishti (r. ca. 756–730 BCE)

Rusa I, son of Sarduri (r. ca. 730–714/13 BCE)

Arghishti II, son of Rusa (r. ca. 714/13–695/85? BCE)

Rusa II, son of Argishti (r. ca. 695/85?–? BCE, mentioned in 673/72 by Esarhaddon)

Erimena* (II) (a ruler?)

Rusa III, son of Erimena (mentioned in 653/52 BCE by Ashurbanipal)

Sarduri*, son of Rusa III

Sarduri III, son of Sarduri (mentioned in 646/42 BCE by Ashurbanipal)

* According to Salvini a high official with the title *LU.asuli*: Salvini in Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), pp. 441, 447.

Main source: Salvini in Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), pp. 427–48. See also: Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001); Fuchs in Kroll, *Biainili-Urartu* (2012), pp. 135–61; Hellwag, *ibid.*, pp. 231; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 109–16, 207; Wartke, *Urartu* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993).

Armenian Orontid/Yervanduni (ca. 401–200 BCE)

Hydarnes ?, one of the Seven Persians at the time of Darius I

Hydarnes III (Idernes) (middle fifth century BCE), satrap of Armenia?

Terituchmes (second half fifth century BCE), satrap?

Orontes I (in office 401–ca. 366/62 BCE), satrap?

Artašiyāta (Codomannus), not an Orontid (in office ?–before 338 BCE)

Orontes II (in office ca. 338, r. 336–331? BCE)

Mithranes (r. 331–ca. 317 BCE)

Neoptolemus, not an Orontid (r. as an anti-king 323–321 BCE)

Orontes III (r. ca. 317–260 BCE)

Arsames (r. after 260–ca. 228 BCE)

Xerxes (r. 228–ca. 212 BCE)

Orontes IV (r. 212–200 BCE)

Armenian Artaxiads/Artashesians of Greater Armenia (200/189 BCE–2 CE)

Artaxias (Artashes) (as strategos 200–189, as king 189–159 BCE)

Artavasdes I (r. 159–ca. 123 or 115 BCE)

Tigranes I (r. 123 or 115–95 BCE)

Tigranes II (r. 95–55 BCE)

Artavasdes II (r. 55–34 BCE)

Artaxias II (r. 30–20 BCE)

Tigranes III (r. 20–8 BCE)

Tigranes IV (first reign ca. 8–5 BCE)

Artavasdes III (r. ca. 5–2 BCE)

Tigranes IV (second reign 2 BCE–1 CE)

Erato (r. 1–2 CE)

Sources: Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 24–9; Redgate, *The Armenians* (1998), pp. 55–78; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 277–94.

Mithridatic dynasty of Pontus (281–37 BCE)

Mithridates I Ctistes (r. 281–266 BCE)

Ariobarzanes (r. 266–ca. 250 BCE)

Mithridates II (r. ca. 250–ca. 220 BCE)

Mithridates III (r. ca. 220–ca. 185 BCE)

Pharnaces I (r. ca. 185–after 169 BCE)

Mithridates IV (r. after 169–ca. 152/1 BCE)

Mithridates V (r. ca. 152/1–120 BCE)

Mithridates VI (r. ca. 120/116–63 BCE)

Pharnaces II (r. 63–47 BCE)

Roman administration

Darius (r. 39–ca. 37 BCE)

Arsaces (r. as usurper 37 BCE)

Polemon I (r. ca. 37–8 BCE)*

Pythodoris (r. 8 BCE–38 CE)*

Polemon II (r. 38–63/4 CE)*

Roman administration (from 63/4 CE)

* Not from the Mithridatic dynasty

Sources: Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 174–7; Eid, *Im Land des Ararat* (2006), pp. 57f; Matyszak, *Mithridates* (2015), pp. 1–8.

Non-Artaxiad kings of Armenia (2–54 CE)

Ariobarzanes II (r. 2–4)

Artavasdes IV (r. 4–6)

Tigranes V (r. 6–12)

Vonones I (r. 12–18)

Zeno-Artaxias III (r. 18–34)

Arsaces (r. 34–35)

Mithridates (Mrdat), r. 35–37, 41–52)

Rhadamistus (r. 52–54)

Armenian Arsacids (54–428)

Tiridates (Trdat) I (first reign 54–58)

Tigranes VI (r. 58–61/62)

Tiridates (Trdat) I (second reign 62/63–72/75 or 88)

Sanatruces I (r. ca. 72/75 or 88–110)

Axidares (r. ca. 110–113)

Parthamasiris (r. 113–114)

Parthaspates ?

Vologeses (Vagharsh) I (r. ca. 117–140)

Sohaemus of Emesa (r. ca. 140/44–161)

or

Pacorus (Aurelius Pacorus), r. ca. 140/44–161)

Pacorus (r. 161–163) ?

Sohaemus (possibly second reign 164–ca. 180)

Vologeses (Vagharsh) II (r. 180–191) ?

Chosroes (Khosrow) I (r. ca. 180–214/16)

Tiridates (Trdat) II (r. 217–252)

Hormizd-Ardashir, a Sassanid (r. ca. 252–272)

Narseh, a Sassanid (r. ca. 273/4–293)

Tiridates (Trdat) III (r. ca. 293–298)

Tiridates (Trdat) IV (r. 298–ca. 330/31)

Chosroes (Khosrow) II Kotak (r. ca. 330/31–338/9)

Tigranes (Tiran) VII (r. ca. 338/39–350?)

Arshak II (r. ca. 350–368)

Pap (r. ca. 369–374)

Varazdat (r. 374–378)

Arshak III (r. ca. 378–387)

Chosroes (Khosrow) III (first reign ca. 387–392)

Vramshapuh (r. ca. 393–414 or 417)

Chosroes (Khosrow) III (second reign 414–415 or 417–418)

Shapur, a Sassanid (r. 415 or 418–420)

Artaxias IV (r. 422–428)

Sources: *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand* trans. Garsoïan (1989); Blockley, 'Division of Armenia' (1987), pp. 222–4; Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift* (1995), pp. 169–71; Lang, 'Iran, Armenia and Georgia', in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3 part I (1983), pp. 517f; Łazar P'arpec'i, *History* (1991); Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 88–139; Schottky, 'Armenische Arsakiden' (2010), pp. 208–25; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), pp. 515f.

Pre-Christian kings of Iberia

TRADITIONAL LIST ACCORDING TO MOKTSEVAY KARTLISAY WITH DATES ACCORDING TO TOUMANOFF		ADDITIONAL OR OTHERWISE DATED KINGS FROM NON-IBERIAN SOURCES
<p>Parnavazid dynasty*</p> <p>Azo (governor of Alexander, not a Parnavazid, d. ca. 299 BCE)</p> <p>Parnavaz I (r. ca. 299–234 BCE)</p> <p>Saumarg (r. ca. 234–159 BCE)</p> <p>Mirian I (Mirvan, r. ca. 159–109 BCE)</p> <p>Parnajom (r. ca. 109–90 BCE)</p>		
<p>Artaxiad</p> <p>Artaxias I (Arshak, r. ca. 90–78 BCE)</p> <p>Artag I (Artoces, r. ca. 78–63 BCE)</p> <p>Bartom I (r. 63–30 BCE)</p> <p>Mirian II (r. 30–20 BCE)</p> <p>Arshak II (r. 20 BCE–1 CE)</p>		Parnavaz II (r. 63–32 BCE)
<p>Moktsevay Kartlisay</p> <p>Aderki (r. 1–58 CE)</p>	<p>Toumanoff</p> <p>Aderki I /Pharasmanes I (r. 1–58)</p>	<p>Meissner</p> <p>Mithridates I (r. ca. ?–34/5)</p>
<p>Alleged diarchies</p> <p>Bartom II + Kartam</p> <p>Parsman I + Kaos</p> <p>Azork + Armazel</p> <p>Amazasp I + Derok</p> <p>Parsman II + Mihrdat I</p>	<p>Mithridates I (r. ca. 58–106)</p> <p>Amazasp I (r. ca. 106–116)</p> <p>Pharasmanes II (r. ca. 116–132)</p>	<p>Pharasmanes I (r. ca. 35–before 75)</p> <p>Mithridates II (r. before 75–ca. 106/10)</p> <p>Mithridates III (r. ca. 106/10–?)</p> <p>Pharasmanes II (r. ?–after 141)</p>
<p>End of the alleged diarchy</p> <p>Adami/Ghadami I (r. ca. 132–135)</p> <p>Parsman III (r. ca. 135–185)</p> <p>Amazasp II (r. ca. 185–189)</p>	<p>Rhadamiste/Adam I (r. ca. 132–135)</p> <p>Pharasmanes III (r. ca. 135–185)</p> <p>Amazasp II (r. ca. 185–189)</p>	<p>Khsefarnug (middle second century)</p>
<p>Arsacids</p> <p>Rev Martali (r. ca. 189–216)</p> <p>Vache I (r. ca. 216–234)</p> <p>Bakur I (r. ca. 234–249)</p> <p>Mihrdat II (r. ca. 249–265?)</p> <p>Amazasp III (anti-king r. 260–265; Toumanoff)</p> <p>Aspagur I (r. ca. 265–284)</p>		

* at most a semi-legendary dynasty

Sources: Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 191; Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 296–8;

Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* (1996), pp. 379f; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), pp. 543f.

Kings and presiding princes of Albania

Arsacid dynasty of Albania

Vachagan I the Brave (r. late third century)

Vache I (r. fourth century)

Urnayr (r. before 359–after 387)

Vachagan II (r. fourth/fifth century)

Mrhavan (r. fifth century)

Satoy (r. fifth century)

Asay? (regent, wife of Urnayr)

Arsuałēn (Arsuał, Arsabilos, r. ca. 424–444)

Vache II (r. ca. 444–463/4)

Albania, a satrapy without a king (463/4–485)

Vachagan III the Pious (r. ca. 485–510)

'Mihranid' presiding princes of Albania

Varaz-Grigor (r. ca. 628–636)

Juansher (r. ca. 637–680)

vassal of the Sassanids (ca. 636–641)

vassal/sympathizer of Byzantium (ca. 641–662)

vassal of the caliphate (ca. 662–680)

Varaz-Trdat I (r. ca. 680–705)

vassal of the caliphate (ca. 680–685)

simultaneously vassal of the caliphate and of Byzantium
(ca. 685–693 or 699)

prisoner in Constantinople (ca. 699–704)

vassal of the caliphate (ca. 704–705)

Šeroy (r. in Varaz-Trdat's absence ca. 699–704)

Princes of Gardman

Vardan II (r. 705–740)

Narseh-Dzndak (r. 740–770)

Gagikh (r. 770–790)

Stephanos I (r. 790–821)

Varaz-Trdat II (r. 821–822)

Sources: Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (1961); Gippert, *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests*, vol. I (2008), pp. vii–xix; Greenwood, 'Armenian neighbours', in *Cambridge History of The Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 333–64; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), p. 124; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), p. 587.

Christian kings of Iberia

Mirian (Mihran) III (r. ?–ca. 361)

Saurmag (Sauromaces) II (r. ca. 361–368, in West Iberia 370–378)

Aspacures II (Aspagur II, Varaz-Bakur I) (r. 368–370, in East Iberia 370–378)

Mihrdat III (r. ca. 379–380)

Varaz-Bakur II (r. ca. 380–394)

Trdat (r. ca. 394–406)

Pharasmanes IV (r. 406–409)

Mihrdat IV (r. ca. 409–411)

Archil (r. ca. 411–435)

Mihrdat V (r. ca. 435–447)

Vakhtang Gorgasali (r. ca. 449–491/502)

Gurgenes (r. ?–523, probably last ruling king)

Dachi (accord. to Toumanoff r. ca. 522–534, nominal ruler)

Bakur II (r. ca. 534–547, nominal ruler)

Parsman V (r. ca. 547–561, nominal ruler)

Parsman VI (r. ca. 561–?, nominal ruler)

Bakur III (r. ca. ?–ca. 580, nominal ruler)

Sources: Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 108–11; Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 303–33; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), pp. 39–51; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 64–217 (1996), pp. 76–228; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), p. 544; id., *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 153, 373–82.

Kings of Lazica in fifth–sixth century

Gubazes I (first reign before 456–?)

A son of Gubazes (r. after 456–ca. 466)

Gubazes I (second reign ca. 466–?)

Damnazes (Zamnaxes, r. ?–ca. 522)

Tzath (Tzathius) I (r. ca. 522–after 527 or 540)

Gubazes II (r. ca. 540–555)

Opsites? (r. in northern Abkhasia ca. 541–550)

Tzath II (r. 555/56–?)

Sources: Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 268–314; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Books I–II, VII–VIII (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, 1954).

Kings of Abkhazia*

Leon I (r. as archon 736–766/67)

Leon II (r. 766/67–811)

Theodosius II (r. 811–837)

Demetrius II (r. 837–872)

George I (r. 872–878)

John (r. 878–879)

Adarnase (r. 879–887)

Bagrat I (r. 887–898)

Constantine III (r. 898–916 or 894–923)

George II (r. 916 or 923–960)

Leon III (r. 960–969)

Demetrius III (r. 969–975)

Theodosius III (r. 975–978)

Bagrat II (r. 978–1008, from 1008 as king Bagrat III of Georgia)

* All dates, with the exception of Bagrat II, are approximate.

Source: *Divan of the Ap'xazian Kings*, in Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 481–4.

Bagratuni presiding princes of Armenia

Ashot IV Msaker Bagratuni (r. 806–826)

Bagrat II (r. 826–852)

Ashot V (r. 856/62–884, as King Ashot I r. 884–890)

Bagratuni kings of Armenia

Ashot I (r. 884–890)

Smbat I (r. 890–913, d. 914)

Ashot II Erkat 'the Iron' (r. 914–928)

Ashot of Bagaran, anti-king (r. ca. 915–920)

Abas (r. 928–953)

Ashot III (r. 953–977)

Smbat II (r. 977–989)

Gagik I of Ani (r. 989–1017 or 1020)

Hovhannes-Smbat III (r. in Ani 1017/20–1040/41) and **Ashot IV**
(r. in Talin 1017/20–1040/41)

Gagik II (r. 1042–1045, d. 1079)

Bagratuni kings of Kars

Mushegh (r. 961/62–984)

Abas (r. 984–1029)

Gagik-Abas II of Kars (r. 1029–1065, d. 1080)

Artsruni kings of Vashpurakan

Gagik I Artsruni (r. 904–937 or 943)

Derenik-Ashot Artsruni (r. 937 or 943–953)

Abu Sahl Hamazasp (r. 953–969 or 972)

Ashot-Sahak (r. 969 or 972–991)

Gurgen-Khatchik (r. 991–1003)

Senekerim-Hovhannes (r. 1003–1021, d. 1025 or 1027)

Sources: Artsruni *History of the House of Artsrunik* (1985); Step'anos Taronec'i, *Universal History* (2017), pp. 173–313; Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 81–134; Garsoïan in Hovannisian, *Armenian People*, vol. 1 (1997), pp. 143–247; Hewsens, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), pp. 94–127; Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades (Chronicle) I*, 17 (2013), pp. 19–127; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 173–84, 197–229.

Bagrationi presiding princes and kings of Iberia

Ashot I Bagrationi (r. 813–ca. 830)

Bagrat I (r. ca. 830–876)

David I (r. 876–81)

Gurgen I (r. as *kouropalates* 881–891)

Adarnase IV (r. as prince 881–888, as king 888–923)

David II (r. 923–937)

Ashot II (r. 937–954)

Smbat I (r. 954–958)

Bagrat II (r. 958–994)

Gurgen (r. de facto ca. 978–94, de jure 994–1008)

Bagrat III (r. as prince in Kartli 976–978, in Abkhazia 978–1008,
as king of Georgia 1008–1014)

Sources: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 406–9, 413–20; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), pp. 58–72; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 255–83 (1996), pp. 260–81; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 407–27; id., 'Armenia and Georgia' (1966) pp. 609–18; id., *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie* (1976).

Rulers and emirs of Caucasian Albania/Azerbaijan

Sajids

Abi'l-Saj Devdad (ostikan, in office 867–870)

Muhammad ibn Abi'l-Saj Devdad, dynasty founder
(r. autonomously 889/90 or 892–901)

Devdad ibn Muhammad (r. 901)

Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj (first reign 901–919)

Nasr al-Subuk (surrogate, r. 919–922)

Yusuf ibn Abi'l-Saj (second reign 922–928)

Abu'l-Musafir al-Fath (r. 928–929)

Sallarids (Musafirids)

Muhammad bin Musafir (r. before 916–941)

Marzuban ibn Muhammad (r. 941/42–957)

Vahsudan (r. 957–983)

Rawwadids

- Muhammad ibn al-Husain al-Rawwadi (d. before 956)
- Husain ibn Muhammad (r. before 956–before 975)
- Muhammad (Mamlan) Abu'l-Haija ibn Husain (r. before 975–ca. 1014)
- Abu Nasr Husain (r. ?, d. 1025)
- Vahsudan ibn Mamlan (r. ca. 1014/16–1059)
- Mamlan II ibn Vahsudan (r. 1059–1070/71)

Shaddadids of Ganja

- Muhammad ibn Shaddad (r. 951–954, d. 955)
- Lashkari I (clan chief 955–971, r. 971–978)
- Marzuban (r. 978–985)
- Fadhl I (r. 985–1031)
- Abu'l-Fath Musa ibn Fadhl (r. 1031–1034)
- Abu'l-Hasan Lashkari II Ali (r. 1034–1049)
- Anushirvan (r. 1049)
- Abu'l-Aswar Shavur ibn Fadhl (r. 1049–1067)
- Fadhl II (r. 1067–1073)
- Ashot (r. during Fadhl II's captivity 1068–1069)
- Fadhl III ibn Fadhl (Fadhlun) (r. 1073–1075)
- Seljuk military slave Savtegin deposed Fadhlun in 1075

Shaddadids of Ani

- Abu'l-Aswar Shavur ibn Fadhl (governor 1064/65)
- Seljuk administration
- Manuchihr (r. 1072–ca. 1118)
- Abu'l-Aswar Shavur (r. ca. 1118–1124)
- Abuleth Orbelian, Georgian governor (in office 1124–1126)
- Fadhl IV (r. 1126–1130)

- Khushchikr (r. 1130–?)
- Mahmud (r. ?)
- Fakr al-Din (r. ?–1155)
- Fadhl V ibn Mahmud (r. 1155–1161)
- Ivane Orbelian Georgian governor (first time in office 1161–1164)
- Shahanshah ibn Mahmud (first reign 1164–1174)
- Ivane Orbelian Georgian governor (second time in office 1174–1176)
- Shahanshah ibn Mahmud (Sultan ibn Mahmud) (second reign 1176–1198/9)
- Zakare and Ivane Mkhargrdzeli (Zakarian) occupied Ani in 1198/99

Yazidids of Shirvan

- Yazid I ibn Usayd (Asid) al-Sulami (ostikan ca. 752–754, 759–770 and 775–780)
- Yazid II ibn Mazyad al-Shaybani, dynasty founder (ostikan 787–89, 799–801)
- Asad ibn Yazid (ostikan 801–802, ca. 810)
- Mohammad ibn Yazid (ostikan ca. 802–ca. 809)?
- Khalid ibn Yazid (ostikan 820–835, ca. 842–844)
- Muhammad I ibn Khalid ibn Yazid (ostikan 844–ca. 860)
- Haytham I ibn Khalid Shirvanshah (r. ca. 861–?)
- Muhammad II ibn Haytham (r. ?)
- Haytham II ibn Muhammad (r. ?)
- Ali ibn Heytham (r. ca. 909 or 912–927)
- Abu Tahir Yazid II (r. 927–948)
- Muhammad III (r. 948–956)
- Ahmad ibn Muhammad (r. 956–980/81)
- Muhammad ibn Ahmad (r. 980/81–991)
- Yazid III ibn Ahmad (r. 991–1027)
- Manuchihr I ibn Yazid (r. 1027–1034)

Abu Mansur Ali ibn Yazid (r. 1034–1043)

Qubad ibn Yazid (r. 1043–1049)

Bukhtnassar Ali (r. 1049–?)

