IV- Some notes on the topography of the Eastern Black Sea in Late Antiquity[384]

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The purpose of this article is to clarify some issues of the late antique topography of the Eastern *Pontus Euxinus*. We deal with two types of toponyms: the first belong to the ecclesiastical topography (attested by the apostolic traditions and the names of the bishoprics) and the second to Byzantine fortresses that still need to be located on the north-eastern borderlands of the early and middle Byzantine empire.

1- Questions of Ecclesiastical Topography

1.1- The Apostolic Traditions

The first report of apostolic preaching on the South-Eastern Black Sea coast is found in the Early Byzantine *List of the Apostles and Disciples* by Pseudo-Epiphanius, dated to the 5th century. 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 the harbour of Hyssos (*Hyssou limen*)[385]

The name of "External Ethiopia" comes from a historiographic tradition which goes back to Herodotus, who compared the Colchians, supposed to be descendants of the Egyptians, with the Ethiopians.[386] *Hyssou limen* (modern Sürmene at the mouth of the Kara Dere)[387] is located near the border between *Pontus* and *Colchis-Lazica*. In fact, Pseudo-Epiphanius' *Hyssou limen* represents one of the locations of the imaginary City

[384] This paper presents the results of *Language, literature, culture in the historical and social dimensions* project, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2026.

[385] Schermann 1907, p. 113-114: Ματθίας [...] ἐκήρυξε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἔξω Αἰθιοπίᾳ καὶ ἐκεῖ ἐμαρτύρησεν ὑπὸ τῶν Αἰθιόπων ἐπὶ Ὕσσου λιμένα; on the manuscripts see Dolbeau 1986.

[386] *Histories*, II, 104-105.

[387] Качарава, Квирквелия 1991, p. 78.

of Cannibals from the 4th-century apocryphal *Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, along with the Pontic Sinope.[388]

Figure 7: Modern settlements mentioned in the text.
Credits/source: M. Elashvili.

Hyssou limen and the Ethiopians are mentioned also in Pseudo-Epiphanius' paragraph about the apostle Andrew:

> Andrew [...] as reported by our predecessors, preached the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Scythians, the Sogdians and the Sakai, as well as in Sebastopolis the Great, where are the castle Apsarus, *Hyssou limen* and the river Phasis (Ethiopians live there) [...][389]

The strange assignment of *Sebastopolis* the Great (modern Sukhumi, in the Northern Caucasus) to the Southern Caucasus and the South-Eastern Black Sea

388 See Виноградов 2013a.

389 Schermann 1907, p. 108-109: Ἀνδρέας [...], ὡς οἱ πρὸ ἡμῶν παραδεδώκασιν, ἐκήρυξε Σκύθαις καὶ Σογδιανοῖς καὶ Σάκαις καὶ ἐν Σεβαστοπόλει τῇ μεγάλῃ, ὅπου ἐστὶν ἡ παρεμβολὴ Ἄψαρος καὶ Ὕσσου λιμὴν καὶ Φᾶσις ποταμός, ἔνθα οἰκοῦσιν Αἰθίοπες...

region, where *Apsaros* (the fortress Gonio at the mouth of Chorokhi river, near modern Batumi), *Hyssou limen* and *Phasis* (the Rioni river) are located, leaves the impression that the Pseudo-Epiphanius is quoting an older geographical text. Indeed, we find a similar list in Hippolytus' of Rome *Chronicon*:

> Saunoi, also called Sanigoi, extend up to Pontus, where the castle Apsaros, [and Sebastopolis], *Hyssou limen* and the river Phasis are. And these peoples live up to and beyond Trebizond.[390]

Another reason for the introduction of *Sebastopolis* in this list was the probable desire to join the southern region of Andrew's preaching from the *Acta Andreae* with the northern one, which mentioned the Scythians, the Sakai and the Sogdians and which was taken from the earlier lists of the apostles: in fact, Andrew's preaching to the Scythians had already been mentioned by Origen.[391] The complete fusion of these two missionary fields appeared in one of Pseudo-Epiphanius' versions, where the Sakai were replaced by the Gorsinoi, *i. e.* the Georgians.[392]

