

History

The Byzantine Thema of Soteroupolis-Anakopia in the 11th Century

Werner Seibt

Austrian Academy of Sciences, Department for Byzantine Research, Vienna, Austria

(Presented by Academy Member Thomas V. Gamkrelidze)

ABSTRACT. A Byzantine Thema was established in Georgian Abkhazia ca. 1033, when the second wife of the Georgian king Giorgi, Elda or Alde, donated her *apanage* to the emperor Romanos III Argyros. Soteroupolis is surely a mediaeval name for Pityous/Bičvinta/Picunda. Probably also the palace of Likhni belonged to this Thema.

About 1044-1045 the Georgian king Bagrāt laid siege to Anakopia but could not conquer it. About this time a certain Nicholas with the Title of Protospatharios was Strategos of the Thema. Only ca. 1074 the Georgians seem to have regained Anakopia and the rest of the Thema. © 2012 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: Byzantine history (11th century), Georgian history (11th century), Abkhazia (11th century), Anakopia, Soteroupolis/Bičvinta.

In the 11th century the Byzantine expansion in the East extended all the way to the modern Georgian province of Abkhazia. No war of aggression was necessary, for it was by good fortune that the emperor was able to take possession of an important part of this region.

The Georgian king Giorgi (1014-1027) was married to Mariam, the daughter of the Armenian king Senek'erim Yovhannēs of Vaspurakan, his ally, when he planned a war against the Byzantine emperor Basil II. But Giorgi was defeated before the allies could bring support in 1022. Senek'erim lost his kingdom [1, 2], Giorgi lost only small territories but presumably was forced to divorce Mariam and to marry a daughter of the king of Alania as his second wife,

who was probably called Elda (in Greek Ἄλδῃ; in the old Alanic Narten-epos we find the form Elda, Osetian variants are Aldā, Āldi, in Georgian Alda, Aldi, Alde) [3]; Ioannes Skylitzes says only Ἄλδῃ ... τοῦ γένους οὐσα τῶν Ἀλανῶν [4], but the Georgian source Matiane Kartlisa specifies her as “daughter of the king of the Osetians” [5: Georg.295,6f. Cf.; Rus.47; Germ.368], using in a misleading way one and the same denomination for Alans and Osetians [6].

Giorgi had a son with this Elda, Demeṭre, but apparently after some time (Basil had passed away in 1025), Mariam returned to her husband. When Giorgi died (1027) Elda was living in her *apanage* in Abkhazia in the region of Anakopia (near the modern town New Athos) with her small son, far from the

court, but Mariam became regent in the Georgian realm in the name of her son Bagrat, who was only then nine years old.

Given the weak position of the Georgian monarchy in relation to the power of the *didebulis*, the big landlords, any alliance of dissenting lords were in a position to choose Demetre as a rival candidate to the throne and consequently his presence on Georgian territory was a threat to king Bagrat.

Whether such an enterprise was set in motion or only prepared, Elda nevertheless left Georgia together with her son circa 1033 and travelled to Konstantinople, where she was welcomed by emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034). Elda donated her possessions to the emperor, who bestowed the title Magistros on Demetre. The Byzantine historian Ioannes Skylitzes mentions only Anakopia as the new Byzantine stronghold [4:48f.], and the Georgian source, Matiane Kartlisa, corroborates only this [5: Georg. 295,6-12]. So these sources cannot yield more information about the borders of this new Byzantine realm.

Under these conditions it was a happy circumstance that some years ago a Byzantine lead seal was found in Bulgaria mentioning a certain Nicholas with the Title “imperial Protospatharios of the Chrysotriklinos” and the command of a “Strategos of Soteroupolis and Anakoupia”. On both sides of the seal only the inscription: Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) Νικολάω (πρωτο)παθ(αρίω) ἐπὶ τοῦ χρ(υσο)(τρι)κλ(ι)ν(ου) | (καὶ) στρατηγ(ῶ) Σ(ωτηρ)ουπόλ(εως) (καὶ) Ἀν(α)κουπί(ας).

The object dates from about the middle of the 11th century [7]. The seal provides definitive proof that there was established a real Byzantine Thema in this region, and that Soteroupolis belonged to it.