Sallar ibn Yazid (r. ?–1063)

Fariburz I ibn Salar (r. 1063–ca. 1094, vassal of the Seljuks)

Manuchihr II (r. 1094–ca. 1106)

Afridun (Faridun) I (r. 1106–1120)

Manuchihr III ibn Kasran (r. 1120–1160, vassal of Georgia)

Afridun II (r. 1160?)

Akhsitan I ibn Manuchihr (r. 1160–1197, sporadically vassal of Georgia)

Shahenshah ibn Manuchihr (r. ca. 1197–ca. 1201?)

Fariburz II ibn Afridun (r. ca. 1201–1204?)

Farrukhzad I ibn Manuchihr (r. 1204?)

Gushtasp I (r. 1204?–1225?)

Hashimids of Derbent

Al-Najm ibn Hashim (governor 790s)

?

Hashim ibn Suraqa ibn Salis (r. 869–884)

Omar ibn Hashim (r. 884–885)

Muhammad ibn Hashim ibn Suraqa (r. 885–915)

Abd al-Malik (r. 916–939)

Abu'l-Najm (r. as anti-emir 916)

Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik (first reign 939)

Haytham bin Muhammad bin Yazid (first reign 939–941)

Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik (second reign 941)

Haytham bin Muhammad bin Yazid (second reign 941–942)

Ahmad bin Yazid (r. ca. 942–953)

Khashram Ahmad ibn Munabbih, king of Lak (r. 953–954)

Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik (third reign 954–976)

Maymun ibn Ahmad (r. with interruptions 976–997)

Muhammad ibn Ahmad (r. 997)

Lashkari ibn Maymun (r. 998–1002)

Mansur ibn Maymun (r. with interruptions 1003–1034)

Abd al-Malik ibn Mansur (r. with interruptions 1034–1043)

Mansur ibn Abd al-Malik (first nominal reign 1043–1054)

Lashkari ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 1054–1055)

Mansur ibn Abd al-Malik (second reign, with interruptions 1055–1065)

Abd al-Malik ibn Lashkari (r. nominal 1065)

Rapid succession of Yazidids and Seljuk officers

Maymun bin Mansur (r. nominal 1075)

Seljuk military slave Savtegin occupied Derbent in December 1075

Sources: Bosworth, *Islamic Dynasties* (1980); id., 'Arrān', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II, fasc. 5 (1986), pp. 520–22; id., 'Azerbaijan', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, III, fasc. 2–3 (1987) pp. 205–57; id., 'Šervānšāhs', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2011); Kévorkian, *Ani* (2001), pp. 100–118; Madelung, 'Minor dynasties' (1975), pp. 198–249; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953); id., *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958); Peacock, 'Shaddadids', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2011); id., 'Rawwadids', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2017); Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates* (1976), 27f, 182–6; Zardabli, Ismail bey, *History of Azerbaijan* (2004), pp. 138–60.

Notes

I. Along the European–Asian Border: An Introduction

- 1 Catford, J.C., 'Mountain of tongues: The languages of the Caucasus', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 6 (Palo Alto, CA; Annual Reviews, 1977), p. 283.
- 2 Haxthausen, Baron August von, *The Tribes of the Caucasus: With an Account of Schamyl and the Murids* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1855), p. 14.
- 3 Cornell, Svante E., *Small Nations and Great Powers* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), p. 17.
- 4 The Salafists are an ultra-conservative Islamic movement focused on a return to their 'pious ancestors', in Arabic *Salaf al-saleh*, and militant struggle against the infidels. The Saudi Wahhabis also belong to the Salafists; often, non-Saudi Wahhabis are also referred to as Salafists. Baumer, Christoph, *The History of Central Asia*, vol. 4: *The Age of Decline and Revival* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2018), pp. 328 ns 8–9.
- 5 We dispense with the common toponyms Transcaucasia and Ciscaucasia because they are anachronistic relics of the past Russian-Soviet hegemony and only make sense from the perspective of Moscow. Ciscaucasia, in Russian *Predkavkaz'ye*, means 'this side of the Caucasus' and Transcaucasia, *Zakavkaz'yu* 'beyond the Caucasus'.
- 6 In Georgian mythology, the Titan is called Amiran.
- 7 In August 2008, Russian armed forces penetrated South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel, which opened in 1985.
- 8 In antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the exonym (foreign name) Iberia denoted the Kingdom of Kartli in central and eastern Georgia. Caucasian Iberia is not to be confused with Iberia in south-western Europe.
- 9 Pliny, *Natural History*, vol. 2: VI.15, trans. H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library, 1942; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 367. See also: Braund, David, 'The Caspian Gates in Roman–Persian relations in ancient Transcaucasia', *AMIT. Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan*, vol. 32, 2000 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2001), pp. 37f.
- 10 The Caucasian Albanians are fundamentally different from the Albanians of the Balkans.
- 11 Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, trans. with commentary by Aidan Liddle (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2003), p. 7.
- 12 Kettenhofen, Erich, 'Darband', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, VII, 1 (1994), p. 13.
- 13 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.15 (2014), p. 367. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I.XI.10, trans. H.B. Dewing (Loeb Classical Library, 1914; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 79, 81. See also: Braund, David, *Georgian Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC–AD 562* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 225f; Isaac, Benjamin, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford: Clarendon: 1990), p. 404; Dignas, Beate and Winter, Engelbert, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 188.
- 14 Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, III.21, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 182. Ptolemy conveys the clearest locations: the Sarmatian Gates are identical with the Darial Pass, the Albanian with Derbent and the Caspian with the Tang-e Sar-e Darra: Ptolemaios, *Klaudios, Handbuch der Geographie*, V.9.11; V.9.15; VI.2.7, ed. Alfred Stückelberger and Gerd Grasshoff (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2006), pp. 535, 537, 605.
- 15 Jackson, A.V. Williams, *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 117f, 127f.
- 16 See below, pp. 139f. Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5: *Agesilaus and Pompey, Pelopidas and Marcellus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Loeb Classical Library, 1914; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998–2002), p. 207.
- 17 See pp. 300ff., Appendix I, Population statistics by country.
- 18 Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV.45, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 254f.
- 19 Strabo, *Geographica*, VII. 4.5; IX.2.1, trans. A. Forbinger (Wiesbaden: Marix Verlag, 2007), pp. 435, 714.
- 20 Ptolemaios, *Geographie*, VII. 5.6 (2006), p. 745.
- 21 A Roman stadium corresponds to 185 m. Arrian's 60 stades mean the approximate distance between Pantikapaion and the eastern side of the Cimmerian Bosphorus; the distance to the mouth of the Tanais is 280 km. Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, 19 (2003), pp. 79, 123.
- 22 Strahlenberg, Philipp Johann von, *Das Nord- und Östliche Theil von Europa und Asia, in so weit solches das gantze Russische Reich mit Sibirien und der großen Tartarey in sich begreiffet* (Stockholm: published by the author, 1730), pp. 91–112. Strahlenberg called the Urals 'the Ryphaean Mountains'.
- 23 Freshfield, Douglas W., 'Journey in the Caucasus and ascent of Kasbek and Elbruz', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, vols 13–14 (London: RGS, 1869), p. 71.
- 24 See map 10. Attempts to define a north–south dividing line through the Caucasus are doomed to failure because it cannot refer to any physical-geographical characteristics.
- 25 See below, pp. 12f. Neukirchen, Florian, *Bewegte Welten. Gebirge und wie sie entstehen* (Heidelberg: Spektrum Akademischer Verlag, 2011), pp. 144–6; Sosson, M. et al., *Sedimentary Basin Tectonics from the Black Sea and Caucasus to the Arabian Platform* (London: The Geological Society, 2010), pp. 239f.
- 26 The Doukhobors deny the divinity of Jesus and reject the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy.
- 27 Molokans, the 'milk drinkers', drink milk during Lent, adhere strongly to the Bible, and reject the divine legal claim of the tsars and the pomp and splendour of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- 28 The Subbotniks follow the Old Testament and celebrate the Sabbath.
- 29 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.16 (2007), p. 720.
- 30 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.5 (2014), p. 349.
- 31 Kausen, Ernst, *Die Sprachfamilien der Welt part 1: Europa und Asien* (Hamburg: Buske, 2010), pp. 232, 242.
- 32 This number excludes the native speakers of ancient Caucasian languages living outside the Caucasus.
- 33 See Appendix II, Long-established languages of the Caucasus by language family.
- 34 An exception was the Kingdom of Georgia in the eleventh to thirteenth century, which produced a number of outstanding rulers.
- 35 Runciman, Steven, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1 (1954; London: The Folio Society, 1994), p. xiii.

II. The Formation of the Landscape and the Early Humans of the Palaeolithic

- 1 Translation of original French. Lumley, Marie-Antoinette de and Lordkipanidze, David, 'L'Homme de Dmanissi (*Homo georgicus*), il y a 1 810 000 ans', *Comptes Rendus Palevol*, vol. 5 (Paris: Académie des sciences, 2006), p. 273.
- 2 mya: million years ago.
- 3 A craton is a very old core area of a continent.
- 4 Neukirchen, *Bewegte Welten* (2011), pp. 144–6.

- 5 Neukirchen, *Bewegte Welten* (2011), p. 140.
- 6 Boomer, Ian et al., 'The palaeolimnology of the Aral Sea: A review', *Quaternary Science Reviews*, no. 19 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2000), p. 1262.
- 7 Baak, Christiaan G.C. van et al., 'A magnetostratigraphic time frame for Plio-Pleistocene transgressions in the South Caspian Basin, Azerbaijan', *Global and Planetary Change*, 103 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013), p. 119.
- 8 ka BP stands for thousand years Before Present. 'Present', however, does not mean the present day, but the default year 1950.
- 9 The term 'marine transgression' refers to an advance of the coastline inland as a result of an increase in sea level or a tectonic subsidence of the landmass; 'regression' designates the opposite movement.
- 10 Baak, 'A magnetostratigraphic time frame' (2013), pp. 119, 130; Boomer, 'Palaeolimnology of the Aral Sea' (2000), pp. 1161f.
- 11 Baak, 'A magnetostratigraphic time frame' (2013), p. 130.
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III. Prehistoric Cultures: From the Neolithic to the Iron Age

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- 9 Chataigner et al., 'Neolithic of the Caucasus' (2018), pp. 24–6.
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- 15 The Shulaveri river is a tributary of the Khrami river which in turn flows into the Kura river.
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- Quaternary Science Reviews*, vol. 197 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2018), pp. 267–87.
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 - 18 Chernykh, Evgeny N., *Ancient Metallurgy in the USSR: The Early Metal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 33f; Kuparadze, David et al., 'The development of mining, metallurgy and the production of cold steel arms in Georgia: A geological and archaeological review' in: Elena Rova and Monica Tonussi (eds), *At the Northern Frontier of Near Eastern Archaeology* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), p. 570.
 - 19 Akhundov, Tufan, 'South Caucasus in the Neolithic to Early Bronze Age: The question of epoch and period', in Sagona, *View from the Highlands* (2004), p. 428.
 - 20 Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), p. 94; Parzinger, *Kinder des Prometheus* (2015), p. 433.
 - 21 Parzinger, *Kinder des Prometheus* (2015), p. 432; Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), p. 203.
 - 22 Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), pp. 203–7.
 - 23 Parzinger, *Kinder des Prometheus* (2015), p. 432.
 - 24 Giemsch and Hansen, *Gold und Wein* (2018), p. 68; Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), pp. 191–4.
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 - 26 Lyonnet, in ead., *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), pp. 16, 137. However, the author does not go as far as Kavtaradze in attributing the transition from the 'Ubaid, more sophisticated ceramic assemblage to the externally primitive Uruk pottery' to an incursion of warlike tribes from the north. Kavtaradze, 'An attempt at dating the starting point in the Kura-Araxes Culture on the background of the "Uruk Cultural Phenomenon"', in: Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), pp. 100–103.
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 - 36 Akhundov, in Lyonnet, *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), p. 120; Museyibli, *Excavations of Soyugbulaq* (2008), p. 24; *id.*, in Taylor, *Pipelines to Cultural Heritage* (2011), p. 18; *id.*, *Grave Monuments* (2014), pp. 66–8.
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- 116 Piliposyan, Ashot, 'Excavations at Metsamor', in Narimanishvili, *Problems* (2014), pp. 42–4.
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- 118 Wartke, Ralf-Bernhard, *Urartu. Das Reich am Ararat* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1993), p. 37.
- 119 Redgate, A.E., *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 27. Mirjo Salvini has a contrary opinion, because he considers Nairi and Uruatri to be 'politically distinct regions'. Salvini, Mirjo, *Geschichte und Kultur der Urartäer* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), p. 23; *id.*, 'Aufstieg und Fall des Reiches Urartu', in: Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), p. 432.
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- 122 Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 2, no. 31 (1976), p. 13. In two Assyrian inscriptions of the eleventh and tenth century BCE Uruatri and Uratri, respectively, are again mentioned imprecisely.
- 123 Sagona, Antonio and Sagona, Claudia, *Archaeology at the North-East Anatolian Frontier, I: An Historical Geography and a Field Survey of the Bayburt Province* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), p. 31.
- 124 Most probably the Assyrian sources meant by 'Upper Lake (or Sea) of Nairi' Lake Van and by 'Lower Lake (Sea) of Nairi' Lake Urmia. Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 15.
- 125 Sagona and Sagona, *Archaeology at the North-East Anatolian Frontier*, vol. 1 (2004), p. 33. It remains disputed whether, as Fähnrich has postulated, that the land Daiaeni from the early eleventh century BCE is identical with the land Diauehe (Diauehi, Diauekhi, Diaohi) mentioned in Urartian inscriptions from the beginning of the eighth century BCE. Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 73–7; Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 78. The location of the Daiaeni remains uncertain; moreover, there is an information gap of three centuries, so that an ethnic continuity between Daiaeni and Diaohi, let alone the existence of a lasting stable state, cannot be proven. Claudia Sagona draws a tentative link from the Daiaeni to the Diaohi, *ibid.*, pp. 30–35. The toponym Diaohi later reappears in Xenophon as 'Taokhoi/Taochi' and as Tao in Georgian sources. Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition*, IV.6–7, trans. Rex Warner (1949; London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 203, 207–9.
- 126 Toumanoff, Cyril, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963), p. 292.
- 127 Redgate, *The Armenians* (1998), pp. 18f; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 51 n44.
- 128 Diakonoff, I.M., *The Pre-History of the Armenian People*, trans. Lori Jennings (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1984), pp. 46–57, 75, 113; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 25.
- 129 Hewsen, Robert H., *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 24. See also: Diakonoff, *Pre-History* (1984), pp. 112–15, 182 n14; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 24. Cyril Toumanoff believed in a close connection between Hayasa and Hayastan. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 53, 55 n49, 59.
- 130 Other authors such as Chahin derive the Mushki from the Chalybes. Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 39.
- 131 Bryce, Trevor, *The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 359f.
- 132 Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, vol. 2, no. 12 (1976), pp. 6f.
- 133 Diakonoff, *Pre-History* (1984), pp. 68f; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 16f.
- 134 Diakonoff, *Pre-History* (1984), pp. 67–73, 115.
- 135 Diakonoff, *Pre-History* (1984), pp. 65, 67, 119, 121; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 16f.
- 136 Herodotus, *The Histories*, III.94, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 213.
- 137 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.14, 17–18 (2007), pp. 719, 721f.
- 138 Toumanoff believes that the Mushki migrated from the Batman region north-east to Imereti and on to Kartli. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 55f. But as the examples of the toponyms Albania and Iberia show, they can designate different countries without any genetic connection: Iberia on the Mediterranean has nothing to do with Iberia in Georgia, nor does Caucasian Albania have any relation to the Balkan country of Albania.
- 139 Kacharava, Darejan and Kvirkevelia, Guram, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani* (New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University, 2008), p. 24. See also Appendix II, 'Long-established languages of the Caucasus by language family'.
- 140 Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 14.
- 141 Sagona and Sagona, *Archaeology at the North-East Anatolian Frontier* (2004), p. 35; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 43.
- 142 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.17 (2007), p. 720. See also: Procopius, *History of the Wars*, vol. 1, I.xii.14f (2006), p. 99; vol. 5, VIII.xiii.15, trans. H.B. Dewing (Loeb Classical Library, 1928; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 187.
- 143 Apakidze, J., 'Towards the study of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age settlements and settlement systems of the Colchian culture in Western Georgia', in: Svend Hansen and Mayke Wagner (eds), *AMIT. Archaeological communications from Iran and Turan*, vol. 37, 2005 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2006), pp. 175–81.
- 144 Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, trans. Francis Adams (Moscow: Dodo Press, 2009), part 15.
- 145 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 89.
- 146 Lordkipanidze, Othar, 'Georgien – Land und Raum' in: Gambashidze, Irina, Hauptmann, Andreas et al. (eds), *Georgien. Schätze aus dem Land des Goldenen Vlies* (Bochum: Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum, 2001), p. 17.
- 147 Makarov, *New Expeditions and Projects* (2016), p. 31.
- 148 See below, pp. 68f.
- 149 The Hittites may have imparted the knowledge of making iron from ores.
- 150 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 90; Kuparadze et al., in: Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), pp. 572–5; *eid.*, 'The history of iron processing and the creation of weapons in Georgia' (n.d.), p. 10; Soltes, *National Treasures* (1999), pp. 57, 75.
- 151 See below, pp. 120ff.
- 152 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.19 (2007), p. 722.
- 153 Aristotle (pseudo-Aristotle), *De Mirabilibus Auscultationibus*, §48, in: *Minor Works*, trans. W.S. Hett (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1936), p. 255.
- 154 Claudia Sagona locates the Chalybes between Trabzon and Erzincan: Sagona and Sagona, *Archaeology at the North-East Anatolian Frontier* (2004), p. 30, map 7. See also Xenophon, *Persian Expedition* IV.7 (2003), p. 209.
- 155 Strabo, *Geographica*, I.2.39 (2007), p. 72.
- 156 Appian, *Roman History*, book 12, XV, vol. 2, trans. Horace White (Loeb Classical Library, 1912; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015),