Pseudo-Epiphanius' *List of the Apostles* (Latin *Index discipulorum*) was the main guideline[393] of the Byzantine hagiographer Epiphanius the Monk, who visited the southern, eastern, and northern shores of the Black Sea in 815-820.[394] In his *Life of the Apostle Andrew* (§ 9), Epiphanius the Monk writes:

> Saint Epiphanius, Archbishop of Cyprus says that according to tradition, the blessed apostle Andrew taught the Scythians, the Sogdians and the Sarmatians, in Sebastopolis the Great, where the castle Apsarus, *Hyssou limen* and the river Phasis are.

Immediately after, Epiphanius adds an explanation of his own: "the Iberians, the Susoi, the Phustoi and the Alans live there" (see below).[395] Then (§ 32) in the

[390] *Chronicon*, 233-234: Σαῦνοι δὲ οἱ λεγόμενοι Σάνιγγες, οἱ ἕως τοῦ Πόντου ἐκτείνοντες, ὅπου ἐστὶ παρεμβολὴ Ἄψαρος [καὶ Σεβαστόπολις] καὶ Ὕσσου λιμὴν καὶ Φάσις ποταμός. Καὶ ἕως Τραπεζοῦντος οἰκοῦσι καὶ παρεκτείνεται τὰ ἔθνη ταῦτα. See Helm 1929, p. 90.

[391] See Виноградов 2005a, p. 135, note 43.

[392] Dolbeau 1986, p. 303.

[393] Виноградов 2005b, p. 117 (Russian translation), p. 161 (Greek text).

[394] See Kahl 1989; Mango 2002.

[395] Виноградов 2005b, p. 197 (cf. p. 239): Τοῦ δὲ ἁγίου Ἐπιφανίου, [ἀρχι]επισκόπου Κύπρου, λέγοντος, ὡς ἐκ παραδόσεως ἔχειν τὸν μακάριον ἀπόστολον Ἀνδρέαν διδάξαι Σκύθαις καὶ Σογδιανοῖς καὶ Σαυρομάτοις, ἐν Σεβαστοπόλει τῇ μεγάλῃ, ὅπου ἔστιν ἡ παρεμβολὴ Ἀψάρου καὶ Ζηκχουλιμήν (Ὑσσουλιμήν) καὶ Φάσις ποταμός, ἔνθα οἰκοῦσιν Ἰβηρες καὶ Σοῦσοι καὶ Φοῦστοι καὶ Ἀλανοί. For the version containing the Γορσινοῖς, see the Greek text p. 239.

long itinerary of the apostle's third voyage, he develops a brief note from the Pseudo-Epiphanius:[396]

> Καὶ μετὰ τὴν πεντηκοστὴν Ἀνδρέας καὶ Σίμων ὁ Κανανίτης καὶ Ματθίας καὶ Θαδδαῖος ὑπέμειναν ἐκεῖ πρὸς Αὔγαρον, οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ διερχόμενοι τὰς πόλεις, διδάσκοντες καὶ θαυματουργοῦντες κατῆλθον εἰς Ἰβηρίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν Φάσιν καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας εἰς Σουσανίαν. Οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες τοῦ ἔθνους ἐκείνου [τότε] ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐκρατοῦντο, εὐπειθὴς δὲ οὖσα ἡ γυνακεῖα φύσις καὶ ταχὺ ὑπήκουσαν. Ἔμεινε δὲ ὁ Ματθίας σὺν μαθηταῖς εἰς τὰς χώρας ἐκείνας διδάσκων καὶ ποιῶν θαύματα πολλά. Ὁ δὲ Σίμων καὶ Ἀνδρέας ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀλανίαν καὶ εἰς Φοῦσταν πόλιν. Καὶ πολλὰ θαύματα ἐργασάμενοι καὶ πολλοὺς μαθητεύσαντες ἀπῆλθον εἰς Αβασγίαν. Καὶ εἰσελθόντες εἰς Σεβαστόπολιν τὴν μεγάλην ἐδίδαξαν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. Ὁ δὲ Ἀνδρέας καταλείψας τὸν Σίμωνα ἐκεῖ σὺν μαθηταῖς αὐτὸς ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Ζηκχίαν. Οἱ δὲ Ζηκχοὶ σκληροὶ ἀνθρωποι καὶ βάρβαροι καὶ ἕως τοῦ νῦν ἄπιστοι ἡμίσεις. Ἔμελλον δὲ τὸν Ἀνδρέαν φονεύειν, εἰ μὴ ἑώρων τὴν ἀκτημοσύνην καὶ τὸ πρᾶον καὶ τὴν ἄσκησιν αὐτοῦ. Καὶ λοιπὸν ἀφεὶς αὐτοὺς κατῆλθεν εἰς Σουγδαίους τοὺς ἄνω, οἱ δὲ ἄνθρωποι εὐπειθεῖς καὶ ἥμεροι, καὶ μετὰ χαρᾶς ἐδέξαντο τὸν λόγον. Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Βόσπορον πόλιν…
>
> 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 Susania. 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 Maximus, who suffered long. In these countries, Matthias remained with his disciples, performing many miracles. Simon and Andrew went to Alania and to the city of 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. 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 Sougdaoi. These people, obedient and meek, gladly received his word. From there he came to the city of Bosporos…

