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## On the Personality of the Creator of the Abkhaz Kingdom

Giuli Alasania\*

\* *International Black Sea University, Tbilisi*

(Presented by Academy Member Th.V.Gamkrelidze)

**ABSTRACT.** Leon II is known in the scholarly literature as the creator of the Abkhaz Kingdom. One can see some discrepancies in the evidence of the related parts of “Kartis Tskhovreba” (“History of Kartli”), “Matiane Kartlisa” (“Chronicle of Kartli” – the 11<sup>th</sup> century) and that of the Chronicle of Wakhushti Bagrationi (the 18<sup>th</sup> century). The first one is more correct. The majority of scholars read the text as follows: “... at the time, when Greeks became weak, the *eristavi* of the Abkhaz broke away from them. He was called Leon and was the nephew of *Eristavi* Leon, to whom Abkhazia was given hereditarily. This second Leon was the grandson of the king of the Khazars and with their aid he broke away from the Greeks and conquered Abkhazia and Egrisi”. Both Leons are considered to be dukes of *Aphazeti* – Leon I, Leon II. The author of the present article argues that one Leon mentioned by the anonymous author of “Matiane Kartlisa” was Leon of Isauria, the Byzantine Emperor, who appointed his nephew Leon as a ruler of Abkhazia in the late third decade of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Proceeding from an analysis of the related sources, the author of the paper comes to the conclusions that:

1. There was one Leon in Abkhazia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century;
2. Leon was a family member neither of the Abkhazian, nor of the Egrisi (Western Georgia) rulers;
3. Leon was the nephew of Leon of Isauria, the Byzantine Emperor, who appointed him as a ruler in Abkhazia;
4. Based on his wife’s rights, Leon united western Georgia and became its ruler in the late eighth decade of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. His wife was Gurandukht, daughter of Mir, to whom Egrisi was given as an apanage by Leon of Isauria;
5. Leon seceded from Byzantium and proclaimed himself King of Abkhazia, which covered western Georgia, in the same late 8<sup>th</sup> century, closer to 786. © 2007 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** *Leon King of the Abkhazians, Georgian historiography.*

In Georgian historiography Leon II is considered to be the creator of the “Abkhaz Kingdom”. Leon II is identified with the Leon mentioned in the respective part of the Georgian Chronicles “the Chronicle of Kartli” (“Kartlis Tskhovreba”) as well as with the Leon in the same part of Wakhushti Bagrationi’s work. According to the ancient Georgian chronicle: “At the time when Greeks lost their power, Leon *Eristavi* of Abkhazia – the nephew of *Eristavi* Leon to whom Abkhazia was given hereditarily – broke away from them. This second Leon was the son of the daughter of the Khazar King and with the help of Khazars he ousted the Greeks and conquered Egrisi and Abkhazia as far as the Likhi. And since Iovane was dead and Juansher was old and later passed away,

too – the Leon was called “the King of the Abkhazians” (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1966, p. 206).

Later on, Leon is mentioned in the chronicle again: “at the time *Curopolates* Ashot launched a campaign. He was helped by *Teodosi*, the King of Abkhazians and the son of Leon II that was son-in-law of *Curopolates* Ashot (p. 206), “at that time there came *Giorgi*, the King of Abkhazians, the brother of *Teodosi* and *Demetre* and the son of Leon” (p 208).

In the Armenian translation of the Georgian Chronicles the information is presented in a somewhat different way: There is no evidence of Leon the *Eristavi*, and the uncle of Leon and Leon King of the Abkhazians are referred to as “a certain Leon, the son of the daugh-

ter of the Khazar King”: “Then there came Khosrodisi, Ostikan of Armenia and built Tpilisi that had been destroyed by Khazars. And a certain Leon, the son of the daughter of the Khazar King was crowned to rule over Abkahlia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi. The sons of Archil, Ivane and Juansher, passed away and their place was occupied by Curopalate Ashot. Caesar glorified him. The Agarians got weak. Teodosi took the place of his father Leon when the latter passed away” (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1953, p. 213).

As compared to the chronicles, Wakhushti presents the same information in a different way, too: “Since the Greeks were weakened by the Agarians, since they had taken overseas – the second Leon, nephew of Leon the Eristavi of Abkhazia conquered Egrisi and was called the King of Abkhazia as Ioane Eristavi passed away and Juansher got old and subsequently died, too”... (Wakhushti Bagrationi, 1973, p. 127). Wakhushti presents the information twice. In the second case, it is given in the chapter: “The description of the country of Egrisi, i. e. Abkhazia, i. e. Imereti” (p. 742). The author gives the names of countries – “Egrisi, the second – Abkhazia, the third – Imereti” and explains why he calls the places these names. “And Abkhazia because of Levan, as after Levan I, Levan II was Eristavi of Abkhazia (in 786). After the death of Khosroans, Leon became King and conquered the whole Egrisi and called his kingdom Abkhazeti and established the name of his saeristavo in Egrisi as a whole”.