- p. 435. See also Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.19 (2007), p. 722.
- 157 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.18 (2007), p. 721. See also Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 91, 154, 156.
- 158 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, XXXIII. 52, vol. 9: books 33–35, trans. H. Rackham (Loeb Classical Library, 1952; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 43.
- 159 Little is known about the identity of the Colchian and neighbouring tribes during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Although classical authors mention Lazi, Machelones, Chalybes, Moschi, Geloni, Marres, Coli, Zydretae, Mossynoeci, Marres, Macrones, Apsilae, Heniochi, Sanigae, Abasci, Sanigae, Coraxi, Soani, Coli and Melanchlaeni, it is questionable whether these tribes existed a millennium before those classical authors.
- 160 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 82; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 77.
- 161 Bryce, *Routledge Handbook* (2012), pp. 171, 331; Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 82.
- 162 Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), p. 78. See also: Lordkipanidze, Othar, 'Georgien' (2001), p. 17.
- 163 In view of the meagre sources, Toumanoff's assertion that Colchis was 'the first Caucasian State' as a Georgian kingdom is difficult to follow. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 68f.
- 164 Meissner, Burkhard, 'A belated nation: Sources on ancient Iberia and Iberian kingship', *AMIT*, vol. 32, 2000 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2000), p. 187.
- 165 See above, p. 40.
- 166 Lyonnet, in ead., *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), p. 134.
- 167 Anthony, *Horse, the Wheel and Language* (2007), pp. 285f. Lyonnet, in: ead., *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), pp. 134f; Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), pp. 137–41.
- 168 Wang, Chuan-Chao et al., 'Ancient human genome-wide data from a 3,000-year interval in the Caucasus corresponds with eco-geographic regions', *Nature Communications*, 10: 590, February 2019 (London: Macmillan, 2019), pp. 7, 9.
- 169 Ivanova, Mariya, 'The chronology of the "Maikop Culture" in the North Caucasus: Changing perspectives', *Aramazd*, vol. 2 (Yerevan: Association for Near Eastern and Caucasian Studies, 2007), p. 11.
- 170 Courcier, Antoine, 'La métallurgie dans les pays du Caucase au Chalcolithique et au début de l'âge du Bronze', in: Lyonnet, *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), pp. 218, 228; Lyonnet, *ibid.*, pp. 134, 150; Anthony, *Horse, the Wheel and Language* (2007), pp. 285f.
- 171 Rassamakin, *Nordpontische Steppe* (2004), pp. 180–83, 210.
- 172 Anthony, *Horse, the Wheel and Language* (2007), p. 187; Sagona, *Archaeology of the Caucasus* (2018), p. 143.
- 173 Bahn, Paul G., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Prehistoric Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 72. However, as Ivanova has pointed out, not all red pigments sprayed on dead bodies were actually ochre; rare minium, cinnabar or very rare montroydite were also used. Ivanova, *Black Sea* (2013), p. 108.
- 174 Korenevskij, Sergej N., 'Grosse Kurgane der Majkop-Kultur. Arbeitsaufwand und kultische Aspekte bei ihrer Errichtung', in: Hansen et al., *Von Majkop bis Trialeti* (2010), p. 59; Rassamakin, *Nordpontische Steppe* (2004), pp. 180–83.
- 175 Chernykh, Evgeny, 'The "Steppe Belt" of stockbreeding cultures in Eurasia during the Early Metal Age', *Trabajos de Prehistoria*, vol. 65, no. 2 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2008), p. 79. Korenevskij specifies for the Maikop culture a period from 40/39 to 30/29 centuries BCE: Korenevskij, in: Hansen et al., *Von Majkop bis Trialeti* (2010), p. 59. The Bronze Age burial objects of the Maikop culture should not be confused with the so-called 'Maikop Treasure', a collection of Iron Age Scythian grave finds: Leskov, Alexander M., *Grabschätze der Adygeen. Neue Entdeckungen im Nordkaukasus* (Munich: Hirmer, 1990); id., *The Maikop Treasure* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), pp. ix, 239–41.
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- 179 Chernykh, *Ancient Metallurgy* (1992), p. 77.
- 180 Hansen, Svend, 'Gold and silver in the Maikop culture', in: Meller Harald et al. (eds), *Metals of Power: Early Gold and Silver* (Halle: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Saxony-Anhalt, 2014), p. 398.
- 181 Korenevskij, Sergej N., 'Military and elite symbolism in the funeral practices of the Maikop-Novosvobodnaia Community', in: Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), p. 37.
- 182 Chernykh, *Nomadic Cultures* (2017), pp. 141, 170, 626. However, in an earlier work Chernykh did emphasize the wealth of burial objects in Kalmykia: *Ancient Metallurgy* (1992), p. 126.
- 183 Anthony, *Horse, the Wheel and Language* (2007), pp. 287–9; Hansen, 'Gold and silver in the Maikop culture' (2014), pp. 389–91. See also: Peltenburg, 'Conflict and exclusivity in Early Bronze Age societies of the middle Euphrates valley', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 72, no. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), pp. 233–52.
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- 189 Lyonnet, in: Marro and Hauptmann, *Chronologies* (2000), p. 309.
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- 191 Ivanova also rightly warns against attributing a very early production of faience to the North Caucasus: *Black Sea* (2013), pp. 78–80, 86f.
- 192 Lyonnet, in: Marro and Hauptmann, *Chronologies* (2000), p. 303. It is disputed whether the stage of Klady-Novosvobodnaya still belongs to the Maikop culture or whether it represents an independent culture. Alexei Rezapkin takes the view that the Novosvobodnaya kurgans did not originate from the Maikop culture, but 'had their starting point in Central and Northern Europe' and 'belonged to a cultural block that stretched from Northern Central Europe to North-Western Caucasus'. Rezapkin, Alexej D., *Das frühbronzezeitliche Gräberfeld von Klady und die Majkop-Kultur in Nordwestkaukasien* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2000), p. 30. See also: Lyonnet, in ead., *Les cultures du Caucase* (2007), pp. 144–6, 150.
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- 197 Kohl and Trifonov, in: Renfrew and Bahn, *Cambridge World Prehistory* (2015), p. 1583.
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- 200 Trifonov, 'Shepsi' (2014), p. 751.
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- 209 Anthony, *Horse, the Wheel and Language* (2007), p. 302; Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 1 (2012), pp. 95f; Gerling, Claudia, *Prehistoric Mobility and Diet in the West Eurasian Steppes 3500–300 BC: An Isotopic Approach* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 13, 15.
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- 10 Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt* (2010), pp. 66–70, 132f.
- 11 See above, p. 46.
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- 13 Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 180.
- 14 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 64.
- 15 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 65. Chahin gives as date the year 849 BCE, Wartke 856 BCE. Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 40.
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- 17 Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 40.
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IV. The First Caucasian State, Greek Emporia and Northern Horse Peoples

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- Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt* (2010), pp. 233, 245, 305–8, 311.
- See above, p. 56.
- Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt* (2010), pp. 132f, 150, 306.
- Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt* (2010), pp. 233, 332–4.
- Mallory, J.P., *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), pp. 24–30, 233–43. Renfrew holds the contrary view that the Indo-European Proto-Hittites

- 33 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 43. The stele was discovered towards the end of 1829 by the young German researcher Friedrich E. Schulz (1799–1829), who was murdered a few days later by Kurds. At the same place in the 1850s, Kurds murdered the German R. Rosch, together with his 38 companions. Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), pp. 12, 14.
- 34 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 96f; id., 'Eastern provinces of Urartu' (2009), pp. 498f.
- 35 Radner, Karen, 'Between a rock and a hard place: Musasir, Kummé, Ukku and Šubria – the buffer states between Assyria and Urartu', in: Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), p. 253.
- 36 Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), Introduction, pp. 28f.
- 37 Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1969), p. 126.
- 38 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 44f.
- 39 Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu*, Introduction (2012), pp. 28f; Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1969), pp. 68f; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), pp. 124–31.
- 40 Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1969), p. 70; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 48f; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), pp. 132f, 142–4. In Bianili, while members of the ruling family and high dignitaries were buried in rock or stone tombs, the rest of the population was cremated.
- 41 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 70; Çilingiroğlu, *Geschichte des Königreiches Van. Urartu* (İzmir: Ofis Ticaret Matbaacılık, 1988), p. 19.
- 42 Özfirat, Aynur, 'Eriqua and Minuahinili: An Early Iron Age–Nairi kingdom and Urartian province on the northern slope of Mt Ağrı (Settlement Complexes at Melekli and Karakoyunlu)', *TUBA-AR*, vol. 21 (Ankara: Turkish Academy of Sciences, 2017), pp. 63–92.
- 43 See above, p. 58.
- 44 There is no evidence that al-Mina was ruled by Bianili. Çiğçi, Ali, *The Socio-Economic Organisation of the Urartian Kingdom* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), p. 161.
- 45 Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), map 13, p. 27; Kleiss, Wolfram and Kroll, Stephan, 'Die Burgen von Libliuni', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, vol. 13 (Berlin: Reimer, 1980), pp. 21–61; Salvini, Mirjo, 'Die Felsinschrift Sarduris II. in Seğendel (Libliuni)', *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, vol. 15 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982), pp. 97–100. The course of the eastern border of Urartu is controversial.
- 46 Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1969), p. 85, 208. See also Diakonoff, *Pre-History* (1984), pp. 130, 199.
- 47 Salvini, Mirjo, 'The historical geography of the Sevan region in the Urartian period', in: Raffaele Biscione et al. (eds), *The North-Eastern Frontier: Urartians and Non-Urartians in the Sevan Lake Basin* (Roma: Istituto di studi sulle civiltà dell'Egeo e del Vicino Oriente, 2002), p. 27. Salvini doubts the veracity of this Urartian proclamation; id., *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 75f.
- 48 Smith, *Political Landscape* (2003), p. 168.
- 49 Çilingiroğlu, in: Sagona, *View from the Highlands* (2004), pp. 209, 219.
- 50 Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 78f; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 79f.
- 51 Xenophon, *Persian Expedition*, IV.8 (2003), p. 23.
- 52 Bryce, *Routledge Handbook* (2012), p. 620.
- 53 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 50.
- 54 Çilingiroğlu, *Geschichte des Königreiches Van* (1988), p. 34.
- 55 Salvini believes that Bastam was conquered only after Rusa II's death: *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 109.
- 56 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), pp. 83f; Çilingiroğlu, *Geschichte des Königreiches Van* (1988), pp. 27f; Piotrovsky, Boris B., *Ourartou, Neapolis des Scythes, Kharezm* (Paris: L'Orient Ancien Illustré, 1954), p. 32; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 72–8.
- 57 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 80f.
- 58 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), pp. 86f; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 79–84.
- 59 Salvini, *Geschichte* (1995), pp. 87f. For the original texts of the four letters of Sennacherib, see: Ivantchik, Askold, *Les Cimmériens au Proche-Orient* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1993), pp. 161–74.
- 60 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 89f. The Assyrian text does not give the name of the king who put down this rebellion. It probably was Rusa I, but could also be Melartua who is possibly identical with Rusa's successor Argishti II.
- 61 Ivantchik, *Cimmériens* (1993), pp. 174–7.
- 62 Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), map 13, p. 27; Ivantchik, Askold, *Kimmerer und Skythen* (Moscow: Palaeograph Press, 2001), p. 61; id., *Cimmériens* (1993), pp. 28, 51.
- 63 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 84–9; Sauter, Hermann, *Studien zum Kimmerierproblem* (Bonn: Habelt, 2000), pp. 219–24. Sauter denies that Rusa suffered two defeats – in the spring against the Cimmerians and in late summer against Sargon – and instead takes the view that there was only a single combined Assyrian–Cimmerian attack. See *ibid.*, p. 222.
- 64 Fuchs, in Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), pp. 155–7. See also: Roaf, Michael, 'Could Rusa son of Erimena have been king of Urartu during Sargon's eighth campaign?', in: *ibid.*, pp. 212f.
- 65 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 91–9; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), pp. 52–8.
- 66 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 94.
- 67 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 98.
- 68 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), pp. 92, 94.
- 69 Ivantchik, *Cimmériens* (1993), pp. 54f; Sauter, *Studien zum Kimmerierproblem* (2000), pp. 224f.
- 70 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 101–3; id., 'Eastern provinces of Urartu' (2009), pp. 504f.
- 71 Fuchs, in Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), p. 137; Ivantchik, *Cimmériens* (1993), pp. 201–4; Piotrovsky, *Urartu* (1969), p. 134.
- 72 Fuchs, in Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), p. 137; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 105.
- 73 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 110.
- 74 Salvini, 'Urartäischen Stelen vom "Priester-See" (Keşiş Göl)', *Antike Welt*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Darmstadt: WBG, 2019), pp. 33–7. On the stele, see also Lehmann-Haupt, *Armenien. Einst und Jetzt* (1926), vol. 2/1, pp. 40–8; 2/2, pp. 461, 857.
- 75 Luckenbill, Daniel D., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 2, no. 834 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1926–7), pp. 320f. See also Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), p. 111.
- 76 Salvini, in Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), p. 441.
- 77 Ivantchik, *Kimmerer und Skythen* (2001), p. 268.
- 78 Brereton, Gareth (ed.), *I am Ashurbanipal, King of the world, King of Assyria* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), pp. 283f. In 605 BCE, another Egyptian–Assyrian army was crushed by the Babylonian–Median alliance at the Battle of Carchemish.
- 79 In the literature, many dates are given for the end of the Urartian state. They vary from ca. 650 to 585 or even 547 BCE. Hellwag gives an overview in: Hellwag, Ursula, 'Der Niedergang Urartus', in: Kroll et al., *Bianili-Urartu* (2012), pp. 238–41.
- 80 Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, part II, Chronicle 3,72, 4,3, 4,11 (1975/2000), pp. 96f; Rollinger, Robert, 'The Median "Empire", the end of Urartu and Cyrus the Great's campaign in 547 BC (Nabonidus Chronicle II 16)', *Ancient West and East*, vol. 7 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), pp. 53f.
- 81 Diakonoff, I.A., 'Media', in: *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2: *The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. Ilya Gershevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 124; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 117–19.
- 82 Jacobs, B., 'Achaemenidenherrschaft in der Kaukasus-Region und in Cis-Kaukasien', *AMIT*, vol. 32, 2000 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2001), p. 93.
- 83 Herodotus, *Histories*, I,73 (2003), p. 33.
- 84 Cyrus was king of the Persians of Anshan from 559 BCE and, after his victories over the Medes, declared himself the king of the Persians and Medes in personal union in the year 550 BCE.
- 85 Dandamayev, M., 'Media and Achaemenid Iran', in: János Harmatta (ed.), *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. 2, *The Development of Sedentary and Nomadic Civilizations, 700 BC to AD 250* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), pp. 37–9.
- 86 'Cyrus, king of Parsu, mustered his army and crossed the Tigris downstream from Arbela and, in the month Iyyat, marched to U[rartu]. He defeated (or: killed) its king, seized its possessions (and) set up his own garrison (there).' Rollinger, 'Median "Empire"' (2008), p. 57.
- 87 Whether the territories listed are purely geographical names, or whether they represent administrative units (satrapies) remains disputed.
- 88 Walser, Gerold, *Die Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis. Teheraner Forschungen*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1966), pp. 27–9; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 175. However, it is unclear whether the Armenian people inhabited the entire Urartian territory before Bianili's fall. See Salvini, in: Rova and Tonussi, *At the Northern Frontier* (2017), p. 442.
- 89 Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 121, 151; Wartke, *Urartu* (1993), p. 175.
- 90 Scott, Marian et al. (eds), *Impact of the Environment on Human Migration in Eurasia*, NATO Scientific Affairs Division (Dordrecht: Kluwer Publishers, 2004), pp. 39f.
- 91 Ivantchik, *Kimmerer und Skythen* (2001), pp. 48f, 279; Lebedynsky, Iaroslav, *Les Cimmériens. Les premiers nomades des steppes européennes, IXe–VIIe siècles av. J.-C.* (Paris: Errance, 2004), pp. 19, 73–6, 104f, 116, 152.
- 92 See above, p. 89.
- 93 See above, p. 89.
- 94 Ivantchik, *Kimmerer und Skythen* (2001), pp. 21f, 42–9, 56; Sauter, *Studien zum Kimmerierproblem* (2000), pp. 226, 247; Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), pp. 30, 44.
- 95 Strabo, *Geographica*, I,3,21 (2007), p. 92; Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), pp. 17, 31, 45, 126f.; Sauter, *Studien*