Epiphanius the Monk describes two tombs of the apostle Simon, that he had discovered somewhat unexpectedly: one was in *Bosporos* (ancient *Pantikapaion*, modern Kerch in Crimea), and the second in *Nikopsis* (near modern Novomikhaylovka in the Krasnodar region).[397] The Byzantine hagiographer did not want to harmonize the contradictory traditions regarding the place of death and burial of Simon mentioned by the Pseudo-Epiphanius (Jerusalem, Ostrakene in Egypt, Britain) with

396 *Ibid*., p. 224-225.

397 *Ibid*., p. 145-146, 179.

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 (see also below). In reality, Simon's tomb in *Bosporos* must have been the primary one, since the tradition of his preaching there is known from the 5th century onwards.[398]

The apostolic itinerary constructed by Epiphanius was repeated without change in later lives of the apostle Andrew, both in Greek (by Nicetas David Paphlagon[399] and Symeon Metaphrastes, as well as in the *Imperial Menology*) and in Georgian (based on Nicetas).[400] However, this passage of Epiphanius gave birth to a local tradition, not only about the preaching, but also about the death of Simon and his burial in Abkhazia, in the city of *Anakopia*, which was identified with *Nikopsis*, abandoned long before.[401] 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, as the founders of the Abkhasian Church[402].

1.2- The Early Bishoprics[403]

Abasgia, Apsilia *and* Misimiania

In the Eastern part of the Euxine Pontus, on the territory of the modern Abkhazia, Christianity is attested from the 4th century onwards. This is due to the fact that the early Christianity was spread here only among the Greeks who inhabited the coastal cities of *Pityous* and *Sebastopolis*. Stratophilus, the bishop of *Pityous* (modern Pitsunda, Bichvinta), took part in the first Ecumenical Council of 325.[404] Several 4th-6th century-churches were excavated in *Pityous*;[405] a local cult of saints is also

398 Виноградов 2005a, p. 134.

399 Nicetas adds only a summary of Arrian's *Periplous of the Black Sea*, 8, and an etymology of Zekchoi from ζῆν ἐκ χοός.

400 Виноградов 2005b, p. 47-56.

401 See Khrouchkova 2006, p. 103.

402 The above-mentioned ancient sources were not known to Preud'homme 2025.

403 This chapter is based on Виноградов, Гугушвили 2013.

404 Gelzer, Hilgenfeld, Cuntz 1898, p. 65.

405 Хрушкова 2002, p. 67-104.

attested there.[406] Some disgraced religious leaders were exiled there: this was the case of John Chrysostom (who died on the road, in the Pontic *Comana*, near the modern Gümenek) and of Peter Knapheus.[407] We know also about the existence of Christians in *Sebastopolis* in the late 4th century from Gregory of Nyssa.[408] However, an episcopal see is attested there only in the 7th century (see below).

