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PONTOS EUXEINOS IN LATE
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BYZANTIUM**

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SOME NOTES ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF EASTERN PONTOS EUXEINOS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY BYZANTIUM²

This paper clarifies some issues of late antique and early Byzantine topography of Eastern Pontos Euxeinos. These questions can be divided into two large groups: the ecclesiastical topography and the locations of Byzantine fortresses. The earliest testimony of Apostolic preaching on the Eastern black sea coast—the list of the apostles by Pseudo-Epiphanius—following the ‘Chronicon’ of Hyppolitus of Rome, unsuccessfully connects South-Eastern Pontos Euxeinos to Sebastopolis the Great (modern Sukhumi), which subsequently gives rise to an itinerary of the apostle Andrew. The Early Byzantine Church in the region had a complicated arrangement: the Zekchians, Abasgians and possibly Apsilians had their own bishoprics (later archbishoprics); the Lazicans had a metropolitan in Phasis (and not in their capital Archaeopolis) with five bishop-suffragans. Byzantine fortresses, mentioned in 7th c sources, are located mostly in Apsilia and Missimiania, in the Kodori valley, which had strategic importance as a route from the Black sea to the North Caucasus.

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The purpose of this article is to clarify some issues of late antique and early Byzantine topography of Eastern Pontus Euxeinus. These questions can be divided into two large groups: the ecclesiastical topography and the locations of Byzantine fortresses.

Ecclesiastical topography

Apostolic traditions

The first report of apostolic preaching on the Eastern or, namely, South-Eastern Black sea coast is found in the Early Byzantine ‘List of the apostles and disciples’ by Pseudo-Epiphanius. In the paragraph about Matthias (manuscripts AOS) we read: “Matthias ... preached the gospel of our Lord in external Ethiopia and was martyred there by the Ethiopians in Issoulimen”³. “External Ethiopia” goes back to *Herodotes*. Hist. 2, 104-105, who compares the Colchians with Ethiopians, and Issoulimen (modern Sürmene at the mouth of the Kara Dere⁴) is located near the border of Pontus and Colchis-Lazica. Pseudo-Epiphanius’ Issoulimen represents another location of the fantasy City of Cannibals from the apocryphal 4th c ‘Acts of Andrew and Matthias’, along with the Pontic Sinope⁵.

Issoulimen and Ethiopians are mentioned also in Pseudo-Epiphanius’ paragraph about the apostle Andrew: “Andrew... as reported by our predecessors, preached to the Scythians, Sogdians and Sakaioi, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in Sebastopolis the Great, where are the castle Apsaros, Issoulimen and the river Phasis (Ethiopians live there)...”⁶. The strange assignment of Sebastopolis the Great (modern Sukhumi) to the South-eastern Black sea region, where Apsaros (the Gonio fortress at the mouth of Chorokhi river, near modern Batumi), Issoulimen and Phasis (the Rioni river) are, produces an impression, that Pseudo-Epiphanius is quoting an ancient geographer determining the location of Sebastopolis the Great. Indeed, a similar list we find by *Hippolytus of Rome*. Chron. 233–234: “Saunoi, also called Sanigoï, extend up to Pontus, where the castle Apsaros, <and Sebastopolis>, Issoulimen and the river Phasis are. And these peoples live up to and beyond Trebizond”⁷.

Another reason for the introduction of Sebastopolis in the list was, in all probability, a desire to join southern region of Andrew’s preaching from ‘Acta Andreae’ with the northern one,

³ Prophetarum vitae fabulosae, indices apostolorum discipulorumque Domini Dorotheo, Epiphanio, Hippolyto aliisque vindicatae / Ed. Th. Schermann. Lipsiae, 1907. P. 113–114; *Dolbeau F.* Une liste ancienne d’apôtres et des disciples, traduit du grec par Moïse de Bergame // *AnBoll*. T. 104 (1986). P. 303.

⁴ Качарова Д. Д., Квирквелия Г. Т. Города и поселения Причерноморья античной эпохи. Тбилиси, 1991. P. 78.

⁵ See *Виноградов А. Ю.* Судьба города людоедов на Христианском востоке // *Христианский восток*. Vol. 6 (2013). P. 337-346.

⁶ Prophetarum... P. 108–109.

⁷ Hippolytus Werke. Vol. 4. / Ed. R. Helm (post A. Bauer). Leipzig, 1929. P. 90.

taken from the earlier lists of the apostles, Scythians, Sakoi and Sogdians: Andrew's preaching to the Scythians had been already mentioned by Origen⁸. The complete fusion of these two missionary fields was in one of Pseudo-Epiphanius' versions, where the Sakoi are replaced by the Gorsinoi, i.e. Georgians⁹.

The 'List of the apostles' by Pseudo-Epiphanius was the main guideline¹⁰ for the Byzantine hagiographer Epiphanius the Monk, who visited the southern, eastern and northern shores of the Black Sea in 815–820¹¹. In his 'Life of the apostle Andrew' firstly he cites it: "Saint Epiphanius, Archbishop of Cyprus says, that according to tradition, the blessed apostle Andrew taught the Scythians, Sakoi and Sarmatians, in Sebastopolis the Great, where the castle Apsaros, Issoulimen and the river Phasis are". But immediately after he introduces his own explanations: "there live Iberians, Susoi, Phustoi and Alans" (see below). Then he develops a brief note of Pseudo-Epiphanius in the long itinerary of the apostle's third voyage: "After Pentecost, Andrew, Simon the Canaanite, Matthias and Thaddeus together with other disciples went to Edessa. Thaddeus remained there by Abgar, and the other, passing through the cities, teaching and performing miracles, went to Iberia and to Phasis, and after a few days to Su<s>ania. Men of this nation were ruled then by women, and because women's nature is easy to convince, they quickly obeyed. Then they came to the fortress Chemarin, where today is the resting place of Maxim, who suffered long. In these countries Matthias remained with his disciples, performing many miracles. And Simon and Andrew went to Alania and to the city Phousta. And having performed many miracles and instructed many people, they went to Abasgia. Coming to Sebastopolis the Great, they taught the word of God, and many people accepted it. And Andrew left Simon there with the disciples and rose to Zekchia. Cruel are these people, barbarians and still half unbelievers: they even wanted to kill Andrew [and would have killed him], if they had not seen his poorness, gentleness and austerity. Finally, leaving them, he went to the upper Sougdaoï. These people, obedient and meek, gladly received his word. From there he came to Bosporos"¹².

Also he describes, somewhat unexpectedly, two tombs of the apostle Simon he had discovered: one was in Bosporos (ancient Pantikapaion, modern Kerch in Crimea), and the

⁸ See Виноградов А. Ю. Апостольские списки – «забытая» страница христианской литературы // Богословские труды. Vol. 40 (2005). P. 135. Note. 43.

⁹ Dolbeau F. Une liste... P. 303.

¹⁰ Греческие предания о св. апостоле Андрее. Том 1: Жития / Ed. А. Ю. Виноградов. Saint-Petersburg, 2005. P. 117, 161 (Библиотека «Христианского Востока», 3).

¹¹ About him see Kahl G. Die geographischen Angaben des Andreasbios (BHG 95b und 102). Diss., Stuttgart, 1989; Mango C. A Journey Around the Coast of the Black Sea in the Ninth Century // Palaeoslavica. Vol. X.1 (2002). P. 255–264.