- zum *Kimmerierproblem* (2000), p. 167. It is disputed whether there were one or two Phrygian kings with the name Midas. It is likewise debated whether the King Midas already mentioned in 738 BCE is identical with the Midas from 63 years later who voluntarily committed suicide.
- 96 Sauter, *Studien zum Kimmerierproblem* (2000), p. 232–4, 248f. See also Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), p. 45. Herodotus gives another account that differs from the Assyrian texts. *Histories*, I.15 (2003), p. 9.
- 97 Strabo, *Geographica*, I.3.21 (2007), p. 92.
- 98 Ivantchik, *Kimmerier und Skythen* (2001), p. 71; Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), pp. 19, 33, 45, 169.
- 99 Ivantchik, *Kimmerier und Skythen* (2001), p. 72.
- 100 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.11 (2007), p. 717. See also Schiltz, Véronique, *L'or des Amazones* (Paris: Findakly, 2001), p. 63.
- 101 Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), p. 166; Rolle, Renate, Murzin, V'jačeslav Ju. and Alekseev, Andrej Ju., *Königskurgan Čertomlyk. Ein skythischer Grabhügel des 4. vorchristlichen Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), vol. 1, p. 168.
- 102 Galanina, Ludmila K., *Die Kurgane von Kelermes* (Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1996), p. 13.
- 103 The cultural monuments of the Scythians can be classified in regional and chronological clusters as follows: 1) Tuva, Southern Siberia, ninth–seventh century BCE; 2) North Caucasus, seventh–sixth century BCE; 3) North Pontic region, sixth–third century BCE; 4) Crimea, second century BCE–third century CE.
- 104 Diakonoff, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2 (1985), pp. 87, 103; Salvini, *Geschichte und Kultur* (1995), pp. 117–19.
- 105 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), pp. 187, 203; Lebedynsky, *Cimmériens* (2004), pp. 31, 44. Rolle, Renate, Müller-Wille, Michael and Schietzel, Kurt (eds), *Gold der Steppe. Archäologie der Ukraine* (Kiel: Archäologisches Landesmuseum, 1991), p. 59.
- 106 The Assyrian texts mention neither Nineveh's siege by the Medes nor the intervention of the Scythians. Sauter, *Studien zum Kimmerierproblem* (2000), pp. 93f, 231. The dating of the attack of Cyaxares around the year 640 BCE follows from Herodotus' remark that the Scythians had established a 28-year period of dominance in the region, which ended at the latest around 612 BCE with the fall of Nineveh. This results in a period of Cyaxares' rule of at least 55 years, contradicting other statements.
- 107 Herodotus, *Histories*, I.103–6 (2003), pp. 48f. See also: Rolle et al., *Gold der Steppe* (1991), p. 59.
- 108 Jeremiah, 5:16; 6:23.
- 109 Strabo, *Geographica*, II.1.14; XI. 8.4; XI.14.4 (2007), pp. 107, 739, 763. See also: Diakonoff, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2 (1985), pp. 117–19; Hewsens, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), maps 13, 52, pp. 27, 59.
- 110 Herodotus, *Histories*, I.106 (2003), p. 49.
- 111 See above, p. 93f.
- 112 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), p. 205.
- 113 The famous gold hoard of Ziwiye from the area of the Mannaeans, whose objects reveal Assyrian, Urartian and Scythian influences and which is associated with the tomb of a Scythian commander, is not scientifically exploitable. The objects bought by museums on the antiques market originated from looting and commercial excavations, so that neither their origin nor coherence as a collection can be proven. Moreover, the authenticity of several objects is doubtful. Muscarella, Oscar White, “Ziwiye” and Ziwiye: The forgery of a provenience’, *Journal of Field Archaeology*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Boston: Boston University, 1977), pp. 197–219.
- 114 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), pp. 117, 119.
- 115 The metal stirrup was invented in the third century CE by the proto-Mongolian Xianbei and brought to Europe by the Avars. Baumer, *The History of Central Asia*, vol. 2: *The Age of the Silk Roads* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014), pp. 88, 176.
- 116 The ‘Maikop Treasure’ is not a uniform excavation find. It consists of more than 2,000 objects, 330 of which have an inventory number, dating from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. They were acquired by the French collector M.A. Merle de Massonneau, who lived in Russia from 1884 to 1904. Alexander Leskov, who analysed the collection, dispersed today between four museums, recognized two object clusters, one from the region of Maikop, Kuban, which may originate from the fifth century BCE, the second from the Pontic steppe, fourth century BCE. Leskov, *Maikop Treasure* (2008), pp. vii–ix, 239–41.
- 117 Menghin, Wilfried, Parzinger, Hermann, Nagler, Anatoli and Nawroth, Manfred (eds), *Im Zeichen des goldenen Greifen. Königsgräber der Skythen* (Munich: Prestel, 2007), pp. 198–202.
- 118 The three most important animals in Scythian art are deer, feline predators, and birds of prey.
- 119 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), pp. 195, 197, 207.
- 120 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), pp. 187, 195, 197, 207.
- 121 The objects from Kelermes mentioned here are shown in Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), table 1–44. Unfortunately, the first excavator of Kelermes in 1903–4, the mining technician D.G. Schultz, turned out to be a nefarious grave robber who secretly melted down more than 3 kg of gold finds. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–25.
- 122 Leskov, *Grabschätze der Adygeen* (1990), p. 15.
- 123 Galanina, *Kurgane von Kelermes* (1996), pp. 35, 55, 59, 71, 83.
- 124 Leskov, *Grabschätze der Adygeen* (1990), pp. 15–17.
- 125 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.72 (2003), pp. 263f.
- 126 Menghin et al., *Im Zeichen des goldenen Greifen* (2007), pp. 207–9. Leskov assigns Iranian or Asia Minor origin to the golden rhyton. Leskov, *Grabschätze der Adygeen* (1990), p. 41.
- 127 Leskov, *Grabschätze der Adygeen* (1990), pp. 41–4, fig. 191–7.
- 128 Leskov, *Grabschätze der Adygeen* (1990), pp. 35f; Menghin, *Im Zeichen des goldenen Greifen* (2007), pp. 205f.
- 129 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.62 (2003), pp. 259f.
- 130 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.3f (2003), pp. 240f.
- 131 Rolle et al., *Königskurgan Čertomlyk*, vol. 2, part III (1998), p. 58.
- 132 Reeder, Ellen D. (ed.), *Scythian Gold: Treasures from Ancient Ukraine* (New York: Abrams, 1999), p. 33.
- 133 Anfimov, N.V., *Древнее золото Кубани / The Kuban's Ancient Gold* (Krasnodar: Krasnodar Book Publishers, 1987), pp. 100f.
- 134 Schmitt, Rüdiger, ‘Black Sea’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4, fasc. 3 (1989), p. 310.
- 135 Braund uses the term ‘Janus-like’ in connection with the Kingdom of Iberia of the fourth–fifth centuries CE. Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 5.
- 136 Fornasier, Jochen and Böttger, Burkhard (eds), *Das Bosporanische Reich* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), pp. 46–95; Giorgi, Valerio de (ed.), *La straordinaria storia di Fanagoria, la più grande colonia greca sul Mar Nero settentrionale* (Berganzona-Lugano: Editrice Ticino Management, 2016/17), pp. 10–23; Kuznetsov, Vladimir D., ‘Archaeological investigations in the Taman Peninsula’, in: Tsetschkladze, Goča R. (ed.), *North Pontic Archaeology: Recent Discoveries and Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 319–44; Makarov, *New Expeditions and Projects* (2016), pp. 54–63; Schiltz, *L'or des Amazones* (2001), pp. 25–63; Strabo, *Geographica*, VII.4.5; XI.2.3–12 (2007), pp. 435, 715–18; Tsetschkladze, G.R. and Kondrashev, A.V., ‘Notes on the rescue excavation of the Tuzla necropolis (1995–1997)’, in Tsetschkladze, *North Pontic Archaeology* (2001), pp. 345–63.
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- 140 Fornasier and Böttger, *Bosporanische Reich* (2002), p. 100.
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- 142 Matyszak, Philip, *Mithridates the Great: Rome's Indomitable Enemy* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2015), pp. 16f.
- 143 Matyszak, *Mithridates* (2015), pp. 159–63.
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- 146 Fornasier and Böttger, *Bosporanische Reich* (2002), p. 104; Lebedynsky, Iaroslav, *Les Sarmates. Amazones et lanciers cuirassés entre Oural et Danube VIIe siècle av. J.C.–VIIe siècle apr. J.C.* (Paris: Errance, 2002), p. 220.
- 147 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.1 (2007), p. 717.
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- 151 Harmatta, János, *Studies in the History and Language of the Sarmatians*, Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica, vol. 13 (Szeged: JATE, 1970), pp. 10, 36; Lebedynsky, *Sarmates* (2002), pp. 39–41.
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- 154 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.5.8 (2007), p. 731.
- 155 Schiltz, *L'or des Amazones* (2001), pp. 47, 143.

- 156 Nagler, *Kurgane der Mozdok-Steppen* (1996), pp. 41, 31–40; Kouznetsov, Vladimir and Lebedynsky Iaroslav, *Les Alains* (Paris: Errance, 2005), pp. 85, 229.
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- 164 Schiltz, *L'or des Amazones* (2001), pp. 219f.
- 165 Lebedynsky, *Sarmates* (2002), pp. 111f; Seipel, *Gold der Steppe* (2009), p. 64. In some cases, the burials of Kobiakovo and Khoklach, as well as the square burial chambers, are attributed to the Alans instead of the Aorsi. Schiltz, *L'or des Amazones* (2001), p. 70.
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- 171 Seipel, *Gold der Steppe* (2009), pp. 73, 111.
- 172 Lebedynsky, *Sarmates* (2002), pp. 118f; id., *De l'épée scythe au sabre mongol* (Paris: Errance 2008), pp. 84–6, 98.
- 173 According to Zenobius (first half of second century CE), the Siraces supposedly chose the man with the longest skull as their king. Lebedynsky, *Sarmates* (2002), pp. 18f, 113ff, 221.
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- 178 See above, p. 4.
- 179 Tacitus, *Annals*, VI.32–5, trans. Aubrey Symonds (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), pp. 265–7; Schiltz, *L'or des Amazones* (2001), p. 68.
- 180 Josephus, Flavius, *The Jewish War*, VII.7.4, trans. H.St.J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 575–7. Josephus refers to the kingdom of Hyrcania on the march of the Alans; however, this must be a confusion with Iberia. Bosworth, C.E., 'Arrian and the Alani', in: Albert Henrichs (ed.), *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 81 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 221; Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), p. 53.
- 181 Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), p. 223. See below, p. 151.
- 182 Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), pp. 219, 229f, 232; Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), p. 53. See below, p. 152.
- 183 Neparáczki, Endre et al., 'Y-chromosome haplogroups from Hun, Avar and conquering Hungarian period nomadic people of the Carpathian Basin', *Nature, Scientific Reports*, 9:16569 (London: Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1f.
- 184 Damgaard, Peter de Barros et al., '137 ancient human genomes from across the Eurasian steppes', *Nature*, vol. 557 (London: Macmillan, 2018), p. 369.
- 185 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXXI.3 (2004), pp. 414f.
- 186 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXXI.12f (2004), pp. 432–6; Lebedynsky, *Sarmates* (2002), pp. 63–5, 232f; Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 58f, 90–96; Souza, Philip de, *The Ancient World at War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 203–7.
- 187 Bóna, István, *Das Hunnenreich* (Stuttgart: Theiss Verlag, 1991), pp. 15, 68, 179.
- 188 Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 2 (2014), pp. 179, 209.
- 189 Escher, Katalin and Lebedynsky, Iaroslav, *Le dossier Attila* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007), p. 21; Kazanski, Michel, 'Die Hunnen im nördlichen Kaukasus', in Bodo Anke et al. (eds), *Attila und die Hunnen*, Historisches Museum der Pfalz Speyer (Stuttgart: Theiss Verlag 2007), pp. 74–81. Other authors date this Hun military campaign to the years 415–420 or 420–430; see *ibid.*, p. 76; Bóna, *Hunnenreich* (1991), p. 46.
- 190 Korobov, Dmitrij S., 'Alanische Katakombengräber im nördlichen Kaukasusgebiet', in: Anke et al., *Attila und die Hunnen* (2007), pp. 283, 286. See below, p. 214f.
- 7 Walser, *Völkerschaften* (1966), pp. 27–9. The inscription of Naqsh-e Rostam names 30 peoples including Persia. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–5.
- 8 To make the somewhat contradictory lists of satrapies compatible, Bruno Jacobs used a three-stage model which divided the empire into seven great satrapies. These were then subdivided into major satrapies, which, in turn, were divided into minor satrapies. In the case of the southern Caucasus, it lay in the Great Satrapy of Media, whose western quarter consisted of the Major Satrapy of Armenia. The latter was subdivided into the Minor Satrapies of (Eastern) Armenia (including eastern Georgia), Western Armenia (including central and western Georgia) and, for a limited time, perhaps Colchis as a separate unit. The eastern part of the South Caucasus was located in the Minor Satrapy of Media Minor, which was part of the Major Satrapy of Media and which roughly corresponded to the future Atropatene. Jacobs, Bruno, *Das Satrapienverwaltung im Perserreich zur Zeit Darius' III* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1994), pp. 182–6, map IV.
- 9 Herodotus, *Histories*, III.90–97; VII.79 (2003), pp. 212–14; 443.
- 10 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 123–5.
- 11 Herodotus, *Histories*, IV.122–4 (2003), p. 281.
- 12 Jacobs, 'Achaemenidenherrschaft' (2001), pp. 97f; id., 'Caucasus and Iran, the Achaemenid rule', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2006). More speculative is Ter-Martirosov's hypothesis that Armenia remained an 'independent kingdom' until 530 BCE and that it was not until Xerxes, between 484 and 480 BCE, that the border of the empire was extended to the Caucasus. Ter-Martirosov, F.I., 'Die Grenzen der achaimenidischen Gebiete in Transkaukasien', *AMIT. Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan*, vol. 32, 2000 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2001), pp. 243–5.
- 13 Gagoshidze, Iulon, 'Neuer archäologischer Befund im Bezirk Kareli, Šhida Kartli, *AMIT. Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan*, vol. 32, 2000 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 2001), pp. 51–8; id. and Kipiani, 'Neue Beobachtungen zur achaimenidischen Baukunst in Kartli', *ibid.*, pp. 59–66; Rapp, Stephen H., *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Casasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 24–7.
- 14 Knauss, and Babaev, 'Xerxes in Aserbaidshān. Eine persische Residenz am Rande des Weltreichs', *Antike Welt*, 6/16 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2016), pp. 70–76.
- 15 Gagoshidze, Iulon, 'The Temples at Dedoplis Mindori' *East and West*, vol. 42, December 1992 (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1992), pp. 28, 38, 44; id., 'Kartli in Hellenistic and Roman times: General aspects', in: A. Furtwängler et al. (eds), *Iberia and Rome: The Excavations of the Palace at Dedoplis Gora and the Roman Influence in the Caucasian Kingdom of Iberia* (Langenweissbach: Beier und Beran, 2008), pp. 31–3, 42, 52.
- 16 The ruins of the Roman fortifications of Sebastopolis are under water due to a rise in sea level.
- 17 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 95–117, 187, 193; Lordkipanidze, Otari, *Phasis: The River and City in Colchis* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000), pp. 12, 54, 61.
- 18 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 47, 198.

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- 1 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 9: 'Gaius Marius', XXX.1–3, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Loeb Classical Library, 1920; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998–2002), p. 551.
- 2 Jacobs, 'Achaemenidenherrschaft' (2001), p. 93. See also above, p. 94.
- 3 Walser, *Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis* (1966), pp. 27–41.
- 4 Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 2.
- 5 Herodotus, *Histories*, III.89–98; VII. 60–96 (2003), pp. 212–14; 438–46.
- 6 Thompson, R. Campbell and King, L.W., *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistān in Persia: A New Collation of the Persian, Susian and Babylonian Texts*, § xxvi–xxx; § xlix, § lii (London: British Museum, 1907), pp. 27–33, 56–9, 64.