A real change occurs in the second half of the 6th century, when the two kings of the Abasgoi converted to Christianity under the pressure of Justinian I. Most probably, they tried to emancipate themselves from the subordination to the Lazoi.[409] Justinian built a church of the Virgin for the Abasgoi and established a bishopric.[410] The cathedral and the episcopal see were unlikely to be in *Sebastopolis*, which Justinian rebuilt later, after its destruction during the war against the Persians.[411] In fact, according to Procopius,[412] the southern boundary of Abasgia passed to the north of *Sebastopolis*, near Trachea.[413] One should look for this episcopal centre rather in Tsandrypsh/Gantiadi, where a basilica and an inscription mentioning a high-ranking official (king or bishop) of "Abasgia and [...]" were found,[414] or in Alakhadzy near *Pityous*, where a large basilica with a huge narthex (for unbaptized people?) is known.[415]

406 Peeters 1938.

407 On *Pityous* see also Preud'homme 2025.

408 *Vita sanctae Macrinae*, 36.

409 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 3, 12-20.

410 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 3, 21.

411 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 4, 6-20; Procopius, *De aedificiis*, III, 7, 8-9.

412 *De bellis*, VIII, 9, 15-19.

413 There is no consensus on the localisation of *Trachea*: the main options are Gagra or *Anakopia* (see Леквинадзе 1973, p. 180-181; Ломоури 1986, p. 72). If we follow the opinion of J. Darrouzès (1981, p. 7), the listing of the archbishopric of *Sebastopolis* in the *Notitia* I after *Heracleiopolis* would indicate its creation during the reign of Heraclius (610-641). However, as showed by Chrysos 1969, the positions of the archbishoprics in the *Notitiae episcopatuum* do not follow always the chronological order. But even if the see of *Sebastopolis* received the status of archbishopric under Heraclius, this tells us nothing about the time of its foundation.

414 Леквинадзе 1973, p. 185.

415 Khrouchkova 2006, p. 39-43.

It is more difficult to estimate the situation in *Apsilia*. According to Procopius[416], the Apsilioi adopted Christianity before the Abasgoi.[417] Procopius' definition of the Apsilioi as "subjects of the Lazoi and already Christians from ancient times (κατήκοοί εἰσι καὶ Χριστιανοὶ γεγόνασιν ἐκ παλαιοῦ οἱ ᾽Αψίλιοι)" testifies in favour of the fact that they received Christianity directly from *Lazica*. According to the Pseudo-Arrian's *Periplous of the Black Sea*, who builds upon the earlier *periploi* of Menippus and Arrian, "from Dioskourias-Sebastoupolis as far as the river *Apsarus* was earlier inhabited by a people, the so-called Colchians who changed their name in Lazoi (Ἀπὸ οὖν Διοσκουριάδος τῆς Σεβαστουπόλεως ἕως Ἀψάρου ποταμοῦ πρώην ᾤκουν ἔθνος οἱ λεγόμενοι Κόλχοι οἱ μετονομασθέντες Λαζοί)".[418] Most likely, this passage reflects the obedience of this Apsilian territory to the authority of the Lazican king. But who exactly exercised ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the coast between *Sebastopolis* and *Ziganis* (see below) is not precisely known, because of the lack of written evidence. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Apsilioi were supervised by the bishop of *Ziganis*. However, the unique domed church of the 6th century, in Dranda,[419] with a baptistery (which in Early Byzantine time belongs usually to a cathedral), suggests that for some time, on this site existed a bishopric, created by Justinian for the Apsilioi. This must have been an *autokephalos* archbishopric or a bishopric subordinate to the metropolitan of *Lazica*.

While describing the events of 730s, the Georgian *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* of the Pseudo-Juansher (11th century) calls Tskhumi (*i. e. Sebastopolis*), a "city of Apshileti".[420] Indeed, Sebastopolis could not be the bishopric of the Abasgoi (see above). If the archbishopric of *Sebastopolis* mentioned in the mid 7th century, already existed during the 6th century,[421] could it be Apsilian and not Greek? Despite the location of *Sebastopolis* in ancient *Apsilia*, this is not very likely because the political centre of the Apsilioi was not on the coast, but in the mountains, in the Tsebelda valley.