¹² Ibid. P. 145–146, 178–179.

second in Nikopsis (near modern Novomikhaylovka in Krasnodar region)¹³. The Byzantine hagiographer did not want to harmonize contradict traditions regarding the place of death and burial of Simon by Pseudo-Epiphanius (Jerusalem, Ostrakene in Egypt, Britain) with the no less contradictory realities he himself had seen (the apostle's tombs in Bosporos and Nikopsis). So he chose to withdraw Simon from the action of the 'Life of Andrew', leaving him in Abasgia. The apostolic itinerary constructed by Epiphanius was repeated without change in later lives of the apostle Andrew, Greek (by Nicetas Davis Paphlago¹⁴, Symeon Metaphrastes, in 'Imperial Menology') and Georgian (based on Nicetas). However, precisely because of this Epiphaniusian trick, a local tradition was later born, not only of the preaching, but also of the death of Simon and his burial in Abkhazia, in the city of Anakopia, which was identified with Nikopsis, long since abandoned¹⁵. Moreover, the apostle Simon, along with the apostle Andrew, became a symbol of identity for the Abkhazian catholicosate, so that exactly these two Apostles were portrayed in the 16th century, over the tomb of the catholicos Eudemon Chkhetidze in the cathedral of Pitsunda, evidently as the founders of the Abkhasian Church.

Early bishoprics¹⁶

Abasgia, Apsilia and Misimiania

Christianity in Eastern Pontus Euxeinos is attested from the 4th c., and exactly on the territory of modern Abkhazia. This is due to the fact, that the early Christianity was spread here only among the Greek colonists, who inhabited coastal cities, Pitious and Sebastopolis. In the first Ecumenical Council of 325 took part Stratophilos, the bishop of Pitious¹⁷ (modern Pitsunda, Bichvinta), where several 4th–6th cc.-churches were excavated¹⁸ and where there was a local cult of saints¹⁹. Some disgraced religious leaders were also exiled there, for example, St. John Chrysostom (who died on the road, in Pontic Comana, near modern Gümenek) and Peter Knapheus. The existence of Christians in Sebastopolis in the late 4th c. we know from *Gregory of Nyssa. Vita sanctae Macrinae* 36, however, an Episcopal see is attested here not earlier than in the 7th c. (see below).

¹³ Ibid. P. 145–146, 179.

¹⁴ He adds only a summary of *Arrian*, Periplous 8, and an etymology of Zekchians from ζήν ἐκ χοός.

¹⁵ See *Khrouchkova L.* Les monuments chrétiens de la côte orientale de la Mer Noire. Abkhazie. IV^e – XIV^e siècles. Turnhout, 2006. P. 103 (Bibliothèque de l'antiquité tardive, 9).

¹⁶ This chapter is based on *Виноградов А. Ю., Гугушвили Ш.* Абхазский католикосат. Его возникновение и ранняя история (VIII–X вв.) // Препринты. Высшая школа экономики. Серия WP19 "Исторические исследования". Moscow, 2013.

¹⁷ *Patrum nicaenorum nomina* Latine, Graece, Coptice, Syriace, Arabice, Armeniace / Ed. H. Gelzer, H. Hilgenfeld, O. Cuntz. Lipsiae, 1898. P. 65.

¹⁸ *Хрушкова Л. Г.* Раннехристианские памятники Восточного Причерноморья. Moscow, 2002. P. 67–104.

¹⁹ *Peeters P.* La legende de S. Orentius et ses six frères martyrs // *AnBoll.* Vol. 56 (1938). P. 241–264.

Real change occurs in the second half of the 6th c., when both kings of the Abasgians accept Christianity under pressure of Justinian I and, probably, to emancipate themselves from the subordination to the Lazicans (*Procopius. De bell.* 8, 3, 12–20). Justinian built for the Abasgians a church of the Virgin and established the bishopric for them (*Procopius. De bell.* 8, 3, 21). The temple and Episcopal see were unlikely to be in Sebastopolis, which Justinian rebuilt later after its destruction during the war against Persians (*Procopius. De bell.* 8.4.6–20; *Procopius. De aedificiis* 3, 7, 8–9), because, according to *Procopius. De bell.* 8, 9, 15–19, the southern boundary of Abasgia passed to the north of it, near Trachea²⁰. This Episcopal centre rather one should see in Tsandrypsh/Gantiadi, where a large Basilica and an inscription was found mentioning a high-ranking official (king or bishop) of “Abasgia and ...”²¹.

Harder to estimate is the situation in Apsilia. According to Procopius, *De bell.* 8, 2, 32–33, the Apsilians adopted Christianity before the Anasgians²². His definition of the Apsilians as “subjects of Lazoi and already Christians from ancient times” testifies in favour of the fact that they received Christianity directly from Lazica. According to Menippos²³, “from Dioskourias-Sebastoupolis as far as the river Apsaros was earlier inhabited by a people, the so-called Colchians who changed their name in Lazoi”, which reflects, most likely, the obedience of this Apsilian territory to the authority of Lazican king. But who exactly exercised ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the coast between Sebastopolis and Ziganis (see below) is not precisely known because of a lack of written evidence. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that Apsiloi were supervised by the bishop of Ziganis. However, the unique domed 6th c.-church in Dranda²⁴, with a baptistery, in Early Byzantine time usually belonging to an Episcopal church, points in favour of the fact that on this site a bishopric, created by Justinian for the Apsilians (autokephalos archbishopric or bishopric subordinate to the metropolitan of Lazica), had existed for some time.

²⁰ Consensus on the localization of Trachea does not exist : main options are Gagra or Anakopia (see *Леквинадзе В. А. О постройках Юстиниана в Западной Грузии // Византийский временник. Т. 34 (1973). С. 180–181; Ломоури Н. Ю. К выяснению некоторых сведений «Notitiae Dignitatum» и вопрос о так называемом Понтийском лимесе // Византийский временник. Т. 46 (1986). С. 72). If we follow the opinion of J. Darrouzès (*Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae / Texte critique, introduction et notes par J. Darrouzès. Paris, 1981. P. 7*), the place of the archbishopric of Sebastopolis in *Notitia* 1 after Heraclieopolis would indicate its creation during the reign of Heraclius (610–641). However, as showed by *Chrysos E. Zur Entstehung der Institution der autokephalen Erzbistümer // Byz. Bd. 62 (1969). P. 263–286*), positions of the archbishoprics in *Notitiae episcopatum* do not follow the chronological order. But even if the see of Sebastopolis received the status of archbishopric indeed under Heraclius, it tells us nothing about the time of its foundation.*

²¹ *Леквинадзе В. А. О постройках... С. 185.*

²² Cf. also, e.g., the Christian finds in Apsilan fortress Tsibile (modern Tsebelda), in particular 6th c. tiles with the stamp “Constantine the bishop”.

²³ *Diller A. The tradition of the Minor Greek Geographers. N. Y.; Lancaster, 1952. P. 128.*

²⁴ About its date see *Виноградов А. Ю. Дранда // Православная энциклопедия. Vol. 16. P. 129–131.*

On the other hand, describing the events of 730s, the Georgian ‘Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali’ by Pseudo-Juansher (11th c.) calls Tskhumi, i.e. Sebastopolis, a “city of Apshileti”²⁵: indeed, Sebastopolis could not be the bishopric of the Abasgians (see above). If the archbishopric of Sebastopolis mentioned in the mid 7th c., already existed in the 6th c.²⁶, could it be Apsilian not Greek? Despite the location of Sebastopolis in ancient Apsilia, this is not very likely because the political centre of the Apsilians was not on the coast, but in the mountains in the Tsebelda valley.

In the third quarter of the 7th c. Anastasius Apocrisiarius and Theodore Spoudaios²⁷ mention Apsilia without any epithet, and their neighbours Abasgians are three times called “Christians”, perhaps to indicate a decline of Christianity among the Apsilians and absence of a bishop²⁸. This is supported by the fact, that in the mid 7th c the archbishop of Sebastopolis already has the title “of Abasgia” (see below), i.e., the Abasgians began to lead the Church here, under them the power shifted, perhaps, to Sebastopolis itself. On the other hand, the same authors clearly separate Apsilia from Abasgia, hence the emergence of the archbishopric of Sebastopolis, known already in the mid 7th c., was preceded by creation of a new political unity—Abkhazia.