As we can see, unlike the chronicle where there is no chronology given, Wakhushti Bagrationi indicates the exact date of the renouncing of Abkhazia - 786. At the same time he elucidates whose nephew was Leon - the Eristavi of Abkhazia of those times. In his opinion he was “the nephew of Leon the Eristavi of Abkhazia”. I.e., whereas the Chronicle of Kartli refers to Leon as the Eristavi of Abkhazia and to his uncle only as to “Leon the Eristavi”, without the indication of the place, Wakhushti does the opposite: he calls the nephew “the second Leon”, and his uncle - “Leon the Eristavi of the Abkhazians”.

We believe that it is here that an inaccuracy in Georgian historiography was made. According to the prevailing opinion, there were two Leons in Abkhazia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century – Leon I and Leon II. Yet, some other points of view have also been expressed.

In the French translation of “the Chronicle of Kartli” Marie Brosset ascribes the words: “to whom Abkhazia was given hereditarily” to the uncle” – “Лѣон еристав д’Апхазіе, fils du fr̄ere de Лѣон, а qui l’eristawat h̄ȳr̄iditaire de cette contr̄ee avait йт̄й confr̄ȳr̄й пр̄йс̄ȳdemment, se d̄ȳtacha d’eux” (M. Brosset, 1850, p.259).

Other researchers interpreted this place in the same manner. In one place C. Toumanoff points out that the

uncle of Leon II – Leon I was called “the Eristavi of Abkhazia”. In another place, C. Toumanoff translates the information of the “Chronicle” in the following way: “the Duke of Abkhazia, whose name was Leon, to whom Abkhazia had been given as an apanage... The second Leon was the son of the daughter of the King of the Khazars and with their aid he revolted against the Byzantines...” (C. Toumanoff, 1956, p. 75).

In his work devoted to the establishment of the Kingdom of Abkhazia S. Janashia translates the place we are interested in as follows: “When the Greeks got weak, the Eristavi of Abkhazia called Leon, the nephew (the son of the brother) of the Eristavi of Abkhazia, to whom Abkhazia was given as an apanage – renounced from them. This second Leon was the son of the daughter of the Khazar King and he renounced from the Greeks with their assistance. He conquered Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi, called himself the King of Abkhazia - since Eristavi Ioane was dead and Juansher was old” (S. Janashia, 1952, p. 325.). Z. Anchabadze translates the extract in question (p. 95): “When the Greeks got weak, the Eristavi of Abkhazia called Leon, the nephew (the son of the brother) of the Eristavi of Abkhazia, to whom Abkhazia was given as an apanage – renounced from the Greeks. This second Leon was the grandson (the son of the daughter) of the Khazar King and he fell away from the Greeks with the assistance of the people. He conquered Abkhazia and Egrisi as far as the Likhi and called himself the King of Abkhazia” (Z. Anchabadze, 1956, p.95). According to P. Golden, Abkhazia was given as an apanage to the uncle of Eristavi Leon – Leon: “But at the time when the Greeks (the Berdzenni) became weak, the eristavi of the Ap’xaz broke away from them. His name was Leon, the nephew of the eristavi Leon, to whom Ap’xazet’i was given hereditarily. This second Leon was the grandson of the king of the Khazars and with their aid he broke away from the Greeks and conquered Ap’xazet’i and Egrisi...” (P. Golden, 1980, p. 63).

During the time that we are investigating, there is only one Leon mentioned in the “the Divan of the Abkhazian Kings” discovered by E. Takaishvili. The Leon, according to the source, governed the country for 45 years. By means of counting back the indicated years of ruling of Abkhaz kings, E. Takaishvili offers the genealogy of Abkhazian kings with the indication of respective years. There is only one Leon mentioned in the 8<sup>th</sup> c here (746 – 791). Yet, right there the comment of the author comes into conflict with the scheme: “for Leon I Caesar determined Abkhazia as saeristavo from the Klisura to the river of great Khazar. With the help of Khazars Leon II – the nephew of this Leon fell away from the Greeks, i.e., Byzantines, occupied all Egrisi as far as the Likhi Mountains and declared himself the King of Abkhazia in 786” (E. Takaishvili, Tbilisi, 1913, p. 53-54).

I. Javakhishvili agreed to the date of Leon's rule proposed by E. Takaishvili – 746 – 791. He does not mention any other Leon in those years since, seemingly, in his opinion there was only one Leon in the 8<sup>th</sup> century Abkhazia (I. Javakhishvili, 1983, p. 92-93).