Though there is some discussion about the localization of Soteroupolis (some scholars mixed it up with the other Soteroupolis/Bourzo on the Çoruh, scil. Borçka, modern Yeniyol [8], others searched for it near Batumi [9], there can be no doubt that it is identical with Bičvinta/Picunda, the old town of Pityous, north of Anakopia. And taking into account

that the palace of Likhni/Lykhny [10] lies between these two centres we may assume that also this place was integrated into the Byzantine hegemony. It would have been strategic nonsense to combine Anakopia in Abkhazia with a place upstream on the Çoroh so far away, not even situated on the seashore! And it is well known that Soteroupolis in Abkhazia was an archbishopric of the Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople from the time of the 10th century, very often combined with the metropolis Alania since the early 12th century [11].

About 1044-1045 the Georgian king Bagrat attacked the Byzantine realm in Abkhazia and laid siege to Anakopia. In these years the Byzantine reputation in the East was damaged, as its armies had great difficulties in occupying Greater Armenia after the death of king Yovhannēs Smbat and his brother Ašot IV (1041), who had been forced in 1022 to accept the Byzantine emperor as their heir. Michael Iasites, the military commander of the Byzantine Ducate Iberia (established in 1000 after the death of Davit Kuropalates of Tao, a vast territory reaching as far as Mantzikert in the south), was ordered to occupy Greater Armenia with his forces, but he failed. As a consequence of the usurpation of Georgios Maniakes and the civil war that followed there were no new Byzantine initiatives against Armenia, where a new Armenian king was established, Gagik II. Only in 1044 was the war against Armenia resumed under the command of Michael Iasites and Nicholas, the Domestikos of the East (a kind of Generalissimus); in the spring of 1045 the Byzantine forces could enter Ani, the capital of Greater Armenia, but the problems did not end with this success, as there followed a war against the former ally Abu'l Aswār, the Kurdish Emir of Dvin [2: 154-158; 12]. The role of the Georgian king in these wars is not quite clear, but it seems that his troops occupied some northern Armenian places at least for some time, presumably in cooperation with the Armenian leader Sargis Bestes [2: 158f.; 13].

About this time Bagrat laid siege to Anakopia. But, according to the official version in the Georgian

Chronicle, he hurried away to Tbilisi when he was informed about the death of the Emir Jafar, seeing in this circumstance a chance to gain control of this Emirate (ca. 1046), leaving behind in front of Anaḱopia Otaḡo, the son of Čača Kuabulel, but it all was in vain [5: 6-10]. After a lapse of time surely Byzantine reinforcements had arrived in Abkhazia and the Georgian troops resigned. Perhaps Nicholas was precisely at this time Strategos of Anaḱopia and the seal originates from a letter to the Dux of Paristrion/Paradounabon informing him about the arrival of a strong Georgian army and asking for assistance.

After the retreat of the Georgian army the Byzantines started to renovate damaged buildings, and some inscriptions give us information about that; as they were re-edited recently [14: 209-224; 268f.] there is a good foundation for further research. On an inscription from the church of St. Theodore on the top of the Anaḱopia fortress we learn about the restoration of a cistern in February 1046 (not 1047! [14: 269, “in February, 1074]); the emperor Konstantine Monomachos is mentioned, and we read also δηᾶ συνδρομῆς Εὐγενίου πρωτοπαθαρίου ὁ τοῦ δεσπότης κὲ Θεοδώρου ταξιάρχου Κασῆς τοῦ Βιολάντη [14: 215; Plates, Fig. 3]. Despotes is surely not the surname or family name of Eugenios, the well-known Byzantine formula ὁ τοῦ can mean “nephew of a despotes”, yet despotes can also be a bishop or archbishop, e.g. the one of Soteroupolis! I would prefer to see in Eugenios a landlord in the Byzantine realm in Abkhazia, rather than the Strategos, as Vinogradov proposed. Theodoros on the other hand was a military commander, but perhaps only temporarily detached to strengthen the troops in the Thema, coming from the Thema Kassenon north-east of Kaisareia [15]. A Turma Κασῆς is already mentioned in *De administrando imperio* [16, 17]. The family name is not so clear; is it a special form of Balantes, Balantios, Abalantes etc.?