As a common territory Abkhazia is mentioned for the first time by Pseudo-Dzhuansher, describing the events of 736-737, but he mentions Apsilia once as a geographical specification. He places it to the north of Kleisoura. Usually this term is understood in its ancient meaning of a “fortified narrow passage, gorge” and identified with the Kelasuri wall to the south of Sukhumi: a version of ‘Conversion of Kartli’ (cod. Sin. georg. N 50) ascribes its construction to the Persians in 560s²⁹. However, we cannot exclude, that here, in the early 8th c, *kleisoura* means a small Byzantine military district (part of a theme), which existed from the late 7th to the 10th c. In this case, in addition to the area of Phasis, the Byzantines directly controlled, at this time, also a small area between Lazica-Egrisi and Abkhazia, roughly coinciding with ancient Apsilia and returned under the rule of the Empire by Leo the Isaurian about 710. It was here that Suleiman

²⁵ Карлис цховреба. История Грузии / Глав. ред. Р. Метревели. Тбилиси, 2008. Р. 108–112.

²⁶ See, e.g., *Khrouchkova L.* Op. cit. P. 90, but there are no direct evidence for it. Kekropios, participant of fourth Ecumenical Council in 451, sometimes attributed to Abasgia, was the bishop of Sebastopolis in Armenia (ACO. T. II.1.2. P. 98).

²⁷ *Anastasius Apocrisiarius.* Epistula ad Theodosium Gangrensiem, 6; Theodorus Spoudaeus. Commemoratio, 5.

²⁸ The absence of references to Lazican bishops by Anastasius must testify, that they, like the rest of the bishops of the Empire, were the Monothelites (see also below) and had no sympathy to Maximus the Confessor, exiled together with Anastasius in Lazica.

²⁹ *Aleksidzé Z.* La construction de la Kleisoura d’après le nouveau manuscrit sinaïtique n° 50 // Travaux et mémoires. T. 13 (2000). P. 673–681.

ibn Hisham campaigned in 738 (*Theophanes. Chron.* 411): the existence of a *kleisoura* would explain the presence in fortress Sideron of Eustathios, son of Byzantine patrikios, Marianos³⁰.

As in the case of Apsilia, the question of ecclesiastical subordination of Missimiania is not clear. It could be supervised by a hierarch of Sebastopolis, Ziganis or Apsilia.

By the end of the era of the Byzantine suzerainty over Abkhazia (late 8th c.) its territory, consisting of ancient Abasgia and Apsilia, was Christianized and had at least one see, the archbishopric of Sebastopolis, which was directly subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Acts of the seventh Ecumenical Council (787) bears the signature of the locum tenens Constantine in the name of the see of Sebastopolis, of the locum tenens Constant and of the bishop Constant³¹—this is probably the same person—who took his see in the course of the Council. In Pitsunda was found a seal of the bishop Theodore, who, however, was, in all probability, the bishop of Kerasous³².

Lazica

Lazica, according to anonymous 5th c.-‘Ecclesiastical history’, incorrectly attributed to Gelasius of Kyzikos (3, 10, 1)³³, was converted to Christianity under Constantine the Great, together with Iberia, despite the unlikelihood of such a dating and relationship³⁴ it is clear, that in the third quarter of the 5th c. Lazica was already perceived as a Christian country. Indeed, in 465-466 Lazican king Gubazos demonstrated their fidelity to Christianity³⁵ in Constantinople revering especially St. Daniel the Stylite³⁶. However, the lack of precisely dated Christian monuments from the 4th-5th cc. in Lazica itself (and not in Apsilia or Pitous) speaks against the hypothesis of its complete Christianization before the 6th c. and against the proclamation of

³⁰ Patrikios Marianos should be identified not with Marinos, “first among the Apsilians” from *Theophanes. Chron.* 394, as it was made by S, Kaukhchishvili (*Georgica. Vol. 4. 1. Tbilisi, 1941. P. 115*), but with one of the numerous patrikioi with this name (PmbZ # 4750, 4753, 4754, 4757).

³¹ See *Die Bischofslisten des VII. Ökumenischen Konzils (Nicaenum II)* (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch-Historische Klasse; Abhandlungen. H. 124). P. 49. Note 191.

³² The seal of the bishop Theodore is similar to the seal of the bishop Narses of late 7th c. (PmbZ # 5224). In view of the fact, that the unique bishop with this rare name, known from this era, is Narses of Kerasous, who took part in Quinsext council (PmbZ # 5217), it seems logical to identify these two Narses. Consequently, Theodore, who made his seal by the same matrix of averses as Narses, was also the bishop of Kerasous, rather his heir than his predecessor, because in 681 the bishop of Kerasous was Theophylact.

³³ See *Gelasius Cyzicenus. Anonyme Kirchengeschichte (CPG 6034)* / Hrsg. von G. C. Hansen. Berlin, 2002. P. IX–XI.

³⁴ The mention of the simultaneous conversion of the Lazicans and Iverians is absent in its sources (*Gelasius Cyzicenus. Op. cit. P. XLI–LV, 123*). Cf., e.g., «Per idem tempus etiam Iberorum gens, quae sub axe Pontico jacet, verbi Dei faedera, et fidem futuri susceperat regni» by Rufinus of Aquileia (PL 21, 480). The mention of Pontos by Rufinus probably caused the interpolation of Lazicans.

³⁵ *Priscus. Fragmenta 34*: «εἶλε γὰρ αὐτοὺς τῆ τε θωπέια τῶν λόγων καὶ τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐπιφερόμενος σύμβολα».

³⁶ *Vita Danielis Stylitae* 51.

Christianity as the state religion already in the 4th c.³⁷ In 523 king Tzathios, apparently, after a period of de-Christianization and rapprochement with Iran is returned to Christianity³⁸.

Most of the Episcopal sees of Lazica were located in coastal Greek colonies, but the date of their origin is not known³⁹. *Procopius*. De bell. 8, 17, 2 is the first to mention “the Lazican bishops”. According to Giftopoulou⁴⁰, until 608 the sees in the Greek colonies of Lazica were a part of the eparchy Pontus Polemoniacus – centred in Neocaesarea, but this assumption is based on an erroneous view of the incorporation of the Lazican Kingdom in a common Armenian-Georgian Church which collapsed in 608. Although this situation is theoretically possible (let us remember the inclusion of Pitous in Pont Polemoniacus at the first Ecumenical Council), in fact, any information about the submission of the Lazican sees up to the mid 7th c. is simply lacking.

According to *Notitiae episcopatum* 1–6, this area was ecclesiastically subordinated to Constantinople. Until the mid 7th c (*Notitia* 1⁴¹) there was a metropolitan see of Lazica⁴² centred in Phasis⁴³. Four bishops were subjected to the metropolitan of Lazica: of Rodopolis (modern Vartsikhe), of Petra (modern Tsikhisdziri), of Ziganis (modern Gudava) and of Saisina (modern Tsaishi)⁴⁴. Thus, the metropolis of Lazica, apparently, occupied the territory of Lazica of Justinian’s era and of Skimnia (modern Lechkhumi) and Souania (modern Svaneti) which was

³⁷ See RAC. Vol. 17. Col. 91–92.

³⁸ See Ibid.

³⁹ Agathangelos in his Greek ‘Life of St. Gregory the Illuminator’ (recensio altera) 170, attributed to St. Gregory the ordination of a Cappadocian Sophronios to the bishop of Lazicans. This information is not in Armenian *History of Agathangelos*.