S. Janashia touched upon the issue of the establishment of the Kingdom of Abkhazia. He put forward a noteworthy position on the issue in question. The scholar did a detailed analysis of the sources that refer to Leon. S. Janashia points out that the "Divan of the Abkhazian Kings" is not complete and precise. He argues that the information of Wakhushti is entirely based on the "Chronicle of Kartli", as for the notes that are different – they are invented by Wakhushti. The scholar agrees with Wakhushti on the date of creation of the Kingdom of Abkhazia – 786 and sees the year as more reliable. At the same time he rejects the dating of Leon's rule offered by E. Takaishvili – 746-791. As we specified above, the same position is shared by I. Javakhishvili. S. Janashia gives a detailed picture of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the relations of the Byzantines, Arabs, and Khazars. Consequently, he expresses a doubt that the Caesar of Byzantium "Khazar" and Leon the founder of the Kingdom of Abkhazia were cousins - their mothers being sisters, the daughters of the Khagan of the Khazars. "True, the old Georgian historian refers the name of Leon to the founders of the Abkhazian dynasty as well", "S. Janashia doubts the historicism of Leon I and supports his doubt with the "Divan of the Abkhazian Kings", which, as we mentioned above, acknowledges one Leon only". In S. Janashia's opinion, this Leon corresponds to Leon II. The scholar dates the founding of the Kingdom of Abkhazia to the period after 797 (797 – 802) (S. Janashia, 1952, p. 323-341). In some cases this same dating is shared by some other scholars (D. Muskhelishvili, 1980, p. 140; M. Biro, 1977, p. 256). At the same time, except for a few cases given below, the doubt of S. Janashia regarding the existence of two Leons has not been shared.

P. Ingorokva elaborated on the issue of the Kingdom of Abkhazia in his work "Giorgi Merchule" (1954). In his genealogical scheme of the kings of Abkhazia, the princes of Lazeti (the Patrikios) and afterwards the kings of Western Georgia ("the kings of Abkhazia") – there are both Leon I and Leon II in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Leon I, Teodosi I (730-740), Konstantine II; Leon II (753-798) was crowned in 786-798.**

"In the 720-30-s there started a wide-scale movement against Arab conquerors in Western Georgia. This campaign was organized and led by the prince of Lazeti – Leon I. Leon I is an important figure in the history of Georgia of the 8<sup>th</sup> century". "The merit of Leon I - the organizer and leader of the anti-Arab movement is immense for Georgia....Leon I, after waging a battle with

the Arabs, left the inner part of Egrisi where the position of Arabs was pretty strong. Leon I moved to Abkhazia – the north coast of the Lazi countries and consolidated his positions there.... Leon I liberated the territories of Abkhazia: Abkhazia itself, as well as Absileti, Misimianeti, Saniget-Jiketi... He established political relations with Byzantium and acknowledged the suzerainty of the Caesar of Byzantium. At the same time, Byzantium, in its turn, took on some responsibilities. Namely, it recognized the Dynasty of Leon I as the hereditary owner of the territories of Abkhazia that had been liberated from the Arabs – with the title of the Eristavi of Caesar – Archonti....the leaders of the anti-Arab front in Iberia (Kartli), the princes of Iberia: Mir and Archil established relations with Leon I"(P. Ingorokva, 1954, p. 197-198). P. Ingorokva considers that western Georgia was liberated from the "Byzantine wardship" by Leon II who got Abkhazia in the 750s (according to the text of "the Divan of the Abkhazian Kings" - 753). His rule continued to 798. Leon II got the title of "prince" earlier than the 780s. Leon II is mentioned with the title "prince" in the work of Ioane Sabanisidze which gives information about western Georgia of 781-782. The integration with western Georgia took place at the time of Leon II (p. 202). The scholar believes that this territory included "the Trebizond region as well" and Leon established relations with Khazars, too.

While Z. Anchabadze tends to agree with S. Janashia, much of P. Ingorokva's analysis on "the Kingdom of Abkhazia" was unacceptable for him. At the same time, Z. Anchabadze leaves two Leons in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. According to Z. Anchabadze, "after the ousting of the Arabs, the territory of the owner of Abkhazia ("The Saeristavo of the Abkhazians") included an important region from the River Kelasuri in the South to Nechepsukho in the North. The Emperor of Byzantium Leon of Isauria (717-741) appointed Leon I within these bounds (Z. Anchabadze, 1959, p. 60). The scholar believes that Leon I owned a fortress, Sobghisi, based on the notes of the work of Juansher in the respective part of the "Georgian Chronicle": "The Eristavi of Caesar Leon entered the fortress Sobghisi". Z. Anchabadze comments that the Georgian sources refer to Leon as the Eristavi of Caesar because Abkhazia depended on Byzantium (p. 87). Afterwards, Z. Anchabadze talks about the "Divan of the Abkhazian Kings" and asserts that the list of Abkhazian chiefs given there is not complete. He argues that in the "Divan of the Abkhazian Kings" there is an omission of Leon, the uncle of Leon II.

N. Berdzenishvili assumes that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century there were 2 Leons in Abkhazia: Leon I and Leon II. "In the opinion of Georgian politicians, with the help of Greeks, "Abkhazia" (the western part of the Egrisi heritage) confronted Kartli. "Kartli" contained the remaining part of Egrisi. This "Abkhazia" sometimes bordered

on the Egris-tskali and sometimes included the Inner Egrisi, as well. At times, it only reached Klisura. At the end, with the support of Greeks, “Abkhazia” encompassed the whole territory of Egrisi (presumably, this was in the times of Leon I) and thus there appeared the country of Abkhazia (at the time of Leon I to Scandashorapani and from the time of Leon II – as far as the Likhi) (N. Berdzenishvili, 1990, p. 269). In the context: “as the «Deaf» entered the Klisura and approached the Fortress of Anakopia, there were the kings of Georgia Mir and Archil inside. And the Eristavi of the Caesar entered the fortress on the border of Ovseti” (p. 577). The scholar interprets “the Eristavi of Caesar Leon” as the Eristavi of Abkhazeti that “famed in this way, corroborated by Sabanisdze (the Georgian author of the 8<sup>th</sup> century). His praise by the king of the Greeks is corroborated in this episode”.