And there is another inscription from March 1046, mentioning again Eugenios, whose title is reduced to Α^ο (for πρωτοπαθαρίου), followed by ὁ τοῦ δ[...];

after that the editors want to read the name Alda, but the letter vestiges to my mind do not support this hypothesis; then we read again κὲ Θεοδῶ[ρου] τα[ξι]άρχου Κασῆς τοῦ Β[...]; it is not so clear if after the last Beta follows Alpha or Iota [14: 217; Plates, Figs 4, 5, 16, 40]. A third inscription mentions the re-consecration of the church of St. Theodore by Michael, archbishop (probably of Soteroupolis) on April 16. Vinogradov wants to read 2nd indiction (dating the inscription to 1049), but that is not for sure [14: 218f; Plates, Figs 4, 6, 41].

In the following years there was peace on the Byzantine-Georgian border in Abkhazia till the early 70s of the 11th century. After the catastrophe of Mantzikert (1071) the Byzantine position in the East was again extremely damaged. About 1074 the Georgians seem to have regained Anaḱopia and the rest of this Thema, and also Byzantine possessions in Northeast Anatolia, including the city of Kars [18, 19], but this one only for a limited number of years, because here the Georgians were again expelled by a Seljuk army under Emir Aḡmad ca. 1080; afterwards Kars came again under Byzantine control under the Dux Georgios Alousianos Protonobellissimos [15: 20f; 20]. In the last chapter of Matiane Kartlisa we read that the Georgian king Giorgi II (1072-1089) was able to regain the Georgian cities occupied by the Byzantines, and as most importantly Anaḱopia is mentioned there [5: Georg. 317, 16; Rus. 61; Germ. 394].

On maps of Historical Geography the “new” Thema should be considered in the future. The important new Georgian *Sakartvelos iṣṭoriis aṭlasi* [21: 22f.] does not yet consider it, and so too the map B VII 16 of the “Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients”, titled “Armenien und Georgien im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert” [22]. In the new atlas “Armenia. A Historical Atlas” R. H. Hewsen notes the “Byzantine enclave” on map 105, “The Third Byzantine Expansion into Armenia, 966-1064” [23], but in a wrong place, situating it in the vicinity of Sebastoupolis/ Suchumi, a region which did not in fact belong to this Thema.

ისტორია

სოტერუპოლის-ანაკოფიის ბიზანტიური თემა XI საუკუნეში

ვ. ზაიბტი

ავსტრიის მეცნიერებათა აკადემია, ბიზანტიური კვლევების დეპარტამენტი, ვენა, ავსტრია

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიკოს თ. გამყრელიძის მიერ)

ბიზანტიური თემა საქართველოს აფხაზეთში ჩამოყალიბდა დაახლოებით 1033 წელს, როცა საქართველოს მეფის, გიორგის, მეორე მეუღლემ, ელდამ ან ალდემ, თავისი აპანაჟი ძღვნად მიართვა იმპერატორ რომანოს III არგიროსს. სოტერუპოლისი უნდა იყოს პიტიუნტ-ბიჭვინთა-პიცუნდის სახელი შუა საუკუნეებში. საგარაუდოდ, ლიხნის სასახლეც ამ თემს ეკუთვნოდა.

დაახლოებით 1044-1045 წლებში ქართველთა მეფე ბაგრატმა ალყა შემოარტყა ანაკოფიას, მაგრამ ვერ მოახერხა მისი აღება. ამ პერიოდში თემის სტრატეგოსი იყო პროტოსპატარიოსი ნიკოლოზი. მხოლოდ 1074 წლისთვის ქართველებმა, როგორც ჩანს, შესძლეს ანაკოფიისა და თემის დანარჩენი ნაწილის დაბრუნება.