⁴⁰ Γυφτοπούλου Σ. Πολεμωνιακός Πόντος – Λαζική; οι εκκλησιαστικές έδρες, οι εκκλησιαστικές επεαρχίες (7ος αι. –16ος αι.) // Ιστορικογεωγραφικά. Vol. 10. 2004. P. 107–155.

⁴¹ On the date see *Jankowiak* M. Byzance sur la mer Noire sous Constant II: la date de la première notice du patriarchat de Constantinople // Proceedings of the 22nd International congress of Byzantine studies. Sofia, 22–27 august 2011. Vol. III. P. 56–57.

⁴² “Sergios, the patriarch of Lazica” by George Cedrenus (I, 776) is a distortion of Sergios, the patrikios of Lazika” in *Theophanes*. Chron. 370).

⁴³ The fact, that the bishop of Phasis was indeed the Metropolitan of Lazika, confirms the double designation of the Monothelite Cyrus (7th c., see below): “Cyrus, the bishop of Lazika” (ACO II.2.2. P. 562) and “Cyrus, the bishop of Phasis” (*Theophanes*. Chron. 329).

⁴⁴ See *Georgica*. Vol. 4.2. Tbilisi, 1965. P. 187–193, 413–415). In particular, Kaukhchishvili convincingly refutes N. Adonts’ identification of Ziganis with fortress Zigani in Chaldia. The latter (modern Kalkandere Kale) is situated at an altitude of about 2000 m, and was probably winter apartment of a Roman cohort (*Bryer A., Winfield D.* The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C., 1985. P. 326; cf.: *Λομούρι Η. ΙΟ.* Op. cit. P. 63). Nothing indicates, that it was ever a city (cf. *Bryer A., Winfield D.* Op. cit. P. 297): this fortress too far from Phasis to suggest there existence of a bishopric under the metropolitan of Phasis. The decisive argument against this identification are the ‘Martyrdom of St. Orentios and his six brothers’ and the identification of Ziganis with Gudakva (modern Gudava) in a scholion in Georgian manuscript A-97, in the translation of this ‘Martyrdom’ from Great Synaxarion of St. George Mtatsmindeli (Ibid. P. 327). The Geography of Ananias of Širak. The Long and Short Recensions / Intr., transl. and comm. by R.H. Hewsen. Wiesbaden, 1992. P. 58, P. 127. N. 12, wrongly identifies Ziganis with Igani, mentioned in ‘Armenian geography’, and places it inside of Lazika “near village Mudzhuna” (Sudzhuna in Abasha municipality?). Finally, in favor of identification of Ziganis with Gudava speaks also *Pseudo-Arrian*. Periplus 48, which places river Sigama-Ziganis 52 miles away to the north from the river Phasis (modern Rioni), and 58 miles away to the south from Sebastopolis the Great (modern Sukhumi), that corresponds exactly to the position of Gudava.

under the rule of the Lazican kings. In addition, in Justinian's time, and possibly later, the bishops of Lazica supervised the coastal territory from Rizaion (modern Rize) up to the border of Lazica near Petra (*Procopius. De bell.* 8, 2, 17–18)⁴⁵. According to *Notitia* 3, into the metropolis of Lazica was included also Rizaion: this testimony can reflect only the situation before 787 (see below). The Eastern boundary of the metropolis of Lazica is not clear: if the identification of the fortress Sarapanis, mentioned by Procopius, on the border with Iberia, with modern Shorapani is correct (see below), then the king of Lazica did not control the territory of Western Georgia to the east of Shorapani.

In 628/629 the metropolitan of Lazica was Cyrus, one of the founders of monothelitism, later Patriarch of Alexandria (ACO II.2.2. P. 534, 562; *Theophanes. Chron.* 329). A Lazican bishop George, which Lequien took from the 'Life of St. John the Merciful', actually does not appear there⁴⁶. The Metropolitan of Lazica, Theodore, took part in the sixth Ecumenical Council in 680 (ACO II.2.2. Nr. 164). The same Theodore of Phasis, together with Faustinus of Ziganis and John of Petra participated in the Quinsext council in 690⁴⁷.

In Lazica we see a certain duality of its territorial structure. The old capital of Lazican kingdom was Archaeopolis (Tsikhegodzhi, modern Nokalakevi), but in the ecclesiastic administration the centre of Lazica was Phasis. On the one hand, it is not necessarily a contradiction, because the metropolitan status of Phasis is known to us only from *Notitiae*, i.e. from the mid 7th c, when the administrative centre of Lazica remains unknown: the Lazican kings are not mentioned after the mid 6th c⁴⁸, but the patrikioi of Lazica are known only after mid 7th c⁴⁹; after 697 the centre of Byzantine possessions in Lazica was Phasis, but its status in the late 6th–early 7th cc, is also unclear⁵⁰. Meanwhile Lazica was not included in the provinces of the Empire: the Quinsext council calls it not an ἐπαρχία, but a χώρα⁵¹. In addition, the absence of a see in Archaeopolis reflects the situation only after the mid 7th c, while the presence of two large

⁴⁵ *Анчабадзе З.* Из истории средневековой Абхазии (VI–XVII вв.). Сухуми, 1959. P. 16, 33, refers the corresponding passage to Sanigians, what seems to be not right judging from the context.

⁴⁶ The corresponding error contains also *Hierarchia ecclesiastica orientalis: series episcoporum ecclesiarum christianarum orientalium / A cura di G. Fedalto.* Padova. 1988. Vol. 1. P. 400.

⁴⁷ *Ohme H.* Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischöfsliste. Berlin. 1990. S. 183, 304.

⁴⁸ The hypothesis according to which the κινῦδοι in Lazica was abolished only under Heraclius (see *Ломоури Н.* Абхазия в античную и раннесредневековую эпохи. Tbilisi, 1997), finds no support in the sources.

⁴⁹ *Anastasius Apocrisiarius.* Epistula ad Theodosium Gangrensiem 6; *Theodorus Spoudaeus.* Commemoratio 5 (see below).

⁵⁰ It cannot be excluded, that in Lazica was a dual control : Phasis was controlled by the Empire directly (because of what it saved Phasis after 697), and the patrikios of Lazica lived in Archaeopolis or somewhere nearby (as patrikios Gregory living in Zichachoris in Apsilia, see below). Its military importance Archaeopoli kept up to early 8th century, when it was besieged by Byzantine-Armenian army, and in 736-737, when it took Merwan-ibn-Muhammed.

⁵¹ *Ohme H.* Das Concilium Quinisextum und seine Bischofsliste: Studien zum Konstantinopeler Konzil von 692. Turnhout, 2006. S. 304.

basilicas supports the idea that there could be a bishopric before the end of the Lazican kingdom in the second half of the 6th c. On the other hand, the metropolitan status of the Phasis can be linked with the ancient origins of this see, as a Greek colony, and with the later Christianization of the Lazicans.

The end of the metropolis of Lazica is connected with the proclamation of independency by new rulers of Lazica—Abkhazian mtavars—shortly before 787. During seventh Ecumenical Council the metropolis of Lazica was abolished, and the title ‘of Lazica’ passed to the metropolitan of Trebizond⁵².