D. Muskhelishvili talks about Leon II. “On the initiative of the government of Abkhazia, the Principality of Egrisi and Abkhazia united in about 778. In 797-802 this new political entity got free from the vassal attitude of Byzantium and formed as the “the Kingdom of Abkhazia”. According to Wakhushti Bagrationi, Leon II – the founder of this kingdom - carried out a series of significant administrative reforms” (D. Muskhelishvili, 1980, p. 140).

In the respective part of his major work on Khazars, M. Artamonov proceeds from the French “Georgian Chronicle” published by Marie Brosset and mentions Lev II (M. Artamonov, 1962, p. 248).

There are also two Leons mentioned in all relatively modern editions (N. Asatiani, M. Sanadze, T. Beradze) including volume II, the index of Ivane Javakhishvili’s works, though Ivane Javakhishvili speaks about one Leon in his research (N. Asatiani, 2004, p. 129-130; T. Beradze, M. Sanadze, 2003 p. 100; I. Javakhishvili, 1983, p. 460).

A different position has also been put forward. M. Lordkipanidze thoroughly studied the history of the Abkhaz Kingdom. Although initially she agreed with the prevailing opinion about two Leons in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Leon I - from the 740s – to 758, Leon II – 758 – 798), later she made an assumption about one Leon. The scholar reckons that the Leon, who led the anti-Arab front in Western Georgia in the 750s, united all Western Georgia by the 780s and got free from the vassalage of Byzantium and assumed the title of king at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century (M. Lordkipanidze, 1973, p. 417, 429; M. Lordkipanidze, 1988, p. 281).

Based on appropriate sources and environment, we also consider that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century there was only one Leon who was first acknowledged as the Eristavi of Abkhazia. Later he took advantage of the domestic situation and the problems in Byzantium and managed to unite Western Georgia with the help of the Khagan of

the Khazars. He broke away from the empire, declared independence and was crowned.

In the “Georgian Chronicles” Leon is mentioned by Juansher even before “the Chronicle of Kartli”. Leon is mentioned twice in the latter. This name is first mentioned with regard to the campaign of Marwan the Deaf (Marwan ibn-Muhammad). When the Arab conqueror reached Anakopia there were “the kings of Kartli: Mir and Archil there”. In the same place there is a reference to “the Eristavi of the Caesar Leon” who “entered the Fortress of Sobghisi, which borders on Ovseti” (p. 193). Later it is said by Juansher: “There came the time of lechery in Kartli, Armenia and Rani... and Mir, Archil and Leon, the Eristavi of Abkhazia, sent an envoy to the King of Greece... The latter produced two crowns and the deed and gave them to Mir and Archil” ...and he wrote to Leon: “I confer the status of the Eristavi of Abkhazia on you and all your successors. May you always respect the kings and the nation of Kartli; may you never be able to harm them and may their borders be on Egrisi”. The dying Mir addresses Archil: “since our fathers get married to the daughters of Eristavis, give them my daughters and share the land of Kartli with them. Let half be yours, and the other half - theirs. I am giving the oldest to you: Egrisi, Suaneti, Takueri, Argueti, Guria. Give Shuamtiuleti and Klarjeti to my daughters so that they could be home at the times of sorrow.... (p. 196). “Archil addressed Leon and stated”.... “I will go and settle in the Fortress Goji and Kutatisi. Ask me whatever you want”... “Leon responded”: “Caesar gave me a land and from now on it is mine from Klisura to Khazareti – where there is the peak of the Caucasus... I do not want anything from you. Let my possession be yours”. Then Archil married his niece Guarandukht to Leon and gave him the crown bestowed upon Mir by the King of Greece.... Archil settled in Egrisi as far as Shorapani. 12 years passed and the construction of Kartli started. Mtskheta was a poor place to live in” (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1996, p. 196-198).

None of these extracts, except for the first one, is included in the Armenian translation of ‘the Georgian Chronicles’. “Leon the Eristavi of the Caesar” mentioned in the first note is considered to be the Eristavi of Abkhazia in scholarly literature. According to C. Tumanoff, Leon I - the uncle of Leon II – is called “Imperial Duke” (C. Toumanoff, 1956, p. 75). And following the analysis of Z. Anchabadze, Leon I was called “the Duke of the Caesar” because of Abkhazia’s vassalage to Byzantium. M. Biro reflects in the same way: “In the chronicle of Juansher the chief of Abkhazia is presented as “Imperial Prince” and we can deduce from this that in 737 Abkhazeti was controlled by Byzantium” (M. Biro, 1975, p. 297). The comment of M. Sanadze and T. Beradze should be specially noted. The scholars proved that “the Duke of Caesar Leon” is Leon of Isauria (717 – 741) and

not “the Duke of Abkhazia”. They proceed from the Armenian translation of the “Georgian Chronicle” as well as some other documents. In the Armenian translation of the “Georgian Chronicle” the Leon we are interested in is mentioned as “Leon, the leader of the Greeks” (M. Sanadze, 2001, p. 75-77; M. Sanadze, T. Beradze, 2004, 76-78).