- 19 Website of Nokalakevi-Tsikhegoji-Archaeopolis, 'About monument': web.archive.org/web/20070626071919/http://www.nokalakevi.ge/eng/monument/index.html.
- 20 See above, p. 59 and below, p. 77.
- 21 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.5 (2014), pp. 348f. The Achaei and Zikhi also practiced piracy. Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.12–14 (2007), pp. 718f.
- 22 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 43, 118–21.
- 23 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 115f. Kacharava and Kvirvelia, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice* (2008), pp. 66, 127, 166, 175.
- 24 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 127–48; Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 83–6; Kacharava and Kvirvelia, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice* (2008), pp. 35, 51–75, 97–110.
- 25 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.17 (2007), p. 721.
- 26 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.4 (2014), p. 347. See also Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 148f.; Gagoshidze, in: Furtwängler et al., *Iberia and Rome* (2008), p. 6 n41.
- 27 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.2.17 (2007), p. 721. See also Kacharava and Kvirvelia, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice* (2008), pp. 35, 75.
- 28 Contrary to the opinion of medieval Armenian historians, the Artaxiads were not a branch of the Parthian Arsakids. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 111.
- 29 See above, p. 77.
- 30 Herodotus, *Histories*, VII.73 (2003), p. 441.
- 31 Diakonoff, *Pre-History of the Armenian People* (1984), pp. 64f, 104, 106–9, 112–15, 123–7, 190; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), pp. 10, 24, 226; Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt* (2010), pp. 139f.; *Wieser Enzyklopädie des Europäischen Ostens* vol. 10: *Lexikon der Sprachen des europäischen Ostens*, ed. Miloš Okuka (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2002), p. 891.
- 32 Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans and commentary R.W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 84–8.
- 33 See above, p. 58.
- 34 Gamkrelidze and Ivanov, *Indo-European and the Indo-European: A Reconstruction and Historical Analysis of a Proto-Language and a Proto-Culture*, trans. Johanna Nichols, 2 vols (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter: 1994–5). See also: Diakonoff, *Pre-History of the Armenian People* (1984), p. 205 n7; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), pp. 10, 24. While the theory of Gamkrelidze and Ivanov is based on linguistics, the obsolete theory developed by the Göttingen School of History towards the end of the eighteenth century, which identified a white race with an alleged Caucasian race, was a taxonomic speculation based on the analysis of skulls.
- 35 Xenophon, *Persian Expedition*, II.4; III.5; IV.4 (2003), pp. 118, 173, 192–5, and Introduction, p. 31. Xenophon gives no indication as to whether Tiribazus was subordinate to Orontes.
- 36 Lang, David Marshall, 'Iran, Armenia and Georgia', in: *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3: *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), part I, p. 507.
- 37 Herodotus, *Histories*, III.70f (2003), p. 202f; Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.14.15 (2007), p. 768.
- 38 Herodotus, *Histories*, VII.85 (2003), p. 443.
- 39 Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 287f.
- 40 Lang, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3 (1983), part I, p. 510.
- 41 Payaslian, Simon, *The History of Armenia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 12.
- 42 It is disputed whether Artaxias and Zariadris were also of Orontidian descent or whether they merely proclaimed this to legitimize their seizure of power. According to Armenian inscriptions found on boundary stones, Artaxias may have been a son of Zariadris who claimed to be an Orontid. On the Orontids, see: Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), pp. 184–92; Garsoian, Nina, 'Armeno-Iranian relations in the pre-Islamic period', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2004); Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 32; Lang, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), p. 505–12; Payaslian, *History of Armenia* (2007), pp. 8–13; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 55–7, 62f; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 73, 277–94. It is uncertain whether Artaxias and Zariadris gained power at the same time or whether Zariadris had already seized power in Sophene years earlier. Eid, Volker, *Im Land des Ararat. Völker und Kulturen im Osten Anatoliens* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2006), p. 59.
- 43 Evans, Richard, *Roman Conquests: Asia Minor, Syria and Armenia* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2011), pp. 2–45.
- 44 Souza, *Ancient World at War* (2008), pp. 135f.
- 45 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.14.6 (2007), p. 764.
- 46 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 2, 'Lucullus', XXXI, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Loeb Classical Library, 1914; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998–2002) (1914; 1998–2002), pp. 573f.
- 47 Matyszak, *Mithridates the Great* (2015), pp. 14f.
- 48 Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica / Library of History*, vol. 11, tr. C.H. Oldfather et al. (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1957), pp. 372f: penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Diodorus_Siculus/31B*.html#22.
- 49 Armen, Herant K., *Tigranes the Great* (Detroit: Avondale, 1940), pp. 19, 39, 43; Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.14.15 (2007), p. 768.
- 50 Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 37.
- 51 See below, p. 287.
- 52 Lang, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 513f.
- 53 Payaslian, *History of Armenia* (2007), pp. 17f.
- 54 Chahin, *Kingdom of Armenia* (2001), p. 196.
- 55 The Parthians were also called 'Arsacids' after their founder Arsaces.
- 56 Armen, *Tigranes the Great* (1940), pp. 24–8; Payaslian, *History of Armenia* (2007), pp. 18f.
- 57 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles. The Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation*, 29 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 42f. See also: Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 199; Rapp, Stephen H., 'Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts' (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), p. 282; Toumanoff, Cyril, 'Chronology of the early kings' of Iberia', *Traditio*, vol. 25 (New York: Fordham University, 1969), pp. 1–33.
- 58 Patriarch Nerses lived from 359 to 363 in exile, probably in Edessa.
- 59 *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut' iwnk')*, trans. with commentary Nina G. Garsoian (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 47, 52, 137f, 446.
- 60 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII (1912; 2015); Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVI, trans. Earnest Cary (Loeb Classical Library, 1914; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Plutarch, *Lives* vols 2, 4, 5, 9 (1914–20; 1998–2002).
- 61 Matyszak, *Mithridates the Great* (2015), pp. 1–8, 14–17.
- 62 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 9, XXX.1–3 (1920; 1998–2002), p. 551.
- 63 Shenkar, Michael, *Intangible Spirits and Groven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 19–22.
- 64 Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (1980), pp. 148–52.
- 65 Strictly speaking, the author lists the pagan temples destroyed by Gregory the Illuminator. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, trans. and commentary R.W. Thomson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), pp. xxxviii–xl, 315–31, 440 n65.
- 66 Additional sources on the Armenian pantheon: Ishkol-Kerovpian, K., 'Mythologie der vorchristlichen Armenier', in Dumézil, Georges, 'Mythologie der Kaukasischen Völker', in: H.W. Haussig (ed.), *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, part I, *Die alten Kulturvölker*, 11–12 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), 11, pp. 59–100; 12, pp. 100–160; Lurker, Manfred, *Lexikon der Götter und Dämonen* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1989); Russell, James R., 'Armenia and Iran iii: Armenian religion', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. II, fasc. 4 (1986), pp. 438–44; id., *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- 67 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.14.16 (2007), p. 769.
- 68 Russell, 'Armenia and Iran iii' (1986), p. 442; Samuelian, *Classical Armenian Culture: Influences and Creativity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982), p. 5.
- 69 Ishkol-Kerovpian, in: Dumézil, 'Mythologie' (1986), 12, p. 139.
- 70 It remains unclear if the Artaxiads were really related to the Orontids; see note 42, above.
- 71 Dadoyan, Seta B., *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 2: *Armenian Realpolitik in the Islamic World and Diverging Paradigms – Case of Cilicia, Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2013), p. 215.
- 72 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, VIII.30–63 (2015), pp. 293–357. See also: Armen, *Tigranes the Great* (1940), pp. 44–64. Mitford, Timothy Bruce, *East of Asia Minor: Rome's Hidden Frontier*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 21f.
- 73 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, VIII.63–71 (2015), pp. 357–73.
- 74 Evans, *Roman Conquests* (2011), pp. 54–69, 71, 101; Matyszak, *Mithridates the Great* (2015), pp. 33–97; Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 22.
- 75 The name Azerbaijan is derived from that of the Persian satrap Atropates, via the toponym Atropatene.
- 76 Armen, *Tigranes the Great* (1940), pp. 77–84.
- 77 Donabédian, Patrick and Mutafian, Claude (eds), *Les douze capitales d'Arménie* (Paris: Somogy, 2010), pp. 99f. The nearby town of Arzan is also considered as a location of the former Tigranakert.

- Three other cities in Nakhchivan, Artsakh and Utik also bore the name Tigranakert. The city, also called Mayyafaraqin, was renamed Martyropolis in the fifth century CE when Bishop Maruta (in office ca. 399–410) brought relics of martyrs of the persecutions of Diocletian.
- 78 Armen, *Tigranes the Great* (1940), pp. 98–103; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 34; Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 22.
- 79 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 2, 'Lucullus', VII–XIV (1914; 1998–2002), pp. 491–511.
- 80 Armen, *Tigranes the Great* (1940), pp. 143–51.
- 81 Matyszak, *Mithridates the Great* (2015), pp. 132–5.
- 82 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, VIII.74–91 (2015), pp. 373–413; Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 2, 'Lucullus', XXI–XXXVI (1914; 1998–2002), pp. 535–87. See also: Fratantuono, Lee, *Lucullus: The Life and Campaigns of a Roman Conqueror* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017), pp. 107–13; Matyszak, *Mithridates* (2015), pp. 143–5.
- 83 Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 80.
- 84 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXXI (1998–2002), p. 197.
- 85 He may have been killed by followers of Mithridates.
- 86 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, VIII.91–111 (2015), pp. 411–55; Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXVI–XXXII (1998–2002), pp. 183–203. See also: Matyszak, *Mithridates* (2015), pp. 146–64; Seager, Robin, *Pompey the Great: A Political Biography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 44–56.
- 87 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVII § 5 (1989), p. 107.
- 88 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVI, § 52 (1989), p. 89; Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXXIII (1998–2002), pp. 199–203; Seager, *Pompey the Great* (2002), pp. 44–57. To whom Pompey finally assigned Sophene is not clear, since neither Cassius Dio nor Plutarch specify. Marciak and Redgate argue for Ariobarzanes I of Cappadocia, Seager for Tigranes the Great and Hewsen for Tigranes' son and successor Artavazdes. From a strategic point of view it makes more sense that Sophene was affiliated to Cappadocia, whose king Ariobarzanes was a client of Rome than to the defeated enemy Tigranes. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 34. Marciak, Michał, 'The cultural landscape of Sophene from Hellenistic to early Byzantine times', *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 17 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2014), p. 32; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 71; Seager, *ibid.* p. 56.
- 89 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.4.6 (2007), p. 727.
- 90 Pompey had transferred control of Armenia to his legate Lucius Afranius.
- 91 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXXV (1998–2002), pp. 207–9.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.4.2 (2007), p. 725.
- 94 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.11 (2014), p. 359.
- 95 Ptolemaios, *Handbuch der Geographie*, V.12.3; V.13.1; VIII.19.8 (2006), pp. 545, 547, 752–4.
- 96 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVI, § 52, 54 (1989), pp. 89–95.
- 97 On this topic, see: Chorbajian, Levon, Donabédian, Patrick and Mutafian, Claude, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 53f; Dreher, Martin, 'Pompeius und die kaukasischen Völker: Kolcher, Iberer, Albaner', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996), p. 195; Gippert Jost et al. (eds), *The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mount Sinai*, vol. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), p. viii; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), pp. 40f; Plontke-Lüning, Annegret, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien. Die Entwicklung des christlichen Sakralbaus in Lazika, Iberien, Armenien, Albanien und den Grenzregionen vom 4. bis zum 7. Jh.* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), p. 122; Samuelian, *Classical Armenian Culture* (1982), pp. 27–35.
- 98 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.4.5 (2007), p. 764.
- 99 Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, VIII.114 (2015), p. 463; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVII, § 1–5 (1989), pp. 99–109; Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXXIV–XXXV (1998–2002), pp. 207–9. See also: Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 168f; Dreher, 'Pompeius und die kaukasischen Völker' (1996), pp. 198–202 n79; Evans, *Roman Conquests* (2011), pp. 110f.
- 100 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, 'Pompey', XXXVI (1998–2002), p. 209.
- 101 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.19 (2014), p. 377. See also above, p. 59.
- 102 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.7.3 (2007), pp. 735f.
- 103 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.12 (2014), p. 361.
- 104 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3, 'Crassus', XVIII–XXXIII, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (1916; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 369–421.
- 105 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3, 'Crassus', XXXIII (1984), p. 421.
- 106 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 5, XLIX, § 19 (1989), p. 381.
- 107 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 5, XLIX, § 24 (1989), p. 391.
- 108 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 27.
- 109 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 5, XLIX, § 24–31 (1989), pp. 391–405.
- 110 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 5, XLIX, § 39f (1989), pp. 421–5.
- 111 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 25–9; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 76–8.
- 112 See below, p. 166.
- 113 See above, p. 138. The late history of Pontus is only briefly touched on, as the region lies outside of the Caucasus.
- 114 Strabo, *Geographica*, XII.3.38 (2007), p. 805.
- 115 See above, p. 106 and Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.3, 11 (2007), pp. 715, 717.
- 116 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.5.18 (2007), p. 721.
- 117 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 5, LIX, § 12 (1989), p. 297. Braund, though, follows Schürer, who identifies Polemon II as the grandson of Phythodoris. Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 175; Schürer, Emil, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1 (1885; repr. and revised London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 450.
- 118 Strabo, *Geographica*, XII.3.29 (2007), p. 800.
- 119 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 174–7; Eid, *Im Land des Ararat* (2006), pp. 57f; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 28.

VI. Roman–Parthian Condominiums in the South Caucasus

- Elishe, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. with commentary R.W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 77f.
- Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.10, transl. C.F.J. Dowsett (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 9f.
- The phonetic sign Ł, ł, is pronounced (and often transliterated) as 'gh' in Armenian.
- For a brief overview of the sources, see: Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 83–91; Ter-Ghewondyan, Aram, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia* (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1976), pp. 1–14.
- Several classical Armenian historical works from the fifth to the fifteenth century are available at: www.attalus.org/armenian.
- Bayzian, Elise Antreassian, *Mesrob Mashdotz, a Fifth Century Life: A Retelling of Koriun's Life of Mashdotz* (New York: St. Vartan Press (1984).
- Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), pp. vii, xc.
- Epic Histories*, III (1989), pp. 3, 6, 44.
- Łazar P'arpec'i, *The History of Łazar P'arpec'i*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 1f, 8, 20, 33f.
- Elishe, *History of Vardan* (1982), pp. 3, 6, 11–15.
- The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. xi, xxxviii–xl. The first part of the work ascribed to Sebeos is called *The Primary History*; it is not included in Thomson's translation. It describes the legendary descent of the Armenians from Hayk and shows parallels to corresponding passages in the work of Movses Khorenatsi: Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (1978), pp. 357–68.
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- Movses' translator Thomson calls him 'an audacious and mendacious faker. [...] He wilfully distorts his sources and invents episodes [...] and is completely unscrupulous in his distortions.' Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (1978), p. 58.
- Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (1978), pp. 1–61. See also: Mahé, Jean-Pierre, 'Die Bekehrung Transkaukasiens: Eine Historiographie mit doppeltem Boden', in: Werner Seibt (ed.), *Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), p. 118f; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), p. 91.
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- 18 Step'anos Taronec'i, *The Universal History*, trans. Tim Greenwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). The translator Tim Greenwood suspects that Taronetsi and Asohik are two different people. *Ibid.*, pp. 8f, 56–8.
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- 25 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), pp. 36, 379.
- 26 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (1961), pp. xv–xx.
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- 29 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 3 (1996), pp. 2–4.
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- 32 Gambashidze et al., *Georgien* (2001), p. 5; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 12.
- 33 Lang, David Marshall (ed. and trans.), *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London: George Allen and Unwin (1956), p. 11.
- 34 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 137; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 3–6 (1996), pp. 2–6.
- 35 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 144 n161; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 8–11 (1996), pp. 9–13.
- 36 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 10–11 (1996), pp. 12f.
- 37 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 18–19 (1996), pp. 25–7.
- 38 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 252, 257–9, 296.
- 39 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 274.
- 40 Fährnich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 91f.
- 41 Cyril Toumanoff made the attempt to assign regnal dates to the legendary kings of Kartli. Toumanoff, 'Chronology of the early kings' (1969), p. 435. The suspected connection between Parnavaz (Pharnavaz) and the Choresmian king Pharasmanes mentioned by Arrian, whose empire allegedly bordered on Colchis and who offered Alexander the Great an alliance for the conquest of the eastern Black Sea region around 329 BCE is highly improbable. Arrian, *Campaigns of Alexander*, IV.15 (1971), pp. 227f.
- 42 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 20–26 (1996), pp. 28–38.
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- 45 See above, p. 139.
- 46 Stopka, Krzysztof, *Armenia Christiana: Armenian Religious Identity and the Churches of Constantinople and Rome (4th–15th century)* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2017), p. 82. See below, p. 229.
- 47 Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 199.
- 48 Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 203.
- 49 For the traditional rulers' list from *Kartlis Tskhovreba* see Appendix III, p. 308.
- 50 *Kartlis Tskhovreba* cites a ruler called Bartom instead of King Parnavaz II and ignores the defeat by Rome. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 30–32 (1996), pp. 44–6.
- 51 See above, p. 141.
- 52 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 7, LVI (1924), pp. 251f. This episode is described in detail by the Roman historians Cassius Dio and Tacitus. Tacitus, *Annals*, VI.32f (1906), p. 211. Cassius Dio, however, writes that Tiberius turned to King Mithridates I of Iberia, who had two sons named Pharasmanes and Mithridates and died around the year 34/35, while according to Tacitus the addressee of Tiberius' letter was Pharasmanes' younger brother. Accordingly, Meissner, Fährnich and Gagoshidze assume for the first half of the first century two Iberian kings, Mithridates I (r. ?–before 35) and Pharasmanes I (r. ca. 35–before 75 or 36–70), while Rayfield follows Toumanoff and cites only one ruler, Pharasmanes (Aderki I, r. 1–58). Fährnich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), p. 105; Gagoshidze, in: Furtwängler et al., *Iberia and Rome* (2008), pp. 14–16; Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 189, 191; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 29f. See also Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 215.
- 53 Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), p. 221.
- 54 See above, p. 110f.
- 55 Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 6 (1876), p. 11.
- 56 See below, p. 166. Bivar, A.D.H., 'The political history of Iran under the Arsacids', in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 73–85; Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 199, 201.
- 57 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.15 (2014), p. 367. The expedition had to be cancelled, however, because of the rebellion of the governor of Gaul, Vindex.
- 58 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 43–54 (1996), pp. 52–64; *Moktsevoy Kart'lisay* mentions six pairs of kings. Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 26of, 290.
- 59 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 213–15, 227–9; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 32.
- 60 Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, 19 (2003), pp. 57, 63; Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 178, 181–4; Kakhidze, Emzar, 'Apsaros: A Roman fort in Southwestern Georgia', in: P.G. Bilde and J.H. Petersen (eds), *Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, Black Sea Studies, 8 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008), pp. 304, 306, 311, 313.
- 61 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 38, 57–60; Pollard, Nigel and Berry, Joanne, *The Complete Roman Legions* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012), p. 162.
- 62 The sequence and dating of Iberian kings is disputed for this period. Braund mentions Mithridates I, Pharasmanes I, Mithridates II, Pharasmanes II: *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 215; Meissner cites Mithridates I, Pharasmanes I, Mithridates II, Mithridates III, Pharasmanes II: 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 191 n81; Rayfield refers to Parsman I, Mithridates I, Amazasp I, Parsman II: *Edge of Empires* (2012), pp. 30–34. The present author shares Meissner's view.
- 63 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 230f.
- 64 Arrian, *Periplus Ponti Euxini*, 19 (2003), pp. 67, 101, 105.
- 65 Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), pp. 219, 229f, 232; Kousnetsov, *Les Alains* (2005), p. 53.
- 66 Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), pp. 228–47; Hyland, Ann, *Training the Roman Cavalry: From Arrian's 'Ars Tactica'* (London: Grange Books, 1993).
- 67 Alemany, Agusti, *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 108f; Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), pp. 229f.
- 68 As the stationing of only 50 soldiers hardly makes sense, the expression *cohortem quinquagenariam* in the *Historia Augusta* must be a spelling mistake for *quingenariam*. Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani' (1977), p. 230 n54.
- 69 Gagoshidze, in Furtwängler et al., *Iberia and Rome* (2008), pp. 21f.
- 70 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 198.
- 71 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), p. 262; Kettenhofen, Erich, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege des 3. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. nach der Inschrift Šahpuhrs I. an der Ka'be-ye Zartošt (ŠKZ)* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1982), p. 90; Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 78.
- 72 Apsaros was rebuilt by the Byzantines in the middle of the sixth century. Kakhidze, 'Apsaros: A Roman fort' (2008), pp. 313f.
- 73 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 263–6, 294.
- 74 See below, pp. 208ff.
- 75 Lang, 'Iran, Armenia and Georgia', in *Cambridge*