Zekhia In 497–523 ceases to exist ancient Bosporan kingdom, whose territory gets under authority of the Empire ; in 527 in Bosporos appears a Byzantine garrison⁵³. On the other hand, in 536 the hierarch of Bosporos suddenly raised his status to metropolitan, and in 519 a bishop of neighbouring Phanagoria is mentioned⁵⁴, obviously subordinate to the Bosporan metropolitan as a suffragan. Finally, in the second third of 6th century in the frame of Justinian’s policy for the Christianization of Eastern Pontos Euxeinos (institution of bishops for the Abasgians and Goths-Tetraxitai; *Procopius*. De bell. 8, 4, 12) an Episcopal see for Zekchians in Nikopsis was founded⁵⁵. The appearance of Simon’s relics in the Nikopsian cathedral shows (see above) that it was consecrated by means of the relics and carried out with the help of the Bosporan metropolitan, who obviously also had control over the Nikopsian bishopric, and who gave the relics of the apostle for the consecration of its new cathedral. In all likelihood, the remainder of this large Bosporan metropolitan is the very special ecclesiastical eparchy of Zekchia, consisting of three autocephalous archbishoprics—of Bosporos, Cherson and Nikopsis—and which is mentioned for the first time in 660s, in *Notitia episcopatum* 1⁵⁶.

A special problem is *Notitia* 3, which, differently from the two preceding and two subsequent notices, indicates two archbishops of Abasgia: of Nicopsis (place 89) and of Sebastopolis (place 94, the last among the archbishops). Beside it, among three usual archbishops of Zekchia Nikopsis is replaced by an archbishopric of Σουγδάων⁵⁷ (about the

⁵² See Виноградов А. Ю., *Гугушвили III*. Op. cit.; unconvincing looks the attempt to date *Notitiae* 4–6 by early 9th c. in *Komatina P.* Date of the composition of the *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* nos. 4, 5 and 6 // *Зборник Радова византинолошког института*. Vol. 50.1 (2013). P. 193–214.

⁵³ See Виноградов А. Ю. Херсонес-Херсон: две истории одного города. Имена, места и даты в исторической памяти полиса // *Вестник древней истории*. № 1 (2013). С. 40–58; *Vinogradov A.* Geschichte einer Stadt zweimal neu geschrieben : diokletianische und konstantinische »Altertümer« aus Chersones // *PONTES* 7. Freiburg in Br., 2015 (in print).

⁵⁴ See *Hierarchia*... P. 391–392.

⁵⁵ Виноградов А. Ю. Зихия // *Православная энциклопедия*. Vol. 20. P. 186–192.

⁵⁶ *Notitiae episcopatum*... P. 206.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* P. 232–233.

existence of the see of Sougdaia in the late 8th c. we know also from the ‘Life of St. Stephen of Sougdaia’⁵⁸ and from the signature of its bishop under the acts of seventh Ecumenical Council in 787⁵⁹). The only logical explanation is the assumption, that *Notitia* 3 reflects a reform of Byzantine ecclesiastical eparchies in North-eastern Pontos Euxeinos: most likely, at the time of *Notitia* 3 Nicosia became a part of the Abkhazian kingdom (which we know exactly was the mid 10th c from *Constantinus Porphyrogenitus. De administrando imperio* 42). The dating of *Notitia* 3 to the 8th c is now generally rejected: indeed, even in 815-820 Epiphanius the Monk mentions Nicopsia as “of Zekchia”⁶⁰, speaking at the same time about the decline of Christianity here: “Cruel are these people, barbarians and still half unbelievers” (which led, apparently, to the speedy abolition of the see of Nicopsis, which no longer exists in the *Notitia* 8, where the archbishopric of Zekchia is transferred to Tamatarcha on Taman peninsula). Thus, in the 8th c. there is only a small period for this situation—at the end of the century, after the 880s, when Byzantium regained its influence in Abkhazia. However, this fact did not influence the ecclesiastic organization in Abkhazia and Lazica.

Byzantine fortresses

4th–6th centuries

The history of 4–6th cc.-fortresses in Eastern Pontos Euxeinos is beyond the scope of this article : they are quite well studied, primarily in the framework of Justinian's wars against the Persians. We will add here only a few remarks.

Unclear is the exact localization of Tsachar fortress, which Byzantine authors also call Iron (Sideron; *Agathias. Hist.* 3, 16, 5). It belongs to Missimians forces to localize it in the middle or upper stream of the Kodori River. Voronov groundlessly believed, that the Tsachar fortress is different from the Sideron, which he identified with the Tsebelda fortress, seeing the Tsachar in the Pskal fortress⁶¹. However, none of these fortresses correspond to the description of Theophanes. Chron. 393–394, who indicates, that the Sideron fortress cannot be avoided on the way from Alania to the sea, walking along the Kodori gorge. Therefore, Tsachar/Sideron should be identified with Chkhalta fortress (Chirks-Abaa), where a solid of Justinian I was found⁶². This identification is confirmed not only by the similarity of the names (Tsachar/Chkhalta), but also

⁵⁸ Виноградов А. Ю. Зихия...; *De la Vaissière E. Histoire des Marchands Sogdiens.* Paris, 2004. P. 211–222.

⁵⁹ Lamberz E. Die Bischofslisten des VII. Ökumenischen Konzils (Nicaenum II) (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch–Historische Klasse; Abhandlungen. H. 124). P. 46.

⁶⁰ Греческие предания... С. 145, 178.

⁶¹ Воронov Ю. Н. Древняя Апсидия. Sukhumi, 1998 (cit. after *Idem.* Научные труды. Vol. 3. Sukhumi, 2010. P. 424).

⁶² Воронov Ю. Н. Древности Военно-Сухумской дороги. Sukhumi, 1977 (cit. after *Idem.* Научные труды. Vol. 2. Sukhumi, 2009. P. С. 326–330.

by the fact that it is the only fortress in the Kodori gorge which completely blocks the road from the Alans to the sea.

Another problem concerns the identification of the Lazican fortress Sarapanis, on the border with Iberia (*Procopius. De bellis* 8, 13, 15–20), with modern Shorapani⁶³. The fact is that the infertility of the territory near Sarapanis described by Procopius, does not correspond to the modern reality of the area of Shorapani. And yet, although the difficulties in Lazica described by Procopius are often exaggerated⁶⁴, to completely reject all of his information as implausible would be unwise.

The Ouchimereos fortress mentioned by Procopius, *De bell.* 8, 14; 8, 16 and not having previously an exact localization, is most likely identified with the Motsameta fortress near Kutaisi⁶⁵. On the location of the Bouchloon fortress mentioned by Agathias, see below; on the localization of Trachea see above, note 21.

7th century

For Byzantine 7th c. fortresses on the Eastern Black sea coast we have two invaluable sources written by people who visited this region in 660s. The sources are the ‘Letter of Anastasius Apocrisiarius to Theodosius of Gangra’, written about 665 and partly preserved only in Latin, and the ‘Hypomnesticon’ by Theodore Spoudaios, compiled about 668⁶⁶. Their compilation was provoked by the exile to Lazica of St. Maximus the Confessor: Anastasius was his companion in exile, and Theodore came to Lazica three years after Maximus’s death. The later biographies of St. Maximus, his Greek lives (*BHG* 1236, 1236d, 1234, 1233m+n), synaxaria⁶⁷, and Georgian translations of the lives and their scholia⁶⁸, do not contain more authentic information about fortresses (see also below). Only the abovementioned Epiphanius the Monk in the early 9th c says, that Chemarin (identical to Schemarin from 7th c. texts) lies on

⁶³ See Georgica. Vol. 3. Tbilisi, 1936. P. 304–307.

⁶⁴ See Braund D. Procopius on the economy of Lazica // *Classical Quarterly*. Vol. 41 (1991). P. 221–225.

⁶⁵ Lanchava O., Kartsidze N. Ukhimerioni – city-fortress Tskaltsiteli // *The works of Kutaisi State Museum*. Vol. 19 (2009). P. 9–16 (in Georgian, see <http://saunje.ge/index.php?id=1060&lang=ka>).