REFERENCES

1. W. Seibt (1978), Die Eingliederung von Vaspurakan in das Byzantinische Reich (etwa Anfang 1019 bzw. Anfang 1022). *Handes amorya*, 92: 49-66, esp. 58-63.
2. W. Felix (1981), Byzanz und die islamische Welt im früheren 11. Jahrhundert (*Byzantina Vindobonensia*, 14). Vienna, 139f.
3. S. Fritz (2006), Die ossetischen Personennamen (*Iranisches Personennamenbuch III/3*). Vienna, 10. 30. 90.
4. Skylitzes (ed. Thurn), A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 389.
5. Matiane Kartlisa [Chronicle of Kartli] (ed. Qaukhchishvili, in: *Kartlis Tskhovreba I*, Tbilisi 1955), 295, 6f. (in Georgian); cf. also the Russian translation by M. D. Lordkipanidze (Tbilisi 1976), 47, and the German translation by G. Pätsch (Leipzig 1985), 368.
6. W. Seibt (2012), Die orthodoxe Metropolis „Kaukasos“, in: J. Tubach, S. G. Vashalomidze, M. Zimmer (edd.), *Caucasus during the Mongol Period – Der Kaukasus in der Mongolenzeit*. Wiesbaden, 244f.
7. W. Seibt, I. Jordanov (2006), Στρατιγὸς Σωτηροπύλεως καὶ Ἀνακοπίας. Ein mittelbyzantinisches Kommando in Abchazien (11. Jahrhundert). *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography*, 9 (München–Leipzig), 234f.
8. Iskustvo Abkhazskogo tsarstva VIII-XI vekov. *Khristianskie pamiatniki Anakopiiskoi kreposti* (2011). St. Petersburg, 264 (in Russian).
9. B. Martin-Hisard (2000), Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le *Livre des cérémonies*, II, 48. *Travaux et Mémoires*, 13, esp. 530.
10. L. G. Khrushkova (1998), Lykhny. Srednevekovyi dvortsovyi kompleks v Abkhazii. Moscow (in Russian).
11. O. Kresten (2002), Die Affäre des Metropolitens Symeon von Alania im Spiegel des Patriarchatsregisters von Konstantinopel. *Anzeiger d. phil.-hist. Klasse (d. Österr. Akademie d. Wissenschaften)*, 137, esp. 11-14.
12. W. Seibt (2009), Das byzantinische Militärkommando „Iberia“. In: *Scientific Paradigms*. Tbilisi, 151f.

13. *E. Honigmann* (1935), Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071 nach griechischen, arabischen, syrischen und armenischen Quellen (A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. III). Brussels, 174-176.
14. *A. Iu. Vinogradov* (2011), Epigrafika. Nadpisi s Anakopiiskoi gory. In: *Iskusstvo Abkhazskogo tsarstva VIII-XI vekov. Khristianskie pamiatniki Anakopiiskoi kreposti*. St. Peterburg, 209-224 (in Russian); English abstract 268f.
15. *W. Seibt* (2011), Zukunftsperspektiven der byzantinischen Siegelkunde – Auf welchen Gebieten sind die bedeutendsten Wissenszuwächse zu erwarten? In: Ch. Stavrakos, B. Papadopoulou (edd.), *Ἡπειρόνδε. Proceedings of the 10th International Symposium of Byzantine Sigillography* (Ioannina, 1-3 October 2009). Wiesbaden, 24f.
16. *De administrando imperio* (ed. G. Moravcsik, Washington, D.C. 1967), 50, 110.
17. *F. Hild – M. Restle* (1981), Kappadokien (Kappadokia, Charsianon, Sebasteia und Lykandos). *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. II. Vienna, 202, s. v. „Kasē“.
18. *W. Seibt, I. Jordanov* (2006), *Strategos Soteroupoleos* 238.
19. *W. Seibt* (2012), Byzantine Imperialism against Georgia in the Later 10th and 11th Centuries? Tbilisi (in print).
20. *W. Barthold, C. J. Heywood*, Kars. *EI IV* (1978) 697.
21. *D. Muskhelishvili*, Edit.(2003), *Sakartvelos istoriis atłasi* [Atlas of Georgian History]. Tbilisi, 22f. (in Georgian).
22. *R. H. Hewsen* (1988), *TAVO B VII* 16.
23. *R. H. Hewsen* (2001), *Armenia. A Historical Atlas*. Chicago-London, 125.

Received June, 2012