As for the other extracts from the work of Juansher, it is quite challenging to date them. Juansher does not mention the name of the Caesar of Byzantium to whom the Georgian chief sent an envoy. According to Wakhushti Bagrationi, this Caesar is Konstantine (741 – 775). After the attack of Marwan ibn Muhammad and the fight at Anakopia where Mir and Archil participated: “Mir was wounded” and Arabs retreated, they passed Guria and headed for Baghdad;” “the kings sent a person to Caesar Konstantine and notified him on everything. As a response the Caesar sent them a crown and praise” (Wakhushti, 1973, p.125)..

It has been noted in the literature that Juansher tends to present events in a compressed way. Though, as a result of comparative studies, it becomes possible to identify a reliable stratum in the source - the material presented here does not suffice for determining the date of the events. When could the Georgian princes have applied to the Caesar of Byzantium? Most probably, that happened when the reign of Marwan ibn Muhammad in Armenia came to an end. As the Armenian author Ghevond, who considers Marwan ibn Muhammad to have been a just ruler, relates: “he punished offenders: thieves, crooks, and other violators of order with deaths on the gallows; he gave orders to cut the legs and arms of the accused” (Ghevond, 1862, p.81).

After Caliph Hisham (724 – 747), there started a power crisis. In a short period of time, several Caliphs replaced each other: Walid II (743 – 744), Yazid III (744), Ibrahim (744). Following them, Caliph Marwan II ibn Muhammad (744 – 750) – the last representative of the Omayyad Dynasty took hold of the throne by means of force. However, in a few years he was defeated by the Abasids (St.Lain-Pool, 2004). According to the Syrian author Abu al-Faraj the same Bar Hebraeus, Walid reigned 1 year and 3 months after Hisham. Yazid ruled for 2 months and his brother Ibrahim – for another 2 months. Then there was Marwan (Abu'l Faraj, 1932, p. 742). In these years of turmoil, as Ghevond put it, “all our leaders wanted to overthrow” the rule of Arabs, “to revolt and get rid of tributes”. They relied on the help of the Caesar of Byzantium in this respect. There is evidence how Konstantine the Caesar of Byzantium provided refuge for the princes who had escaped from Arabs (Ghevond, 1862, p. 82-83, 93). The Georgian plea to Caesar of Byzantium could be dated back to this time. And the years of Leon’s rule (745 – 791), as proposed by E. Takaishvili, seem quite acceptable, which of course

includes not only the time of royalty, but such an appeal could have been secretly made right then – after the campaign of Marwan ibn Muhammad – i. e., in 737-739.

After the campaigns of Marwan ibn Muhammad, the necessity to form coalitions against Arabs became evident. Seemingly, as formerly members of such coalitions were Byzantium, the Kingdom of Khazars and Georgia. The union was traditional starting with Heracles the time of the Caesar of Byzantium. It never stopped to exist even at the time of Arabs or the establishment of the independent Khazar state. In respective sources we can trace the association of Leon of Isauria with Khazars. Even before the attack of Marwan ibn Muhammad against Georgia, in 732/3 the Caesar of Byzantium – Leon of Isauria married his son Konstantine to the daughter of the Khagan of Khazars, who after baptizing was named Irene (I. Chichurov. 1980, p. 68). Later on (according to the dating of Theophanes in 750) this marriage resulted in the birth of Leon the IV “Khazar”, later – of the Caesar of Byzantium. He took the throne after his father Konstantine.

According to the sources, the Eristavi of Abkhazia was Leon in those years. It is mentioned in the “Chronicle” that his mother, whose name is not mentioned in the source, was the daughter of Khazar Khakan. Who was the father of Leon? According to the “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings”, the father of Leon was Thevdore. He is mentioned as the ninth king of Abkhazia. In the above-mentioned list of other predecessors, Leon owns the Kingdom of Abkhazia and rules it hereditarily; the throne goes from father to son (J. Gamakharia, B. Gogia, 1997 p. 198). The marriages were not accidental in those times. This period is significant because the strong Arabic coalition was held. Together with Byzantium’s, Khazar’s and Kartli’s kings the ruler of Abkhazia participates intensively in this coalition. If we believe the evidence provided by the Georgian sources, these two people, Leon “Khazar” and Leon Abkhazian Eristavi were cousins, and their mothers were sisters. S. Janashia supports this standpoint.