- History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), p. 520; Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 261, 290–93; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 34f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 54–9 (1996), pp. 65–9.
- 76 For Armenia, see below, pp. 170ff.
- 77 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 28, see also pp. 3, 21, 123. The inscription is written in Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek: ‘Great inscription of Shapur I, SKZ’, 2 (Parthian Sources Online); Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 241–3.
- 78 This inscription is one of four virtually identical proclamations from Kartir.
- 79 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 29. Nonetheless, it is possible that Kartir’s demarcation was not meant politically, but ethnically.
- 80 ‘Great inscription of Shapur I, SKZ’, 44 (Parthian Sources Online). Amazasp III is not mentioned in the medieval sources of Iberia; his presumed predecessor Mihrdat II is mentioned exclusively there. See also: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 293.
- 81 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 59–64 (1996), pp. 69–75.
- 82 Skjaervo, Prods O., *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli*, part 3.1, *Restored Text and Translation* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1983), p. 71.
- 83 Vacca, Alison, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 122.
- 84 The tetrarchy refers to the division of the supreme imperial administration introduced by Diocletian into four areas, led by two emperors (Augusti) and their two Caesars (co-emperors), who were their designated successors.
- 85 Banchich, Thomas M. (ed. and trans.), *The Lost History of Peter the Patrician: An Account of Rome’s Imperial Past from the Age of Justinian* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 135f.
- 86 Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity* (2007), p. 127; Dodgeon, Michael H. and Lieu, Samuel N.C. (eds), *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars ad 226–363: A Documentary History* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 133, 377 n48–59, 389f n19, map, p. 141.
- 87 On the question of the supposedly reigning king Mirian III from 284 to 361, see below, p. 194.
- 88 Kettenhofen, *Römisch-persischen Kriege* (1982), pp. 161–3. See below, p. 179.
- 89 Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia* (2007), p. 127.
- 90 The designation ‘Caucasian’ is used only to distinguish it from Albania in Southern Europe.
- 91 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), p. 11.
- 92 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (1961); see also: Mahé, in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), p. 118f.
- 93 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.4.6 (2007), p. 727.
- 94 Kausen, *Sprachfamilien der Welt*, part I: *Europa und Asien* (2010), pp. 236; Schulze, Wolfgang, ‘Towards a history of Udi’, *International Journal of Diachronic Linguistics* 1 (Munich: Peniope, 2005), pp. 55–91.
- 95 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.11 (2014), p. 359.
- 96 Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), p. 150; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 477.
- 97 Ibn Hawqal, *La Configuration de la Terre (Kitab surat al-ard)*, introduction and trans. J.H. Kramers and G. Wiet, vol. 2 (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), p. 342.
- 98 Jacobs, *Die Satrapienverwaltung im Perserreich* (1994), p. 182, map IV.
- 99 Arrian, *Campaigns of Alexander*, III.8 (1971), p. 160.
- 100 For the points of contact with Rome already mentioned, see pp. 138ff.
- 101 Festus, *Breviarium rerum gestarum (Breviarium of the Accomplishments of the Roman People)* § XX, trans. Thomas M. Banchich and Jennifer A. Meka (Buffalo: Canisius College, 2001).
- 102 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* I.15 (1961), pp. 24f.
- 103 Kettenhofen, Erich, *Tirād und die Inschrift von Paikuli. Kritik und Quellen zur Geschichte Armeniens im späten 3. und 4. Jh. n. Chr.* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1995), p. 20; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 122, 124.
- 104 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XVIII.6; XIX.2 (2004), pp. 155, 165.
- 105 *Epic Histories* (1989), V.iv–v; pp. 189–95.
- 106 See above, p. 139. Anassian, H.S., ‘Une mise au point relative à l’Albanie Caucasiennne’ (Afuank’), *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, vol. 6 (Marseille: ARAM, 1969), pp. 305, 326; Chorbajian et al., *Caucasian Knot* (1994), pp. 53f; Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, p. viii; vol. 2, p. 96; Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 11, 14–16; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 122, 124, 131; Samuelian, *Classical Armenian Culture* (1982), pp. 27–35.
- 107 Hewsden, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), map 21, p. 34.
- 108 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.14.5 (2007), p. 764.
- 109 Pliny, *Natural History*, VI.11 (2014), p. 359.
- 110 Ptolemaios, *Geographie*, V. 12.3; 13.1; VIII.19.8 (2006), pp. 545, 547, 752–4.
- 111 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 3, XXXVI.54 (1914), p. 93.
- 112 Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 5, ‘Pompey’, XXXV (1998–2002), pp. 207–9.
- 113 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.4.2 (2007), p. 725.
- 114 *Epic Histories*, V.xii–xiii (1989), p. 200; see the comments of Nina Garsoïan, *ibid.*, pp. 445f, 498. Chorbajian and Gippert et al. are of the opinion that Utik was granted to Albania only after the abolition of the Armenian monarchy in 428, and Artsakh only after the failed rebellion of Armenian nobles in 450–51. Chorbajian et al., *The Caucasian Knot* (1994), p. 55; Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, p. viii.
- 115 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.9 (1961), pp. 7f. On the Christianization of Albania, see below, pp. 205ff
- 116 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.15 (1961), p. 24, 8 n1.
- 117 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, p. xvi; Koriun, ‘Beschreibung des Lebens und Sterbens des hl. Lehrers Mesrop’, trans. Simon Weber, in: O. Bardenhewer et al. (eds), *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter. Eine Auswahl patristischer Werke*, vol. 1 (Munich: Josef Kösel & Friedrich Pustet, 1927), p. 218.
- 118 For the development of South Caucasian scripts, see below, p. 191f.
- 119 Elishe, *History of Vardan*, 24 (1982), pp. 77f.
- 120 Elishe, *History of Vardan*, 89–97 (1982), pp. 141–9.
- 121 Elishe, *History of Vardan*, 69–79 (1982), pp. 119–31.
- 122 Elishe, *History of Vardan* (1982), pp. 6f; Frye, R.N., ‘The political history of Iran under the Sasanians’, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 146f.
- 123 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.15 (1961), p. 24.
- 124 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.10 (1961), pp. 9f.
- 125 Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (1956), pp. 44–56.
- 126 P’arpec’i, *History*, 66 (1991), p. 171; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 262f n6.
- 127 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, pp. xvi–xviii; Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.15–17 (1961), pp. 25–9.
- 128 Strabo, *Geographica*, XI.7 (2007), p. 727; Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.18 (1961), pp. 29–32.
- 129 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.26 (1961), pp. 50–54.
- 130 Plontke-Lüning, Annegret, ‘Early Christian churches in Caucasian Albania’, in: Ivan Foletti and Erik Thunø, *The Medieval South Caucasus: Artistic Cultures of Albania, Armenia and Georgia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), p. 163.
- 131 The Henotikon was a failed attempt to formulate a confession of faith acceptable to both the Chalcedonians and the Miaphysites, since it led to the schism with Rome. Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), pp. 63–9.
- 132 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, p. xviii; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), pp. 69–80.
- 133 Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople 428–31, advocated a distinct form of Diophysitism, according to which divine and human nature existed together, completely undivided, in the person of Jesus Christ. His position was close to the Chalcedonian Creed, but he rejected the designation of Mary as Theotokos (‘God’s Bearer’) and called her Christotokos (‘Christ-Bearer’).
- 134 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.7 (1961), pp. 72–5.
- 135 The Miaphysite creed confesses that in Christ the divine and the human form a single, undivided nature, while the Chalcedonian dual-nature doctrine confesses that Jesus Christ is at the same time ‘true God’ and ‘true human being’.
- 136 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, §46 (1999), vol. 1, p. 118.
- 137 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, pp. xviii–xix; Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.46–8 (1961), pp. 172–8; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), pp. 80–83.
- 138 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.14 (1961), p. 93.
- 139 Movsēs Dasxuranc’i cites a Sassanid prince named Mihran as ancestor of Varaz-Grigor, which is why he calls the dynasty Mihranid. *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.17 (1961), p. 107.
- 140 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 353, 379; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 476ff.

- 141 On the efforts of Heraclius to bring the Armenian Church back to the imperial church, see below, p. 228.
- 142 Mustafayav, Sahin, 'Archaeological representation of Caspian trade routes on the territory of Azerbaijan', lecture held at The Second International Conference on Central Asian Archaeology, *Cultures in Contact*, 13–15 February 2020 (unpublished: University of Bern, 2020).
- 143 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 14, 18, 86–90.
- 144 For the kingdom of the Khazars, see pp. 251ff.
- 145 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.14 (1961), pp. 95–102.
- 146 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.18f (1961), pp. 109–16.
- 147 Dadoyan, Seta B., *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1: *The Arab Period in Arminyah, Seventh to Eleventh Centuries* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), pp. 53, 56; *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, §48 (1999), vol. 1, pp. 135–8. See here pp. 238f.
- 148 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, §49 (1999), vol. 1, p. 143.
- 149 Dadoyan, Seta B., *The Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, 2011, pp. 56f; Greenwood, Tim, 'Armenian neighbours (600–1045)', in: *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 341–3.
- 150 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 342f. Toumanoff dates the second counteroffensive of Constans to the year 654. Toumanoff, Cyril, 'Armenia and Georgia', in: *The Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4, *The Byzantine Empire. Part I: Byzantium and its Neighbours*, ed. J.M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 606.
- 151 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.22 (1961), p. 118.
- 152 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.23, 27 (1961), pp. 120, 125f; Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 343.
- 153 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.36–43 (1961), pp. 149–168.
- 154 Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 2 (2014), pp. 183, 293.
- 155 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, III.12 (1961), p. 202; Greenwood, in: *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 344; Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), p. 13.
- 156 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 345f.
- 157 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (1961), pp. 202f n2; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), p. 589.
- 158 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *History of the Caucasian Albanians*, III, 5 (1961), p. 191.
- 159 Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, III, 3–10 (1961), pp. 189–98. See also Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 88.
- 160 The later so-called 'Princes of Albania' were merely princes of Gardman. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 481 n189.
- 161 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 76.
- 162 See above, p. 142.
- 163 Tacitus, *Annals*, XII.45–8 (1876), pp. 381–7.
- 164 Pollard and Berry, *Complete Roman Legions* (2012), pp. 134, 138, 146, 152. The Fourth Legion Scythica was typically written IIII rather than IV in Roman inscriptions. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 165 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 34–6; Pollard and Berry, *Complete Roman Legions* (2012), pp. 134, 138.
- 166 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 8, LXII.23 (1925), pp. 127.
- 167 Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.1–30 (1876). See also: Bivar, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 73–85; Meissner, 'A belated nation' (2000), p. 199, 201; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), pp. 106f, 114f.
- 168 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 40, 45.
- 169 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 8, LXIII.4 (1925), pp. 143.
- 170 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 8, LXIII.7 (1925), p. 147.
- 171 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 38, 58.
- 172 Lang, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), p. 517.
- 173 Osroes' rule was contested by Vologeses III.
- 174 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 8, LXVIII.17 (1925), p. 395.
- 175 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 65.
- 176 Bivar, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 88–90. It is disputed whether Trajan also created a province of Assyria lying even further east.
- 177 See above, p. 152.
- 178 The sources on the Armenian kings of the second and third century are scarce and partly based on coin discoveries. The king appointed by Antonius Pius is unknown by name; coins exist with only the reverse legend REX ARMENIIS DATUS S C from the time of the third consulate of the emperor (140–44 CE). Schottky, Martin, 'Armenische Arsakiden zur Zeit der Antonine. Ein Beitrag zur Korrektur der armenischen Königsliste', *ANABASIS, Studia Classica et Orientalia I* (Rzeszów: Rzeszów University, 2010), p. 209 n7. Schottky, however, attributes the coin to Antonius Pius' second consulate although the obverse reads 'COS III'. For an image see: Kropp, Andreas J. M., 'Crowning the Emperor an unorthodox image of Claudius, Agrippa I and Herod of Chalkis', *Syria. Archéologie, Art et Histoire*, vol. 90 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2013), fig. 7. Schottky (*ibid.*, pp. 209–11) suspects that it refers to Aurelius Pacorus; Redgate and Toumanoff suggest Sohaemus. Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 93; Toumanoff, Cyrille, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de la Caucasic chrétienne (Arménie – Géorgie – Albanie)* (Rome: Edizione Aquila, 1976), p. 515.
- 179 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 73.
- 180 In Etchmiadzin, two inscriptions were found of a vexillatio of XV Apollinaris from the years 175/6 and 184/5. Isaac, *Limits of Empire* (1990), p. 52; Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 74, 543–55; Pollard and Berry, *Complete Roman Legions* (2012), pp. 164f.
- 181 Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 74; Schottky, 'Armenische Arsakiden' (2010), p. 215.
- 182 Schottky, 'Armenische Arsakiden' (2010), p. 215.
- 183 Schottky, 'Armenische Arsakiden' (2010), pp. 218–21; Toumanoff, Cyrille, 'The third-century Armenian Arsacids: A chronological and genealogical commentary', *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, vol. 6 (Marseille: ARAM, 1969), pp. 242–4.
- 184 Schottky, 'Armenische Arsakiden' (2010), pp. 222f.
- 185 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 9, LXXVIII.21 (1927), pp. 331–3.
- 186 Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. 9, LXXIX.27 (1927), p. 403–5; Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), p. 141; Mitford, *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 77; Patterson, Lee E., 'Caracalla's Armenia', *Syllecta Classica*, vol. 24 (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2013), pp. 173–99.
- 187 Exceptions were the resourceful emperors Probus (r. 276–82) and Carus (r. 282–83), who were both murdered.
- 188 At the time of the young Severus Alexander, his mother Julia Mamaea held power and dictated foreign policy.
- 189 Kettenhofen, *Römisch-persischen Kriege* (1982), pp. 38f. Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (2007), p. 116.
- 190 Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, II.77 (1978), p. 224. The alleged division of Armenia is assumed by: Mitford (with reservation), *East of Asia Minor*, vol. 1 (2018), p. 79; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 94; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), p. 515. Kettenhofen, however, who has intensively studied the complicated situation, rejects it firmly. Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), pp. 61f, 68, 149.
- 191 Skjaervo, *Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli* (1983), pp. 21, 71.
- 192 See above, p. 155.
- 193 Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), pp. 133, 137, 161–3, 170f.
- 194 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Later Roman Empire XXXI* (2004), p. 261.
- 195 Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), pp. 68f, 152–8.
- 196 Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), pp. 81f, 163.
- 197 Ormanian, Malachia, *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature, and Existing Condition* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1912), p. 8. On the Christianization of the South Caucasus, see below, pp. 174ff.
- 198 Kettenhofen, *Tirdād und die Inschrift von Paikuli* (1995), p. 93.
- 199 Depending on the source, Rhipsime's companions numbered 32, 36, 37 or 39. Esbroeck, Michel van, 'Die Stellung der Märtyrerin Rhipsime in der Geschichte der Bekehrung des Kaukasus', in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), p. 175.
- 200 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, § 124–36 (1976), pp. 137–47.
- 201 See below, p. 180f.
- 202 See above, pp. 127f and 149–51.
- 203 Toumanoff, 'Armenia and Georgia' (1966), pp. 596f n1.

VII The Introduction of Christianity as a State Ideology and the Division of the South Caucasus