⁶⁶ Edited in *Scripta saeculi VII, vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia, una cum latina interpretatione Anastasii Bibliothecarii iuxta posita* / Ed. P. Allen, B. Neil. Turnhout; Leuven, 1999. (CCSG, 39); *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions* / Ed. and transl. by P. Allen et B. Neil. Oxford, 2002.

⁶⁷ *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* / Ed. H. Delehaye. Bruxelles, 1902. Col. 409, 887, 910, 924 (*Acta sanctorum*, Nov., Propyl.).

⁶⁸ See Кекелидзе К. Сведения грузинских источников о Максиме Исповеднике // *Труды Киевской духовной академии* № 9 (1912). P. 1–41; № 11 (1912). P. 451–486; *Khoperia L. Maximus the Confessor: Life and Works in the Georgian Tradition* // *Maximus the Confessor and Georgia*. Louisville, KY, 2010. P. 45–46 (*Iberica Caucasica*, 3); *Larchet J.-C. Le martyre, l'exil et la mort de saint Maxime le Confesseur et de ses deux disciples, Anatsase le Moine et Anastase l'Apocrisiaire. Quelques précisions en rapport avec des découvertes archéologiques récentes* // *RHE*. Vol. 108 (2013). 1. P. 65–97.

the way to Alania from Susania, i.e. Souania-Svaneti, and he mentions the city of Phousta between Alania and Sebastopolis the Great in Abasgia⁶⁹.

According to *Letter 4*, after arriving in Lazica exhausted Maxim was immediately separated from his companions and carried on a stretcher to the fortress Schemarin, near the “people called the Alans” (*Letter 4*). Here he died, and his tomb was also in this fortress (*Letter 5*). His disciples, Anastasius the Deacon and Anastasius Apocrisiarius were exiled, respectively, to the fortresses Skotorin and Bukolous, and then through the so-called Moukourisin respectively, to “the fortress of Souania” and to “the fortress of Thacyria”. Anastasius the Deacon died either in “the fortress of Souania”, or on the way to it (*Letter 4*), and Anastasius Apocrisiarius was transferred later “to the regions of Apsilia and Missimiania”, to the fortress Phousta (*Letter 6*). Finally, he was to be transferred to same Schemarin, but at this moment the princeps of Lazica was overthrown, and the new princeps (Gregory, according to *Hypomnesticon 7*) brought Anastasius back (reduxit) “from the road to the above-mentioned fortress Schemarin” and settled him in a place, five miles away from his residence (*Letter 6-7*). The latter was not a real monastery, but just a place, “truly fitting for monks”.

Theodore Spoudaios, who visited Lazica soon after the saints’ deaths, confirms the existence of Maxim’s tomb in Schemarin, referring to its comes Mistrianos, because Theodore himself was unable to get there (*Hypomnesticon 9*). In addition, Theodore identifies the place of the third exile of Anastasius Apocrisiarius with “the fortress Thousoumes, located above village Mochoes—the end of the climate of Apsilia, to the east of the Pontic sea, right at the foot of the Caucasus mountains, near the land of the Abasgians, who love Christ, and the people of the Alans, about five miles from village of Zichachoris, that is to say the first house of Gregory, the true friend of Christ, the patrikios and magistros of the same land of the Lazican”, which is also mentioned, unnamed, in *Letter 7*.

Researchers have most actively searched for the location of Schemarin, where St. Maxim died and was buried. There are five claims for it, founded mainly by consonance.

1) Dzhanashvili⁷⁰, Gan⁷¹ and Alekseeva⁷² identified Schemarin with the Khumara fortress in Alania, on the right bank of the Kuban river (in modern Karachay-Cherkessia, near Karachaevsk). This hypothesis should be refuted not only by the absence of Byzantine or

69 Греческие предания... Р. 144–145, 312.

70 Джанашивили М. Г. Известия грузинских летописей и историков о Херсонесе, Готфии, Хазарии, Дидоетии и России // Сборник материалов для описания местностей и племен Кавказа. Issue 12 (1892). Р. 11. Note 20.

71 Ган К. Первый опыт объяснения кавказских географических названий // Сборник материалов для описания местностей и племен Кавказа. Issue 30 (1909). Р. 148.

72 Алексеева Е. П. Древняя и средневековая история Карачаево-Черкесии. Moscow, 1971. Р. 132.

Lazican control over the Northern Caucasus, but also by the fact, that *Letter 4* (in the passage about Boukolous) clearly states what is bordered by the Alans and what is in their power, while Schemerin is mentioned only as located “near the Alans”⁷³. The same applies to attempt to identify the Phousta fortress with the settlement Ulu-Dorbunlar in the Kislovodsk basin⁷⁴.

2) Brilliantov⁷⁵ identified Schemarin with the Uchemereos fortress (see above). However, in addition to the linguistic complexities recognized by him, the researcher also pointed out, that Procopius’s Uchemereos was near Kotais-Kutaisi. To correct this geographical stretch, Brilliantov tried to bring Schemarin closer to Muri in Lechkhumi, which is also untenable (see below). This hypothesis was supported also by Kuznetsov⁷⁶, who, however, later changed his opinion (see below).

3) Georgian manuscript Tbilisi A-97 (11th c) mentions Georgian names of above-mentioned fortresses: Kotori for Skotorin, Bokely for Boukolous, and the unnamed “fortress of Souania” it identifies with the fortress Muri in Lechkhumi. Another Georgian manuscript Tbilisi A-222 (12th c) contains on p. 440 opposite a cinnabar 12th c scholion: “The relics of saint Maxim are ... near ...eri”: in the middle of the scholion its author tried to write two Greek words, that Kekelidze mistakenly read as “in the fortress Muri”, and the lost beginning of the toponym he arbitrarily reconstructed as Tsageri⁷⁷. The first attempt to localize Schemarin in Lechkhumi and Lower Svaneti goes back to a 18th c author, Vakhushti Bagrationi, who recorded a local tradition claiming this. In the scholarship this localization exists in three variations: a) the fortress Muri⁷⁸; b) the fortress Takveri in the middle of the Rioni and the Tskhenis-Tskali⁷⁹ (however, Takveri is a district and not a fortress, and it is mentioned in *Letter 4* under the name of Thakyria, not associated with Shemarin); c) Skemeri in Lentekhi⁸⁰. All the localizations of Schemarin in Lechkhumi contradict our sources: this is not near the “peak of Caucasus”, i.e. close to the Main Caucasian ridge; not “near the Alans”, because between Lechkhumi and Alania lies Upper Svaneti, where the Alans have never lived ; not on the way from Svaneti to Alania. In addition,

73 The critics see in *Бриллиантов А. О месте кончины и погребения св. Максима Исповедника // Христианский Восток. Vol. 6.1 (1922). P. 39.*

74 // *Очерки средневековой археологии Кавказа: к 85-летию со дня рождения В. А. Кузнецова. Moscow, 2013. P. 137.*

75 *Бриллиантов А. Op. cit. P. 1–64.*

76 *Кузнецов В. А. Христианство в Алании до X в. // Известия Южно-Осетинского научного исследовательского института. Issue 23 (1978). P. 34.*

77 *Кекелидзе К. Op. cit. P. 35.*

78 See *Khoperia L. Op. cit. P. 39. Note 52.*

79 *Чиковани М. Я. Образ Максима Конфессора (Исповедника) в грузинских легендах VII–VIII веков // Всесоюзная научная сессия, посвященная итогам полевых археологических и этнографических исследований 1970 г. Тезисы докладов. Tbilisi, 1971. P. 134–135.*

80 *Стефан (Кадайджашвидли), еп. Современный взгляд на вопрос о месте переселения, кончины и погребения св. Максима Исповедника в Грузии // XV Ежегодная богословская конференция ПСТГУ. Moscow, 2005. P. 232–245; Larchet J.-C. Op. cit. P. 80–84.*

Thakyrria, clearly identified with Takveri-Lechkhumi, is described in *Letter* 4 as being “near Iberia” and not “near Alania” like Schemarin.