There is no chronological order before the governance of Leon in the “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings”. The situation changes radically after the ruling period of Leon. All the dates are indicated after his governance. According to P. Ingorokva the governors of Abkhazia are the governors of Egrisi, too. The indication of Barnuki in the list supports this idea. Its connection with Patrikios Lebaruk and with Sergi, the son of Barnuki, mentioned by the Byzantine chroniclers of the sixties and nineties of the seventh century is clear (“As Patrikios Lebaruk told us under a dreadful oath”- evidence by Theodore of Gangra, exiled from Byzantium to Lazica, or by Theophanes, in 697 “Patrikios of Lazica, Sergi, son of Barnuk rebelled“ – Georgica, IV, 1941, p.

49, 105.). M. Sanadze and T. Beradze share the same standpoint. According to the list presented by the “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings”, the link between the Patrikios of Egrisi and the Abkhaz kings is evident. However, how much reliable is the evidence? Are the Abkhaz kings associated with the Patrikios of Egrisi artificially in order to indicate their heir rights over western Georgia? The Abkhaz Kingdom supported this idea in the period of Bagrat the III.

Let us return to the Chronicle of Kartli on the issue of Leon’s predecessors. “As the power of Greeks lost strength, Leon the king of Abkhazia, whose kingdom was Abkhazia and owned it hereditarily, and who was the nephew of Leon Eristavi, broke away from Greeks. The second Leon, the son of the daughter of the Khazar King conquered Abkhazia and Egrisi to Likhi, and was called the King of Abkhazians.”

There are two Leons in this context. One of them gave the other Abkhazia to rule over. S. Janashia stated the possibility that Leon obtained the rights on the governance of Abkhazia from his uncle, but with some doubts. Still he hardly believes that the uncle, who was considered the Eristavi of Abkhazia, existed in reality (S. Janashia, 1952, p. 326). The words “Leon, who was given Abkhazia, broke away from Greeks” belong to Leon. The same chronicle gives us information about Leon. This time he is in alliance with Curopalates Ashot and Teodosi: “the times when Ashot Curopalates attacked and was supported by Teodosi, the king of Apkhazeti, the son of the second Leon, who was the son-in-law of Ashot Curapalates” (p. 206). In this case the first part of the text determines the last part of it and this means that the son-in-law was Teodosi and not Leon II. According to the Chronicle, Abkhazia was given to Leon, who broke away from Greeks and called himself the King of Abkhazians. Who is Eristavi Leon, whose nephew is Leon the Abkhaz Eristavi? According to the author of Georgian Chronicles, this is the same person as the one mentioned by Juansher “Leon, Eristavi of Caesar” (p.193), the same Leon of Isauria. He was the most honorable person, who appointed the governors of Kartli to the position of Patrikios. But when and why did that happen?

It was noted several times that Juansher did not mention anything about the relations with Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries. Chroniclers unite several events here. Separating them from each other is only possible if we compare different sources. According to the research of M. Sanadze and T. Beradze, Mir and Archil took the title of Patrikios for participating in the battles against Arabs and supporting the Byzantines. These events took place mostly in the first years of the governance of Leon of Isauria (717). As for Leon Eristavi, the scholars consider him as an honorable person in the 30s of the eighth century (737-739) (p. 76), the time when Marwan the Deaf’s invasions ended. This is quite ac-

ceptable. There passed quite a long time between the two events and it was quite possible that the Byzantine Caesar appointed his brother’s son or one of the relatives to this position. The same standpoint was shared by M. Artamonov. He thought that Abkhaz Eristavi Leon was the nephew of Byzantine Caesar. Nevertheless, M. Artamonov thinks that the Caesar was Leon Khazar (775-780) (M. Artamonov, 1962, p. 248). Probably it was not accidental that according to the evidence of the “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings” Leon’s father’s, Thevdore’s father’s as well as Byzantine Caesar’s Leon of Isauria’s son’s name was Konstantine. If we take into account the attitude of Leon of Isauria towards western Georgia’s governors, it is impossible for him to have trusted any representative of any branch of the Abkhazia and Egrisi Patrikios. It is hardly believable that Byzantium considered these sides the leading forces against Arabian attacks. In the beginning of the 8th century, when - according to the evidence of Theopanes - “Arabs were governing Abasgia, Lazica and Iberia” (Georgica, 1941, 105), Leon was sent to the Alans to pay them money and to use their force against Abasgians. Despite some obstacles, he partially succeeded in this. On his way back, Leon II named by the Chronicles as Leon the Eristavi, strongly refused to pass the territory of Abkhazia. With the help of Mir, he managed to come out of the territory of western Georgia and returned to Justinian (M. Sanadze, T. Beradze, 2004, p. 77.).