- 1 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, §46, 13 (1999), vol. I, p. 115.
- 2 Mahé, in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), pp. 108f.
- 3 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, § 149–214 (1976), pp. 159–219. In 1868, Solomon Malan published a biography of Gregory based on Agathangelos. Malan, Solomon C., *The Life and Times of St. Gregory, the Illuminator, the Founder and Patron Saint of the Armenian Church* (1868; reprint Whitefish, ca. 2016).
- 4 Thaddaeus, also called Judas Thaddaeus and distinct from Judas Iscariot the traitor, was one of the Twelve Apostles (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18). He is often indistinguishable from Thaddaeus of Edessa.
- 5 *Epic Histories* (1989), III.1, p. 67.
- 6 Yuzbachtian, Karen N., 'Einige Bemerkungen über die Entwicklung der nationalen Bewusstseinsbildung im kaukasischen Albanien', in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), p. 183.
- 7 Mahé, 'Die Bekehrung Transkaukasiens' (2002), p. 112.
- 8 Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book II.8, trans. Chester D. Hartranft, revised Kevin Knight (New Advent, 2017).
- 9 Movsēs Dasxuranc'ī, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, I.6, III.23 (1961), pp. 5f, 228.
- 10 Movsēs Dasxuranc'ī, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, II.48 (1961), pp. 175–7. Possibly Daskhurantsi did not mean the church near Shaki, but that of Giş in the province of Utik. Mammadova, Gulchohra, *Architecture of Caucasian Albania: Natural Investigation and Measurement of Christian Monuments of Caucasian Albania, Ways of their Preservation* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 19.
- 11 Another tradition locates Nikopsia further south, near Apsaros. Khroushkova, Liudmila, *Les monuments chrétiens de la côte orientale de la mer noire. Abkhazie IVe–XIVe siècles* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 21, 91.
- 12 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* (1996), pp. 50f., 355–9; Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 287, 433.
- 13 Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), p. 136.
- 14 Rufinus of Aquileia, *The 'Church History' of Rufinus of Aquileia, Books 10 and 11*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 22–3. See also: Synek, Eva M., *The Life of St Nino: Georgia's Conversion to its Female Apostle* (published by the author, 1997), pp. 139–42.
- 15 For the date, see below, p. 197.
- 16 Lang, *Lives and Legends* (1956), pp. 19–39.
- 17 Lang, *Lives and Legends* (1956), p. 20.
- 18 Lerner, *Wellspring of Georgian Historiography* (2004), p. 145.
- 19 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 146, 155, 165.
- 20 Thierry, Nicole, 'Sur le culte de Sainte Nino', in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), p. 155.
- 21 Gedevanishvili, Ekaterine, 'Cult and image of St George in medieval Georgian art', in: Bacci, Kaffenberger and Studer-Karlen, *Cultural Interactions in Medieval Georgia* (2018), p. 162.
- 22 Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians* (1978), pp. 86, p. 238.
- 23 Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica (Kirchengeschichte)*, trans. Philipp Häuser, Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, 2nd series, vol. 1 (Munich: Kösel, 1932), p. 163.
- 24 Dodgeon and Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier* (1994), p. 394 n6.; Lieu, Samuel N.C., *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), p. 105.
- 25 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 26–31; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 46.
- 26 Koriun, 'Beschreibung des Lebens und Sterbens des hl. Lehrers Mesrop', 14 (1927), p. 217.
- 27 See below, pp. 246ff.
- 28 Thomson, Robert W., 'The origins of Caucasian civilization: The Christian component', Occasional Paper no. 97 (Washington DC: Wilson Center, 1980), p. 26.
- 29 There exist different, partly divergent versions of the hagiography ascribed to Agathangelos. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), pp. xxi–xxiii.
- 30 The origin of the legendary descent of Gregory from Persian nobility probably lay in a desire to establish some distance between the later Sassanid overlords and Byzantium. It is likely that he came from the Roman–Armenian border area.
- 31 Seibt, Werner, 'Der historische Hintergrund und die Chronologie der Christianisierung Armeniens bzw. der Taufe König Trdat (ca. 315)', in: Seibt, *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), p. 128.
- 32 Daniel 4:29–31.
- 33 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), p. 317.
- 34 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), p. 317–29.
- 35 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), p. 351.
- 36 Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), p. 144; Seibt, in id., *Christianisierung des Kaukasus* (2002), pp. 129f.
- 37 Rapp, *The Sassanian World* (2014), pp. 303, 305, 308f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 197 (1996), p. 215.
- 38 Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), p. 145.
- 39 *Epic Histories*, III, iii, 19 (1989), p. 68.
- 40 The pro-Syrian priest dynasty of the Aghbianos provided three chief prelates: Sahak I of Manzikert (in office 373–377), Zaven I (in office 377–381) and Aspuraces I (in office 381–386). It rivalled with the Gregorids, who had turned towards the Greek imperial church. Ormanian, *Church of Armenia* (1912), pp. 230f. Plontke-Lüning, by contrast, cites the chief bishops Paren and Sahak I as representatives of the Aghbianos. Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), p. 145.
- 41 Hage, Wolfgang, *Das orientalische Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007), p. 231; Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), pp. 53, 107.
- 42 Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 35.
- 43 Plontke-Lüning, Annegret, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), pp. 170, 174.
- 44 The journey of Gregory and Trdat to Rome or, depending on the version, to Constantinople, described in the *History of the Armenians* is apocryphal. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, Introduction, § 873–84 (1976), pp. lxxviii, 407–17.
- 45 Only the Greek Escorial version of the *History of the Armenians* mentions the name of Gregory's wife. Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), pp. xxxiii, lix.
- 46 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* (1976), p. 391.
- 47 Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 51.
- 48 Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians*, § 860–62, 884–5 (1976), pp. 395–7, 415–17.
- 49 Sophene, called Tsopk in Armenian, represented the main part of Fourth Armenia, which was formed in 536 CE during an administrative reform by Emperor Justinian. At the time of Aristakes Fourth Armenia did not yet exist. Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, II. 91 (1978), p. 249.
- 50 *Epic Histories*, III, iii, 19–20 (1989), pp. 68f.
- 51 *Epic Histories*, III, v, 22–3 (1989), p. 70.
- 52 Hewsen believes that Husik and Grigoris were sons of Bishop Aristakes, not Vrtanes. This despite the fact that the *Epic Histories* records that Aristakes remained a bachelor. *Epic Histories*, III, vi, 25–6 (1989), pp. 72f; Hewsen, Robert H. 'The successors of Tiridates the Great: A contribution to the history of Armenia in the fourth century', *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, new series, vol. 13 (Paris: Association Revue des Études Arméniennes, 1978–9), pp. 113, 118.
- 53 *Epic Histories*, III, vi, 25–6 (1989), pp. 72f.
- 54 Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 38.
- 55 Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), pp. 129; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 46.
- 56 See below, p. 220.
- 57 Conybeare, Frederick Cornwallis, 'The survival of animal sacrifices inside the Christian Church', *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 1903 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903), p. 63.
- 58 Conybeare, 'Survival of animal sacrifices' (1903), p. 65.
- 59 Conybeare, Frederick Cornwallis and McLean, A. J. (eds), *Rituale Armenorum: Being the Administration of the Sacraments and the Breviary Rites of the Armenian Church together with the Greek Rites of Baptism and Epiphany* (1905; reprint Whitefish: Literary Licensing, ca. 2017), p. 57.
- 60 Conybeare, 'Survival of animal sacrifices' (1903), p. 77.
- 61 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 136.
- 62 Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 40 n111.
- 63 Baumer, Christoph, *China's Holy Mountain: An Illustrated Journey into the Heart of Buddhism* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 67.
- 64 Redgate, *Armenian* (1998), pp. 129f.
- 65 *Epic Histories*, III, iii, 18 (1989), p. 68.
- 66 *Epic Histories*, III, xii, 40 (1989), p. 82. Not only is King Tiran's reign a matter of controversy, but his very existence is uncertain. *Epic Histories*, commentary by Nina G. Garsoïan (1989), p. 414. Hewsen has removed both Khosrow and Tiran from the royal list and cites the reign of Arshak II as 333–63. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 21. It is highly unlikely that Hannibalianus was an Armenian king around 336–7, as some authors believe. Kettenhofen, *Die römisch-persischen Kriege* (1982), p. 128; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 133.
- 67 *Epic Histories*, III, xii–xiv (1989), pp. 83–91.
- 68 Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 63.
- 69 *Epic Histories*, IV, xiii, 119 (1989), p. 136f. See above, p. 128.

- 70 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXV, 7 (2004), pp. 304.
- 71 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 346; *Epic Histories*, IV, xxi, 144–liv, 175 (1989), pp. 153–73. See also: Blockley, Roger C., ‘The division of Armenia between the Romans and the Persians at the end of the fourth century A.D.’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1987), pp. 223, 229.
- 72 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 346.
- 73 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 347.
- 74 At that time the target strength of Roman legions was only 1,000 to 1,500 men. Pollard and Berry, *Complete Roman Legions* (2012), p. 213.
- 75 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 348; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 41.
- 76 *Epic Histories*, V, xxix, 230 (1989), p. 210; Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (2007), p. 231; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), pp. 51 n156, 53.
- 77 *Epic Histories*, V, xxxii, 235f (1989), pp. 213f; Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXX, 1 (2004), pp. 387–90.
- 78 *Epic Histories*, VI, i, 265f (1989), pp. 233f; Łazar P’arpec’i, *History*, I, 6 (1991), p. 41.
- 79 See above, p. 158.
- 80 Blockley, ‘Division of Armenia’ (1987), pp. 232f.
- 81 Frye, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), p. 142.
- 82 Łazar P’arpec’i, *History*, I, 10 (1991), pp. 46–8. See below, p. 191.
- 83 Łazar P’arpec’i, *History*, I, 14 (1991), pp. 59f.
- 84 Sarkissian, Karekin, *The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church* (New York: The Armenian Church Prelacy, 1975), pp. 105–7.
- 85 The remark ‘erring faith of the Greeks’ must be seen in the context of the later theological dispute between Byzantine Chalcedonians and Armenian Miaphysites.
- 86 Moses Khorenats’i, *History of the Armenians*, III, 65 (1978), p. 343.
- 87 Ormanian, *Church of Armenia* (1912), p. 231. According to Koriun, after Sahak’s death Mesrop Mashtots took over the leadership of the church until his death in 440, then Hovsep, who was elected as the head of the church by the bishops around 444. Koriun, ‘Beschreibung’, 22 (1927), pp. 227f.
- 88 Moses Khorenats’i, *History of the Armenians*, III, 52 (1978), p. 318.
- 89 Koriun, ‘Beschreibung’, 4–6 (1927), pp. 202–6.
- 90 Moses Khorenats’i, *History of the Armenians*, III, 52 (1978), p. 319.
- 91 Koriun, ‘Beschreibung’, 8 (1927), pp. 208f.
- 92 Haarmann, Harald, *Universalgeschichte der Schrift* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1998), p. 346.
- 93 Haarmann, *Universalgeschichte der Schrift* (1998), pp. 346–9; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 55 n173.
- 94 Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (2007), p. 234; Nersessian, Vrej, *The Bible in the Armenian Tradition* (London: British Library, 2001), p. 14, 16f.
- 95 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 20.
- 96 Sarkissian, *Council of Chalcedon* (1975), p. 115.
- 97 Sarkissian, *Council of Chalcedon* (1975), p. 116.
- 98 Sarkissian, *Council of Chalcedon* (1975), p. 129.
- 99 Koriun, ‘Beschreibung’, 12, 15 (1927), pp. 213f, 217f.
- 100 Hewitt, B.G., *Georgian: A Structural Reference Grammar* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), p. 4.
- 101 Haarmann, *Universalgeschichte der Schrift* (1998), pp. 352–5.
- 102 The Albanian script was probably used sporadically up to the twelfth century.
- 103 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, pp. xix–xxiv, 25, 29f; vol. 2, pp. 1, 30, 84.
- 104 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 63f (1996), pp. 74–6.
- 105 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), pp. 244f; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 83, 149, 253.
- 106 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 293–5.
- 107 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXI, 6 (2004), pp. 215.
- 108 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 25, 89 (1996), pp. 36, 98.
- 109 Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits* (2014), p. 23.
- 110 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 278.
- 111 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 278.
- 112 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 89 (1996), p. 98; Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 151.
- 113 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* (1996), p. 99f.
- 114 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 27 (1996), p. 39; Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits* (2014), p. 24.
- 115 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 278; Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits* (2014), p. 23.
- 116 Lerner, *Wellspring of Georgian Historiography* (2004), pp. 172f.
- 117 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 147; Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits* (2014), pp. 24f.
- 118 See pp. 127, 149.
- 119 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 65 (1996), p. 77.
- 120 The fact that she is mentioned (as ‘St Christiana’) in the *Martyriologum Romanum* on 14 January according to the Orthodox calendar (15 December according to the Gregorian calendar) is of course no proof of her historicity. The *Roman Martyrology*, 15 December: www.breviary.net/martyrology/mart1215.htm.
- 121 Lerner, *Wellspring of Georgian Historiography* (2004), pp. 37, 43, 50. *Kartlis Tskhovreba* dates Nino’s death fourteen years after her arrival in Kartli. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 127 (1996), pp. 142f, n31.
- 122 Rufinus, *The ‘Church History’, Books 10 and 11* (1997), p. 22.
- 123 Thomson, ‘Origins of Caucasian civilization’ (1980), p. 28.
- 124 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 108, 146, 155, 247; id., *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 108.
- 125 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 72–80 (1996), pp. 84–91.
- 126 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXXI, 12 (2004), p. 434.
- 127 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 74.
- 128 Thélamon, Françoise, *Paiens et Chrétiens au IVe Siècle. L’apport de l’Histoire ecclésiastique de Rufin d’Aquilée* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981), pp. 97–123.
- 129 Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 377.
- 130 Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 39.
- 131 Kekelidze, Korneli, ‘Die Bekehrung Georgiens zum Christentum’, *Morgenland Darstellungen aus Geschichte und Kultur des Ostens*, 18 (Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1928), pp. 41–4; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), p. 136 n50.
- 132 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_solar_eclipses, see fourth century; eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/5MCS Emap/0301-0400/317-12-20.gif; eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEsearch/SEsearchmap.php?Ecl=03340717; eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEsearch/SEsearchmap.php?Ecl=03550528
- 133 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 115 (1996), pp. 128f.
- 134 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 196–8 (1996), pp. 213–17. See also: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 305, 319, 463; id., *Sasanian World* (2014), pp. 303–5.
- 135 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 207 (1996), p. 226. See also: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 307, 321, 330, 463f. There is a contradiction between the dates concerning chief prelate Saba (in office 523–52) and King Parsman VI (r. ca. 561–?). As Stephen Rapp confirmed to the author in a private communication on 23.10.2020, the Georgian lists of chief prelates are imprecise, in part confused and contain errors. Since other primary sources are lacking, we cannot resolve such an issue.
- 136 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 125f (1996), pp. 139f.
- 137 Radde, Gustav, *Die Chews’uren und ihr Land untersucht im Sommer 1876* (Cassel: Theodor Fischer, 1878).
- 138 Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (2007), p. 116; Lang, *Lives and Legends* (1956), pp. 81f; Rapp, Stephen H., ‘Georgian Christianity’, in: Ken Parry (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), p. 142.
- 139 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXI, 6 (2004), p. 215.
- 140 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 346.
- 141 Ammianus, *Later Roman Empire*, XXVII, 12 (2004), p. 348; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 41. See above, p. 188.
- 142 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 135 (1996), p. 149.
- 143 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 137 (1996), p. 151.
- 144 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 142 (1996), p. 157.
- 145 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 144f (1996), pp. 158–60.
- 146 The *History of King Vaxhtang Gorgasali* and its continuation into the eighth century by a pseudo-Juansher Juansheriani were written at the end of the eighth century. They are part of *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.
- 147 Łazar P’arpec’i, *History*, III, 66, 70, 73, 74, 79 (1991), pp. 173, 181f, 189, 192, 205.
- 148 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, vol. 1, I, xii; II, xxviii (2006), pp. 97, 521. Toumanoff identifies Gurgenes with Gorgasali: *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 368–70; also Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 319. Braund rules out an identification of Vaxhtang with Gurgenes and dates his death to the year 491: *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 283f; also Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens*

- (2010), p. 512, and Frye, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part I (1983), pp. 148, 152. Rayfield leaves this question unanswered, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 44, and Lordkipanidze mentions 502 as Vakhtang's year of death: Othar Lordkipanidze, in Gambashidze, Hauptmann et al., *Georgien* (2001), p. 27. This author considers Gorgasali and Gurgenes to be two distinct rulers, the latter being an Iberian king not mentioned in *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. See also note 156 below.
- 149 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 180 (1996), p. 197.
- 150 Priscus, fr. 51, in: Blockley, Roger C., *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus* (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2007), vol. 2, p. 359. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), p. 364.
- 151 Rapp, *Sasanian World* (2014), pp. 181f, 354.
- 152 See above, p. 161.
- 153 Łazar P'arpeç'i, *History*, 66 (1991), p. 173.
- 154 Łazar P'arpeç'i, *History*, 70, 74 (1991), pp. 181, 192.
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- 159 Rubin, Zeev, 'Persia and the Sasanian monarchy (224–651)', in: *Cambridge History of The Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 135.
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- 164 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 217 (1996), pp. 228f.
- 165 Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 153, 373, 381f. Rapp follows Toumanoff's conclusion: *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 145, 322; id., *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 86.
- 166 Braund, *Georgian Antiquity* (1994), pp. 276f.
- 167 As mentioned above in note 148, the present author considers Vakhtang Gorgasali and Gurgenes two different rulers.
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- 172 *Epic Histories*, III, vi, 25–6 (1989), pp. 72f.
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- 183 Gippert et al., *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests* (2008), vol. 1, p. xix; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 60.
- 184 Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (2007), p. 264; Hasan-Jalalians, *History of the Land of Artsakh* (2013), p. 175.
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- 190 See above, p. 201.
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- 205 Procopius, *History of the Wars*, vol. 1, II, xxviii (2006), pp. 519, 523.
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- 299 The epithet 'Nestorian' for the Persian Church of the East is factually incorrect. Nestorius never presided over the church, nor was he a member of it. His teachings were based on that of Theodore of Mopsuestia, whom the Persian Church recognized as an important church father.
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- 322 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, §45–6 (1999), vol. 1, pp. 113–32.
- 323 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (1999), vol. I, §45, p. 112; vol. 2, p. 262.
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- 327 Kleinbauer, ‘Zvart’nots’ (1972), pp. 250–55; Maranci, *Vigilant Powers* (2015), pp. 121, 133f; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), pp. 191, 301, 304–8; ead. in Foletti and Thunø, *Medieval*

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VIII. Between Caliphate, Byzantium and Khazars

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- 2 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, vol. 2 (1999), p. 238; Forsyth, James, *The Caucasus: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 54.
- 3 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 250 (1996), p. 257; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 394, 397f. According to Rapp, after Stepanoz II’s death in 650 Iberia did not have a presiding prince for 35 years: *Sasanian World* (2014), p. 349.
- 4 Fähnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), p. 166.
- 5 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, vol. 1, § 48 (1999), p. 136.
- 6 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, vol. 1, § 49 (1999), p. 142.
- 7 See below, pp. 252.
- 8 *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (1999), vol. 1, § 52, p. 150; vol. 2, pp. 278f.
- 9 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 57.
- 10 22 hostages miraculously survived the mass execution. *Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (1999), vol. 1, § 52, p. 153; vol. 2, pp. 283f.
- 11 Lewond, *Discours Historique, traduit et commenté par Bernadette Martin Hisard*, V (Paris: ACHCByz, 2015), pp. 28–30.
- 12 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 344; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 397f; id., in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 606.
- 13 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 68; Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien* (2007), pp. 111f. According to Toumanoff, the province of Arminiya was established after 654 and was supposedly incorporated into the caliphate at that time. Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 605.
- 14 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 44, 67f; Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 607.
- 15 Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 107; Theophanes, *Chronicle* (1982), 391, pp. 85f. See also: Alemany, *Sources on the Alans* (2000), pp. 200–203.
- 16 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 69; Greenwood, in: *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 346; Theophanes, *Chronicle* (1982), 372, p. 70. The place called Khram is probably identical with today’s Nekhram situated 10 km south of Nakhchivan city.
- 17 Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 607.
- 18 Tabari, Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-, *Chronique [Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk]*, trans. from the Persian version by Abdou-Ali Mohammed Belami by Hermann Zotenberg, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1874), pp. 283–93.
- 19 Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 2 (2014), p. 214 n38; Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 74; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 234 (1996), p. 241.
- 20 The *Kartlis Tskhovreba* cites the brothers Mihr and Archil as rulers of Kartli instead of Guaram III. Little is known about Mihr and Archil, who were not ‘kings’ but rulers of Kakheti. According to legend, Archil was martyred in 786 by *ostikan* Khuzayma ibn Khazim; Archil was canonized by the Church of Georgia. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 232–48 (1996), pp. 240–55; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 56f.
- 21 In Byzantium, *archon* was a high official title that implied a dependence on the empire. Hewitt, George, *The Abkhazians: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 60f.
- 22 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 251 (1996), p. 258; Hewitt, *Abkhazians* (2014), p. 61.
- 23 The autonomous Catholicosate of Abkhazia was founded at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth century. It was re-established in western Georgia after the partition of Georgia by the Mongols in 1249. Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens* (2006), p. 96.
- 24 Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 62.
- 25 See above, p. 207.
- 26 Garsoïan, Nina, ‘The Arab invasions and the rise of the Bagratuni (640–884)’, in: Hovannisian, Richard G. (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 1 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), pp. 129f.
- 27 Lewond, *Discours Historique*, XXXVIII–XLII (2015), pp. 154–86.
- 28 On the history of Albania under the Umayyads, see above, pp. 164f, 227f.
- 29 The Kamsarakans resurfaced in the tenth century north-west of Lake Sevan under the name Pahlavuni. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 206f.
- 30 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 347f; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 154, 328, 348, 405f; in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), pp. 607f.
- 31 Ashot’s most important acquisition from the Kamsarakans was the area of Shirak with the then still small village of Ani.
- 32 On the incremental increase in the territory of the Armenian Bagratids, see: Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (2001), p. 96.