4) Locating Schemarin in Upper Svaneti was analyzed by Brilliantov, because there, on the left bank of the river Inguri, in the community Syupi/Swipi, is a toponym Tskhmari; but he rejected this identification, because this place was outside of ancient Lazica itself⁸¹. However, *Letter* 6 says not that Schemarin was in Lazica, but only that it was under the control of the patrikios of Lazica, who also controlled areas outside of Lazica itself: Apsilia and Missimiania. This localization also corresponds to the position of Schimarin “near the Alans” and on the way from Svaneti to Alania (through one of the passes). However, the main objection against this localization is the fact that on the upper Inguri, or on the river Nenskra there is a known Byzantine fortress (in Schemarin, however, was a regular garrison, headed by a comes).

5) Muskhelishvili⁸² drew attention to the toponym Sgimar on the Saken river (in the modern Ochamchire district of Abkhazia), which join the Gvandra river and the Kodori river. Kuznetsov, who originally supported the localization of Schemarin in Lechkhumi (see above), subsequently associated this toponym with a big fortress near Saken lake⁸³, which Voronov dated not later than by the 9th–10th cc⁸⁴. The exact localization of Schemarin in the upper stream of the Kodori corresponds at most to our sources (see below). But first, let us clarify the localization of other above-mentioned toponyms from *Letter* and *Hypomnesticon* (see also Fig. 2).

A) The fortress Boukolous (identical with Bouchloon in Agathias, *Hist.* 3, 16), located in Missimiania on the border with the Alans (*Letter* 4), where Anastasius Apocrisiarius was originally exiled, should be on the territory of the ancient Missimians, i.e. on the upper Kodori. The occupation by Alans as a place of transportation of tributes to Alania, is mentioned twice in the sources (by Agathias and in *Letter* 4), speaks of its proximity to a pass on the Main Caucasian ridge. The lack of fortresses on the Chkhalta river, on the way to the Marukha pass (this is, perhaps, the Dareine road described by *Menander Protector*. *De leg. gent. ad Rom.* 22), means it was looked for near the Klukhor pass on the Klych river, where there is a pass near a Byzantine fortress, with regular masonry on lime mortar, buttresses and towers with stone vaults⁸⁵. Its position corresponds exactly to the localization of Boukolous in *Letter* 4: “on the borders of the Alans”. This expression (ἐν τοῖς μεθορίοις) also suggests that Boukolous was

81 Brilliantov A. Op. cit. P. 38–39.

82 Очерки истории Грузии. Vol. II. Tbilisi, 1988. P. 387.

83 Кузнецов В. А. Христианство на Северном Кавказе до XV в. Vladikavkaz, 2002. P. 30–32.

84 Воронов Ю. Н. Древности... P. 333).

85 Воронов Ю. Н. Ibid. P. 332; *Idem*. Древняя Апсилия... P. 424.

closer to the Alans than Schemarin, the location of which is described as “near (πλησίον) the Alans”.

B) Moukourisin (Μουκουρίσιν), apparently identical to Procopius’s Mocheresis (Μοχηρήσις) and to Agathias’s Moucheirisis (Μουχειρίσις), but if by Procopius it is the name of a region with the centre in Kotais (modern Kutaisi), by Agathias it is a fortress in Rioni valley. *Letter 5* does not specify the nature of Moukourisin.

C) Thakyria (“near Iberia”), where Anastasius Apocrisiarius was exiled, is traditionally identified with Takveri/Lechkhumi; and Souania is, obviously, Svaneti⁸⁶. However, a 11th c. Georgian scholion in the manuscript Tbilisi A-97 (see above) identifies this anonymous fortress with fortress Muri – in this case, both Anastasii would have to have departed from Moukourisin together, upstream of Rioni to Muri and Takveri respectively, but their separation in Moukourisin speaks in favour of their different ways – upstream of Inguri and Rioni respectively.

D) In the definition of the fortress Thousoumes and the villages Mochoes and Zichachoris in *Hypomnesticon 5* (see above) some questions are raised about their neighbourhood with the Alans, from which Apsilia is separated by Missimiania. But in view of the high status of Zichachoris as the first residence of the Lazican ruler we should search for it in Apsilia and not in far away Missimiania. However, considering it a clearly artificial Lazican (i.e. alien to Apsilia) name (from Dzhikha-khora ‘house-fortress’⁸⁷), we should see in it an important fortress of Apsilia, renamed by a Lazican ruler. From Agathias, *Hist.* 4, 15, 5 we know, that the upper boundary of Apsilia was the Tibeleos fortress (Τιβέλεος), identical to Procopius’s Tsibile (Τζιβιλή) and reliably identified with the Tsebelda fortress⁸⁸. Therefore, Zichachoris could not be located in the upper Kodori gorge and must be identified with one of the biggest fortresses of Apsilia: of Tsebelda, of Gerzeul or of Shapky.

This identification is confirmed by the position of Zichachoris about 7.5 km from the fortress Thousoumes, located above the village of Mochoes, i.e., judging by the lack of mention of the villages in the Kodori gorge, above the coastal plain. If we identify Mochoes with the ancient village of Mokvi⁸⁹, the only candidate for the fortress above it would be the 6th c Achapara fortress, but 7.5 km from it there is no fortress which could be identical with Zichachoris. The nearest major monuments, the Pskal and the Tsebelda fortresses, are more than

86 *Khrouchkova L.* Op. cit. P. 57, without references and arguments identifies Thakyria with Tsakhar-Sideron, which completely contradicts to *Letter 4*.

87 *Ingorokva P.* George Merchule. Tbilisi, 1954. P. 132 (in Georgian). The form Xichachoris, Often used in scholarship, goes back to an error in the Latin translation of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.

88 See *Воронов Ю. Н.* Древняя Апсалия... P. 415–421.

89 See *Амичба Г. А., Пануашвили Т. Г.* Из истории совместной борьбы грузин и абхазов против иноземных завоевателей (VI–VIII вв.). Tbilisi, 1985. P. 58.

20 km away. In addition, in this case Mochoes is, on the contrary, maximally far away from Abasgia. Therefore it is necessary to reject such a localization of Mochoes, which could be any ancient settlement on coastal plain, and to search for a pair of fortresses at a distance of about 7.5 km from each other, one of which is a major centre (Zichachoris), and the other is located above the plain (Thousoumes). Only two pairs of fortresses correspond to this condition: Tsebelda – Shapky and Tsebelda – Gerzeul (the distance between Shapky and Gerzeul fortresses is significantly less, about 3 km). Indeed, it is logical, that the residence of the Lazican ruler is the largest centre of Apsilia — Tsibile/Tibeleos (Anastasius Apocrisarius was here, near the house of the patrikios of Lazica, for about a year during his second imprisonment, see *Letter 6*). With Thousoumes, “truly fitting for monks”, we can identify both the Shapky and the Gerzeul fortresses, where there are also the churches⁹⁰. In addition, the localization of Thousoumes in the Gerzeul or Shapky fortress perfectly corresponds to the indication of *Hypomnesticon 5* that the location of Mochoes is “at the end of the climate of Apsilia... near the land of Abasgi, who love Christ”: last land starts very close, behind the Kelasuri wall⁹¹.