During his relations with Alans he got convinced that it was very profitable to build relations with Khazars. They could help in the battles against Arabs. Later he married his son to the daughter of the Khazar Khakan. According to the Georgian Chronicles, it is not accidental that one of his other relatives or his brother could have an alliance and matrimonial relations with the Khazar Khakan and his son could have been appointed as the Eristavi of Abkhazia. That is, at least, the perception of the author of the “Chronicle of Kartli”. The chronicle that mentions the name as the second Leon, does not mean Leon II. There is no other case in the chronicle when the king is numbered. “Second” comes from the context. “Leon who broke away from Greeks and conquered Apkhazeti and Egrisi up to Likhi and who assumed the name the King of Apkhazians” was not Leon Eristavi, who was sent from Byzantium, but another Leon - his nephew. Wakhushti identified this part differently. From his standpoint, Leon, to whom Abkhazia was given, and Eristavi of Caesar Leon were the same person “The title of Abkhaz Eristavii was given to Leon hereditarily for serving the kings (as that Leon I Eristavi appointed by the Caesar)” (Wakhushti, 1973, p. 127). He gave the numbers to the Abkhaz Eristavs, Leon I and Leon II, who, by his wrong perception, ruled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

We think that the title of Eristavi was given to Leon by the Byzantine Caesar Leon of Isauria. This must have

happened before 741. But if we take into consideration that each of the given titles should have been confirmed by each Caesar, the standpoint of Wakhushti that an envoy was sent to the Caesar Konstantine could come from a reliable source.

When could Leon have joined Egrisi, move the capital city to Kutaisi, and secede from Byzantium?

After Archil agreed "to the marriage of Leon and his niece Gurandukht and gave him the crown, which was conferred to Mir by the king of Greeks", he thanked him and said: "I will go and settle down in the Fortress Goji and Kutaisi" (p.197). "Archil settled in Egrisi that extends to Shorapani" (p.198). At the time of Khazars' attacks, in the sixties of the 8th century, Archil was not alive. Kartli and Kakheti were ruled by Juansher, who was taken as hostage. Archil's son Ioane (p. 205) being in western Georgia together with his mother and sisters, was informed by Juansher on the desire of the Khakan to marry their sister. (M. Sanadze, 2001, p. 87-88.). After seven years, at the time when Juansher comes back, there is a rebellion against Arabs. The title of Erismtavari is abolished. Nerse is arrested, though he is freed after several years. The status of Saeristavo is renewed for a while. Later Nerse leaves Kartli. However, after 786 it appears all these people, including Ioane, are dead.

The cooperation of Abkhazia, Byzantium, and Khazar, quite expected in the period of the Byzantine Emperor Leon III, lasted during the governance of Konstantine the V, and his son Leon the IV "Khazar's" periods. The successful development of Byzantium's policy is the result of relations with Khazars, the researchers think (I. Chichurov, 1980, p. 11-12.). The embassy is sent from Byzantium to Khazar in 729. It is considered that Khazars attacks in 730 helped Byzantium to regain the territory of Abkhazia and preserved Lazica. Khazars played a very important role in the trade relations with Byzantium. Byzantium at the same time tried to spread Christianity in Khazaria. The same Byzantines strongly stood the attack of the Arabs. In 740 Leon the III and his son Konstantine won the battle with Acroin, Konstantine the V conquered Germanicia, the territory subjugated by Arabs in Syria, destroyed the Arab fleet near Cyprus. In 751-752 he ruined Melitena (in Mesopotamia) and Theodosiopolis (in Armenia), in 770 he defeated the Arabs in Asia Minor. Leon the IV waged three successful battles against Arabs.

The situation changed after the death of Leon the IV "Khazar" (780). Instead of underage Konstantine the VI the governor of the country was Irene, the mother of the king. In 787 the Christian population rebelled against Khazars in Crimea's Gutia. Byzantium did not take a special part in that battle to protect Christians; instead it was limited to founding only the Gutia Metropolis. In summer of 790 Irene defeated all the enemies and declared herself Empress. However, in December of the

same year, the throne was taken by her son Konstantine. In 782 the Arabs started attacks and Byzantium gained peace by sending 70 000 Noems annually. In the eighties, after the defeat in a battle, Konstantine had to pay subsidies to the Bulgar Khan. Irene ordered to blind Konstantine, her son. And in 797, she took the throne once again. These events ended in a coup d'état, and the throne was taken by Caesar Nicephorus. That was the reason why S. Janashia considered that the secession of Abkhazia from Byzantium dates back to 797-802. However, it is quite possible that this fact happened earlier, as it is given in the evidence of Wakhushti, in 786.

Ioane Sabanisidze's "The Martyrdom of Saint Abo of Tiflis" written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century provides information on Abkhazia. This source proves that the relations between Khazars and Abkhazians were active and well-disposed. The given source "The Martyrdom of Saint Abo Tpileli" does not say that in the eighth decade of the 8th century there is a king in Abkhazia at all. The ruler of Abkhazia is known as *mtavari*, who extended hospitality to Nerse and all his people. According to Ioane Sabanisidze, "there was fear of the Saracens in the country" (Iovane Sabanisidze, 1982, p. 128).