- 33 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 243, 324 (1996), pp. 248, 315; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 423–8.
- 34 Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 368.
- 35 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 251, 324 (1996), pp. 258, 315. See also: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 340–48; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 203, 328, 342, 345; in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 609. Khorenatsi had already attributed the Bagratuni's main line of descent to Jews living in exile in Babylon, but not to King David. Moses Khorenatsi, *History of the Armenians*, I, 22 (1978), pp. 110f.
- 36 Fährnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 166–8.
- 37 This will be discussed in vol. 2 of the present work.
- 38 Toumanoff, in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), pp. 609f.
- 39 Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates* (1976), pp. 33–5.
- 40 Amoretti, B.S., 'Sects and heresies', in: *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4: *From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. R.N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 498–509.
- 41 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 91.
- 42 Tabari, al-, *Chronique*, vol. 4 (1874), pp. 544f. See also: Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 91–4.
- 43 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 300, 349; Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 611.
- 44 Payaslian, *History of Armenia* (2007), p. 50.
- 45 Greenwood, in *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), pp. 353, 357f; Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), pp. 612, 616.
- 46 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 44 (1967), pp. 199–205; Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates* (1976), pp. 79–88, 184.
- 47 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 95f.
- 48 Greenwood, Tim, 'The emergence of the Bagratuni kingdoms of Kars and Ani', in: Robert G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Armenian Kars and Ani* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2011), p. 46.
- 49 Greenwood, in: *Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (2008), p. 353; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), pp. 92f, 97; Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 612.
- 50 It appears that the tenets of the Paulicians changed quite a bit over time.
- 51 Docetism, appearing at the beginning of the second century, teaches that matter is bad and evil, which is why Christ had only an illusory body.
- 52 See above, p. 335 n300.
- 53 Garsoïan, Nina, *The Paulician Heresy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 125, 163–76; Nersessian, Vrej, *The Tondrakian Movement: Religious Movements in the Armenian Church from the Fourth to the Tenth Centuries* (Eugene: Pickwick, 1988), pp. 14–20; Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 194.
- 54 Byzantine iconoclasm in the eighth and ninth centuries rejected the veneration of images. By orders of synods and emperors religious images were destroyed and adherents of the veneration of images were persecuted.
- 55 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 76, 78, 86.
- 56 Step'anos Taroneci, *The Universal History*, III.22 (2017), p. 284.
- 57 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 99f; Garsoïan, *Paulician Heresy* (1967), pp. 125–30.
- 58 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), p. 125; vol. 2 (2013), pp. 68, 215; Garsoïan, *Paulician Heresy* (1967), p. 233.
- 59 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 195, 222; Garsoïan, *Paulician Heresy* (1967), p. 139.
- 60 Dadoyan, *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World*, vol. 1 (2011), pp. 134–40; Martin, Michael, *City of the Sun: Development and Popular Resistance in the Pre-Modern West* (New York: Algora, 2017), p. 349; Nersessian, *Tondrakian Movement* (1988), pp. 73–82.
- 61 Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 62; Stopka, *Armenia Christiana* (2017), p. 92.
- 62 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 253 (1996), p. 259; Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), p. 386.
- 63 *Divan of the Ap'xazian Kings*, originally composed in the late tenth/early eleventh century, in: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 481–4; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 66; Toumanoff, *Manuel de généalogie* (1976), p. 549. According to *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, King George I of Abkhazia (r. 872–8) conquered Inner Kartli. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 258 (1996), p. 263.
- 64 Fährnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 168–71; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), pp. 65–7.
- 65 See above, p. 242.
- 66 Madelung, W., 'The minor dynasties of Northern Iran', in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 230.
- 67 Fährnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), p. 171; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires* (2012), p. 66; Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (1963), pp. 492–7.
- 68 David III is also referred to as David II.
- 69 Bagrat III did not accept the title of king until after the death of his father, Gurgen, in 1008.
- 70 The unifier of Georgia Bagrat III (ca. 960–1014) was the grandson of the titular king of Kartli Bagrat II (r. 958–994). In 978 he became king of Abkhazia as Bagrat II (r. 978–1008) and in 1008 king of unified Georgia as Bagrat III (r. 1008–14).
- 71 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 272–8 (1996), pp. 273–7. See also: Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography* (2003), pp. 413–15; Toumanoff, in: *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), pp. 617–19.
- 72 Yahya ibn Said d'Antioche, *Histoire*, ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 23, fasc. 2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1932), p. 429. Translation from French by the author.
- 73 Fährnrich, *Geschichte Georgiens* (2010), pp. 172f, 191; Toumanoff, in *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 4: *The Byzantine Empire*, part I (1966), p. 618.
- 74 Garsoïan, Nina, 'The independent kingdoms of medieval Armenia', in: Hovannisian, *Armenian People*, vol. 1 (1997), pp. 170f.
- 75 Madelung, *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 241. Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 43; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 279–84 (1996), pp. 279–81.
- 76 The Ugrî spoke an Uralic language, the Sabir a Turkic language.
- 77 Golden, Peter, *Turks and Khazars: Origins, Institutions and Interactions in Pre-Mongol Eurasia* (Aldershot: 2010), X, pp. 173–5.
- 78 Golden, Peter, *Nomads and their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs* (Aldershot: 2003), IV, p. 50; Tabari, al-, *Chronique*, vol. 3 (1871), p. 478.
- 79 al-Tabari, *Chronique*, vol. 4 (1874), pp. 270–72.
- 80 Christian, David, *A History of Russia, Central Asia and Mongolia*, vol. 1, *Inner Eurasia from Prehistory to the Mongol Empire* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 286; Piatigorsky, Jacques and Sapir, Jacques, *L'Empire khazar, VIIe–XIe siècle. L'énigme d'un peuple cavalier* (Paris: Autrement, 2005), pp. 9, 47.
- 81 It remains uncertain whether Marwan advanced as far as Atil during his campaign and when exactly Atil was raised to the status of capital. Personal correspondence from Peter Golden to the author, dated 16 Oct. 2011. Golden, *Nomads and their Neighbours* (2003), IV, p. 51; id., *Turks and Khazars* (2010), V, p. 43; XI, p. 15.
- 82 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 42 (1967), pp. 183–5. Today the ruins of Sarkel are flooded by the artificial Tsimlyansk Reservoir. Golden, *Nomads and their Neighbours* (2003), V, p. 62.
- 83 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 37 (1967), p. 167.
- 84 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 11 (1967), p. 65.
- 85 Golden, *Turks and Khazars* (2010), V, p. 43; XI, pp. 9–11.
- 86 Golden, *Turks and Khazars* (2010), XI, p. 19.
- 87 Ibn Khordadbeh, *Le livre des routes et provinces [Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik]*, trans. C. Barbier de Meynard (Paris: Journal Asiatique, 1865) n.291: remacle.org/bloodwolf/arabe/khordadbeh/routes.htm#_ftn291.
- 88 Golden, *Turks and Khazars* (2010), X, p. 183; XI, pp. 23, 34.
- 89 Numerous Muslim merchants lived in the Khazar cities.
- 90 Christian, *History of Russia* (1998), pp. 293f; Piatigorsky and Sapir, *L'Empire khazar* (2005), p. 60. See also: Frye, Richard, *Ibn Fadhlān's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River* (Princeton: Wiener, 2006), pp. 73f.
- 91 Frye, *Ibn Fadhlān's Journey* (2006), p. 75.
- 92 Golden, *Turks and Khazars* (2010), X, p. 183; X, p. 170.
- 93 Golden, *Turks and Khazars* (2010), X, p. 170; Piatigorsky and Sapir, *L'Empire khazar* (2005), p. 56.
- 94 Preiser-Kapeller, Johannes, 'Zwischen Konstantinopel und Goldener Horde: Die byzantinischen Kirchenprovinzen der Alanen und Zichen im mongolischen Machtbereich im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert', in: Tubach, Jürgen, Vashalomidze, Sophia G. and Zimmer, Manfred (eds), *Caucasus during the Mongol Period / Der Kaukasus in der Mongolenzeit* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2012), p. 201.

- 95 Arzhantseva and Ruzanova, 'The problems of the beginning of medieval towns' (2010), p. 211.
- 96 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les chrétiens disparus* (1999), pp. 151f.
- 97 Ierusalimskaja, Anna A., *Die Gräber der Moščevaja Balka. Frühmittelalterliche Funde an der Nordkaukasischen Seidenstrasse* (Munich: Editio Maris, 1996), pp. 120–22.
- 98 Ierusalimskaja, *Gräber der Moščevaja Balka* (1996), pp. 21–3.
- 99 Ierusalimskaja, *Gräber der Moščevaja Balka* (1996), pp. 11, 115–22.
- 100 Ierusalimskaja, *Gräber der Moščevaja Balka* (1996), pp. 5, 127–9.
- 101 Alemany, *Sources on the Alans* (2000), p. 260.
- 102 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 297 (1996), p. 289. See also Goiladze, Vakhtang (ed.), *Caucasus in Georgian Sources: Foreign States, Tribes, Historical Figures. Encyclopedical Dictionary* (Tbilisi: Favorite, 2012), p. 376.
- 103 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 183–5; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 74f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 288 (1996), p. 295.
- 104 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 187f.
- 105 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les chrétiens disparus du Caucase* (1999), pp. 86f.
- 106 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les chrétiens disparus du Caucase* (1999), p. 51; *ibid.*, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 226–8.
- 107 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 20, 75.
- 108 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 21f, 75.
- 109 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 66f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 313 (1996), p. 304.
- 110 The location of Soteriopolis is disputed; it has been equated with Pitsunda, Abkhazia and with the Turkish city of Borçka, which lies on the Turkish–Georgian border. Khroushkova, *Les monuments chrétiens* (2006), pp. 94–6, 159; Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 186, 225. The metropolitan seat of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Alania and Soteriopolis was moved to Trabzon by Metropolitan Symeon (in office with interruptions ca. 1350–1365). Preiser-Kapeller, in: Tubach et al., *Caucasus during the Mongol Period* (2012), pp. 210–13.
- 111 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 186, 225f.
- 112 Tvaradze, Aleksandre, 'Der Westfeldzug von 1219–1221: Die "Mongolenerwartung" im Kreuzfahrerlager von Damiette und im christlichen Kaukasus', in: Tubach et al., *Caucasus during the Mongol Period* (2012), pp. 258f.
- 113 Gabriel, Richard A., *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Khan's Greatest General* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), pp. 90–97; Rasiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-Tawarikh: Compendium of Chronicles (Tome 1)*, Classical Writings of the Medieval Islamic World, vol. 3, 534, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012), p. 185.
- 114 Juvaini, Ala ud-Din Ata Malik, *Tarikh-e Jahan-gusha: The History of the World-Conqueror*, vol. I, XXXIX (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp. 269f; Rasiduddin Fazlullah, *Jami' u't-Tawarikh*, vol. 3, 663 (2012), p. 231.
- 115 Alemany, *Sources on the Alans* (2000), p. 415.
- 116 Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, viii (1997), p. 92; Rubruck, *Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, xxxvii (2009), p. 259.
- 117 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), p. 195.
- 118 Alemany, *Sources on the Alans* (2000), pp. 404–21; Allsen, Thomas T., 'Mongols and North Caucasia', *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, vol. 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 17–27, 33–6; Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les Alains* (2005), pp. 205–7.
- 119 Preiser-Kapeller, in: Tubach et al., *Caucasus during the Mongol Period* (2012), pp. 239–43.
- 120 Schiltberger, Hans, *Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger in Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396–1427*, trans. J.B. Telfer (London: Hakluyt Society, 1879), pp. 34, 138 n3.
- 121 Kouznetsov and Lebedynsky, *Les chrétiens disparus du Caucase* (1999), pp. 105–9.
- 122 See above, p. 163ff.
- 123 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), p. 13.
- 124 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 111 n1.
- 125 Draxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, § 48 (1987), pp. 173–9; Madelung, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 229f.
- 126 Redgate, *Armenians* (1998), p. 204.
- 127 The Samanids (818/875–999) were a Persian dynasty that ruled over Khorasan and Transoxania.
- 128 Madelung, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 229–31.
- 129 The Shiite Ismailites recognize the seventh Imam, Isma' il ibn Ja'far (d. 760), as the last Imam. Baumer, Christoph, *The History of Central Asia*, vol. 3: *The Age of Islam and the Mongols* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2016), pp. 9, 312.
- 130 Partav (modern Barda) is situated on the Tartar River, a tributary of the Kura.
- 131 Bosworth, C.E., et al., 'Azerbaijan', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, III, fasc. 2–3 (1987), pp. 205–57; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 76.
- 132 The succession of the Rawwadid rulers is controversial, since the written sources contradict each other and do not correspond with numismatic findings. For the most part, the present author follows the recent analysis of Andrew Peacock: 'Rawwadids', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2017), www.iranicaonline.org/articles/rawwadids.
- 133 Mamlan is the Kurdish variant of Muhammad. Peacock: 'Rawwadids' (2017).
- 134 Madelung, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 236f; Peacock: 'Rawwadids' (2017).
- 135 Madelung, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 237; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 168; Peacock: 'Rawwadids' (2017).
- 136 On the Oghuz Turkmen and Seljuks, see: Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 3 (2016), pp. 65f, 80–89.
- 137 Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 3 (2016), p. 81; Madelung, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 237f.
- 138 Athir, al-, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks* (2002), p. 15; Peacock, Andrew, *Early Seljuq History: A New Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 38, 49.
- 139 Athir, al-, *Annals of the Saljuq Turks* (2002), p. 67.
- 140 Peacock: 'Rawwadids' (2017).
- 141 Bosworth, et al., 'Azerbaijan' (1987), pp. 205–57.
- 142 For the Shaddadid junior line of Ani, see below, p. 288.
- 143 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 43.
- 144 Madelung, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 239–42; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 2–18, 30 n11, 48; Peacock, Andrew, 'Shaddadids', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2011), www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shaddadids.
- 145 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 21, 58, 81.
- 146 Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 309 (1996), p. 300.
- 147 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 23, 29, 66f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 311–13 (1996), pp. 302–4.
- 148 Savtegin is an incorrect paraphrase of Shad Tegin.
- 149 Madelung, in: *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), pp. 242f; Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), pp. 18–25, 59–68; Peacock, Andrew, 'Nomadic society and the Seljuq campaigns in Caucasia', *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 224; *id.*, 'Shaddadids' (2011).
- 150 See below, p. 288.
- 151 Bakikhanov, Abbas Qoli Aqa, *The Heavenly Rose-Garden: A History of Shirvan and Daghestan*, trans. Willem M. Floor and Hasan Javadi (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2009), p. 51; Bosworth, 'Šervanšahs', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2011): www.iranicaonline.org/articles/servansahs; Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 27, 61, 77, 120.
- 152 Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces* (2017), pp. 99f.
- 153 Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates* (1976), pp. 27–9, 49.
- 154 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 24f, 57, 116.
- 155 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 41f.
- 156 Madelung, in *Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 240; Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 26, 42.
- 157 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 83, 162. Minorsky speculates that the name Anbasa al-'Awur ('one-eyed lion') could represent an Arabic paraphrase of 'Leon the one-eyed' and that this ruler 'may have been the offspring of some Albano-Armenian family' (*ibid.*, p. 83). However, Anbasa (meaning lion) is a traditional Arabic name for males; for example, five companions of the Prophet Muhammad were named Anbasa: hawramani.com/anbasa-name.
- 158 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 27–31, 44–6, 70.
- 159 Bosworth, 'Šervanšahs' (2011); Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 31–3.
- 160 Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), p. 36.
- 161 Bosworth, 'Šervanšahs' (2011); Minorsky, *History of Sharvan and Darband* (1958), pp. 33–8, 41, 53–5, 66.
- 162 Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (1953), p. 65; Peacock, 'Nomadic society and the Seljuq campaigns' (2005), p. 215; *id.*, *Early Seljuq History* (2010), pp. 149f; Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History* 319f (1996), pp. 310f.
- 163 See below, p. 287.
- 164 Baumer, *History of Central Asia*, vol. 3 (2016), pp. 89, 196.

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IX. Outlook

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- 4 Since the COVID-19 pandemic, which spread in early 2020 from China over the whole globe, has severely hit the world economy, it is expected that it will slow down and regionally disrupt the implementation of BRI. Several debtor states already involved in BRI will request debt renegotiations. China's recent aggressive foreign and economic policies may well arouse suspicions about its hegemonic intentions.

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Adapted from: Sagona, Antonio, *The Archaeology of the Caucasus: From Earliest Settlements to the Iron Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 217; Simonyan, Hakob and Rothman, Mitchell S., ‘Regarding ritual behaviour at Shengavit, Armenia’, *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 52 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), p. 4.

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Adapted from Hewsens, Robert H., *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), map 13, p. 27; Kroll, Stephan, ‘The Kingdom of Urartu in North-Western Iran (Ninth–Seventh Century B.C.E.)’, in: Kamal-Aldin Niknami and Ali Hozhabri (eds), *Archaeology of Iran in the Historical Period* (Tehran: University of Tehran, 2020), p. 12.

6. The Sarmatian tribes in the North Caucasus and Greek emporia on the Eastern Black Sea coast (p. 107)

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7. The maximum expansion of the Armenian Empire under King Tigranes II in ca. 70 BCE (p. 126)

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8. The partitions of the southern Caucasus between the Roman/Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire of 387 and 591 CE, and the Arab conquest under the Umayyad Caliphate

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9. The Armenian and Georgian kingdoms and the eastern principalities around 1008 CE (pp. 274–75)

Adapted from: Hewsens, Robert H., *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), maps 88, 94, 105, 108, pp. 113, 118, 125, 128.

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