In the case of the Shapky fortress we need to pay attention to its unique church-martyrium, rebuilt from a square building, with a shrine for relics to the left of a Π-shaped altar screen—the likely origin the famous so-called Tsebelda screens with narrative reliefs (possibly of the 7th–8th cc.)⁹²; while the church in the Gerzeul fortress was built only after 1000. It is possible that the Shapky church is the burial place of St. Anastasius Apocrisarius in Thousoumes, mentioned in *Hypomnesticon 5*.

E) The description of the location of the Skotorin fortress “in Apsilia, near Abasgia” (*Letter 4*) is similar to the description of the location of Mochoes village in *Hypomnesticon 5* (see above). This toponym was usually compared with the hydronym Kodori and located somewhere in the middle stream of the Kodori⁹³. There the best candidate for Skotorin is the Pskal fortress near Tsebelda. However, against the localization of Skotorin, there is the indication of *Letter 4* of the neighbouring Abasgia: as we saw above, in the same way as the Thousoumes fortress is described, which had to be the Shapky or Gerzeul fortress. Accordingly, the same two major Byzantine fortress here Shapky or Gerzeul, as well as smaller fortifications on the border with Abasgia :Lar, Bat and Akhysta, can claim identity with Skotorin⁹⁴.

F) The Phousta fortress should be somewhere in the upper or middle stream of the Kodori, because through it Epiphanius the Monk leads the apostle Andrew from Alania to

90 See Воронов Ю. Н. Древняя Апсилия... Р. 412–415.

91 See Картлис цховреба... Р. 108–112.

92 See Хрушкова. Указ. соч. Р. 322–327.

93 Khrouchkova L. Op. cit. P. 57, without references and arguments identifies Skotorin with Tsebelda fortress.

94 On them see Воронов Ю. Н. Древняя Апсилия... Р. 421–422.

Sebastopolis the Great. Epiphanius mentions the *Phoustoi* people⁹⁵, whose name is obviously derived from toponyme Phousta⁹⁶, and the epithet “city” indicates the significance of this place. It is also characteristic that in *Letter 6* an unusual designation of a fortress by an ethnonym – “castrum Phustensium” is used twice. *Letter 6* confirms the location of Phousta on the Kodori: Phousta is in the “regions of Apsilia and Missimiania”. This indication suggests the location of Phousta somewhere near the border of Apsilia and Missimiania, i.e. in the middle stream of the Kodori, while the other fortresses *Letter* determines as being either in Missimiania, near the Alans, or in Apsilia, near Abasgia. According to *Letter 7*, on the road from Phousta to mountainous Schemarin, Anastasius was “brought back” to Thousoumes, located over coastal plain (see above). In view of the negative characteristic of Phousta in *Letter 6* (in contrast to the positive characteristics of Thousoumes, located above the plain), it was a place hard to stay, i.e., apparently, a mountain fortress.

From the fortresses in the upper and middle stream of the Kodori for such a significant role of the *city* of Phousta there are not many candidates. The Chkalta fortress (Chirks-Abaa) is likely Tsakhar/Sideron (see above); the change of its name to Phousta mentioned both in the 7th and 9th cc., is not credible. The same applies to Tsibile/Tsebelda (see above). Because on the rivers Chkhalta and Saken there are no Byzantine fortresses, and on the river Klych only one, most likely identical to Bouchloon/Boukolous (see above), the number of applicants for the role of Phousta gets even narrower. The best of them from a phonetic point of view is Apushta, in the strategically important bottomland of the Amlkel river, where the road from Alania to Sebastopolis the Great deviates from the Kodori to the west. However, this fortress is too small and primitively built (without mortar)⁹⁷, to be an important centre in the 7th–9th cc, which one had necessarily to pass on the road from Alania to Sebastopolis. But the neighbouring fortress Pal (with double wall, moat and settlement), on the other slope of the same mountain Pshoou, controlling the output of an ancient road from the Kodori gorge to the plain⁹⁸, could be ancient Phousta, which was impossible to pass on the road from the Alans to the sea. This fortress is located on the border of Apsilia and Missimiania, which began somewhere behind Tsibile (see above), at the rocks of Bagad, the entrance to the Kodori gorge⁹⁹. Accordingly, the term *Phustenses/Phoustoi* in the 7th–9th cc could refer to the population of Amtkel and Machara valleys.

95 Греческие предания... P. 117, 287.

96 Like Sousoi – from misspelled Sou<s>ania (see above).

97 On it see Воронов Ю. Н. Древняя Апселия... P. 423.

98 On it see Ibid. P. 423.

99 Georgica. Vol. 2.1. Tbilisi, 1941. P. 54, refers the tradition of the inhabitants of village Alexandrovka near Sukhumi, that Phousta was there. However, no fortress is known there, and this territory should be determined as close to Abasgia (like Skotorin or Thousoumes), and not to Missimiania.

G) Now, finally, we can try to localize Schemarin/Chemarin. Its location cannot be Saken (see above), Chkhalta (due to the lack of fortresses) or the Klych valleys (the only Byzantine fortress here is with high probability identical to Bouchloon/Boukolous ; the latter was closer to Alans than Shemar, see above). It could only be in the middle and upper stream of the Kodori (above Apushta-Phousta: the exiling of Anastasius from Phousta to mountainous Schemarin is described in *Letter 6* as a crime), i.e. Dal gorge; but because of the abovementioned closeness of Schemarin to the Alans and to the “peak of the Caucasus” only the upper stream of the Kodori can be considered.

The Lata fortress is too small for a garrison, headed by a comes, and is dated to the 11th–14th cc.¹⁰⁰; the same applies to Azhara fortress¹⁰¹. In addition, they are not suitable for the position of Schemarin as a point on the way from Svaneti to Alania through the Nenskra gorge and the upper stream of the Kodori: a traveller would have to deviate from the road and descend down the Kodori. The identification of Schemarin with the Chkhalta fortress is theoretically possible, but the latter is probably Tsakhar/Sideron (see above).

More suitable for this role is the Omarishara fortress at the confluence of the Gvandra and the Klych¹⁰². Here we have masonry on lime mortar, and the remains of a church, where later (in the early 9th c) the relics of St. Maximus would be revered. It matches also by its location on the way from Svaneti to Alania through Nenskra gorge, its closeness to the “peak of the Caucasus” (exactly because of its altitude Theodore Spoudaios could not reach it in the winter) and its proximity to the Alans (its direct neighbour with Alanian Boukolous could displace the word Missimiania from its definition). The “night-watch” of the comes of Schemarin also becomes clearer in this case: after the neighbouring Boukolous/Klych fortress was occupied by the Alans, the Schemarin-Omarishara fortress became the edge of Byzantine possessions in the Kodori valley. The absence of the word similar to Schemarin here is easily explained by multiple changes of the population in Dal. But if the toponym Schemarin derives from Svanian *sgimar* ‘mineral springs’, it could originate here in the time of Missimians (relatives of the Svans) due to the existence of mineral springs about 4 km from Omarishara¹⁰³.

Thus, we see, that most of the Byzantine fortresses, mentioned in 7th c. sources, are located in Apsilia and Missimiania, in the Kodori valley, which is not surprising in view of its strategic importance as a route from the Black sea to the North Caucasus.

100 On it see Воронов Ю. Н. Древности... Р. 328.

101 On it see Воронов Ю. Н. Древняя Аpsилия... Р. 423–424.

102 On it see Воронов Ю. Н. Древности... Р. 331–332; on his map (Fig. 1) it mistakenly placed at the confluence of rivers Gvandra and Saken.

103 Бондарев Н. Д. В горах Абхазии. Moscow, 1981 (see <http://www.novabrazia.ru>).

This research shows that not all the sources on toponyms of the Eastern Pontos Euxeinos are yet exhausted. New discoveries and corrections are possible, especially in the field of the comparison of ancient texts and archaeological surveys.

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