"In the period of Leon this region is absolutely free from Arabs. It is also possible to suppose that at that time Leon united western Georgia. But it can also be presumed that the source indicates the borders of Christianity, but not Abkhazia. Trebizond and Constantinople are also mentioned: "None of the non-believers can find place in it. The border of it is the Pontus Sea, the place of Christians to the border of Chaldea, where Trebizond, the place of Apsars and the port of Nafsai are included. And there are places and cities ruled by the servant of Christ, the King of Ioans, who resided in Constantinople" (pp. 128-129). "The Martyrdom of Saint Abo Tpileli" was written by the order of Samuel Catholicos (780-790) after the torture of Abo (786), it means no later than 786-790; however, it seems to have been written more immediately after the torture of Abo. It can hardly be presumed that Leon, who received Abkhazia from Leon of Isauria, could declare himself king in the ninth decade of the 8th century. Quite possibly, it happened earlier.

Proceeding from the foregoing, it is possible to assume that Leon united western Georgia in the 80s of the 8th century and declared independence from Byzantium. We do not agree to the information provided by Kevin Alan Brook that the strong and enlarged Abkhazia could be a colony of the Khazars at the end of the eighth century (K. Brook, 2005, p. 258). This attestation doesn't correspond to the earlier time either, when Abkhazia was governed by the grandson of the Khazar Khakan Leon. According to the analysis of the given information, we can conclude the following:

1. There was only one Leon in Abkhazia in the 8<sup>th</sup> century;

2. Leon was a family member neither of the Abkhazian, nor of the Egrisi (western Georgia) rulers;
3. Leon was the nephew of Leon of Isauria, the Byzantine Emperor, who appointed him as a ruler in Abkhazia;
4. Based on his wife's rights, Leon united Western Georgia and became its ruler in the late eighth decade of

the 8<sup>th</sup> century. His wife was Guranduckht, daughter of Mir, to whom Egrisi was given hereditarily by Leon of Isauria;

5. Leon seceded from Byzantium and proclaimed himself King of Abkhazia that covered western Georgia, in the same late 8<sup>th</sup> century, closer to 786.

## ისტორია & ფილოლოგია

# აფხაზთა სამეფოს შემქმნელის ვინაობისათვის

## გ. ალასანია\*

\* შავი ზღვის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიკოს თ. გამყრელიძის მიერ)

ქართულ ისტორიოგრაფიაში “აფხაზეთის სამეფოს” შემქმნელად მიჩნეულია ლეონ II. “ქართლის ცხოვრების” შესაბამისი მონაკვეთის, “მატიანე ქართლისაის”, და ვახუშტის ჩვენებებს შორის ჩვენთვის საინტერესო შემთხვევაში შეინიშნება ზოგიერთი სხვაობა. პირველი, როგორც ჩანს, უფრო ზუსტია. მკვლევართა უმრავლესობა ცნობას ასე კითხულობს: “რაჟამს მოუძღურდეს ბერძენნი, გადგა მათგან ერისთავი აფხაზთა, სახელით ლეონ, ძმისწული ლეონ ერისთავისა, რომლისად მიეცა სამკვიდროდ აფხაზეთი. ესე მეორე ლეონ ასულის წული იყო ხაზართა მეფისა და ძალითა მათითა გაადგა ბერძენთა, დაიპყრა აფხაზეთი და ეგრისი“. ორივე ლეონი მიჩნეულია აფხაზეთის მთავრებად: ლეონ I-დ და ლეონ II-დ. წინამდებარე სტატიის ავტორი სათანადო წყაროების განხილვით მიდის დასკვნამდე, რომ “მატიანე ქართლისაისში” მოხსენიებული ერთ-ერთი ლეონი არის ლეონ ისაგრიელი, ბიზანტიის იმპერატორი, რომელმაც დანიშნა თავისი ძმისშვილი ლეონი აფხაზეთის გამგებლად მე-8 საუკუნის 30-იან წლებში.

ვფიქრობთ, შესაძლებელია შემდეგი ვარაუდების გამოთქმა:

1. მე-8 საუკუნეში აფხაზეთში მმართველად მხოლოდ ერთი ლეონი იყო;
2. ლეონი არ ეკუთვნოდა არც ეგრისის, და არც აფხაზთა გამგებლების ოჯახს;
3. ლეონი იყო ბიზანტიის იმპერატორის ლეონ ისაგრიელის ძმისშვილი, რომელიც ბიძამისმა ურჩი აფხაზეთის გამგებლად დანიშნა;
4. ლეონი აერთიანებს დასავლეთ საქართველოს და ხდება მისი გამგებელი მე-8 საუკუნის გვიან 80-იან წლებში – ცოლის უფლებებზე დაყრდნობით. ეს უკანასკნელი იყო გურანდუხტი, მირის ქალიშვილი, რომელსაც ეგრისის ტახტი სამემკვიდროდ იმავე ლეონ ისაგრიელისაგან ჰქონდა მიცემული;
5. ლეონი განუდგა ბიზანტიას და გამოაცხადა თავი დასავლეთ საქართველოს მეფედ, ხაზართა ძალებზე დაყრდნობით, მე-8 საუკუნის იმავე გვიან 80-იან წლებში, ახლოს 786 წელთან, როდესაც ქართლის სამეფო ოჯახის წევრები გარდაცვლილი იყვნენ.



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