416 *De bellis*, VIII, 2, 32-33.

417 Cf. also, *e. g.*, the Christian finds in the Apsilan fortress of *Tsibile* (modern Tsebelda), in particular the 6th c. tiles with the stamp "Constantine the bishop".

418 Diller 1952, p. 128, 9v23.

419 About its date, see Виноградов 2007.

420 Метревели 2008, p. 108-112.

421 See, *e. g.*, Khrouchkova 2006, p. 90, although there is no direct evidence for it. Kekropios, a participant in the fourth Ecumenical Council in 451, is sometimes attributed to Abasgia. But he was the bishop of Sebastopolis in Armenia (*ACO*, II.1.2.P.98).

In the third quarter of the 7th century, Anastasius Apocrisiarius and Theodore Spoudaeus[422] mention *Apsilia* without any complement. The neighbours of *Apsilia*, the Abasgoi, are called "Christians" three times, perhaps to indicate a decline of Christianity among the Apsilioi and the absence of a bishop.[423] This is supported by the fact that by the mid-7th century, the archbishop of *Sebastopolis* already had the title "of Abasgia" (see below): this implies that the Abasgoi began to dominate the region of *Sebastopolis*. 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 century, was preceded by the creation of a new political unity: Abkhazia.

Abkhazia is mentioned for the first time by the Pseudo-Juansher, describing events of the years 736-737. However, he also mentions *Apsilia* once, as a geographical specification, and places it north of Kleisoura. Usually, the Greek term *kleisoura* (κλεισοῦρα) is understood in its ancient meaning of a "fortified narrow passage, gorge" and identified with the Kelasuri wall, south of Sukhumi: a version of the *Conversion of Kartli* (in the cod. Sin. georg. N50) ascribes its construction to the Persians, in 560s.[424] However, we cannot exclude that in the early 8th century, *kleisoura* means a small Byzantine military district (part of a theme), which existed from the late 7th to the 10th century. In this case, in addition to the area of *Phasis*, the Byzantines directly controlled also a small area between *Lazica*-Egrisi and Abkhazia, roughly coinciding with ancient *Apsilia*. This area returned under the rule of the Empire under Leo the Isaurian, about 710. It was here that Suleiman ibn Hisham campaigned in 738.[425] The existence of a *kleisoura* would explain the presence of Eustathius, son of the Byzantine *patricius* Marianus, in the fortress *Sideron*.[426]

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

[422] Anastasius Apocrisiarius, *Epistula ad Theodosium Gangrensium*, 6; Theodorus Spoudaeus, *Commemoratio*, 5.

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

[424] Aleksidzé 2000.

[425] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, 411.

[426] This *Patrikios* Marianos should be identified not with Marinos, "first among the Apsiloi" from Theophanes' *Chronographia*, 394 (as in *Georgica*, vol. 4.2, p. 115), but with one of the numerous *patrikioi* with this name (*PmbZ* # 4750, 4753, 4754, 4757).

Apsilia. In the late 8th century, by the end of the Byzantine suzerainty over Abkhazia, its territory, consisting of the 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) bear the signature of the *locum tenens* Constantine in the name of the see of *Sebastopolis*, of the *locum tenens* Constant, and of the bishop Constant[427]—this is probably the same person—who took his see during the Council. In *Pityous*, a seal of the bishop Theodore (who was, however, in all probability, the bishop of Kerasous) was found.[428]

Lazica

According to the 5th-century *Ecclesiastical history* of Pseudo-Gelasius of Kyzikos,[429] *Lazica* was converted to Christianity under Constantine the Great, together with Iberia. Despite the unlikelihood of such a dating and relationship,[430] it is clear that in the third quarter of the 5th century *Lazica* was already perceived as a Christian country. Indeed, in 465-466, the Lazican king Gubazos demonstrated his fidelity to Christianity in Constantinople,[431] by revering St. Daniel the Stylite.[432] However, the lack of precisely dated Christian monuments from the 4th and the 5th century in *Lazica* itself (unlike in *Apsilia* or *Pityous*) speaks against the hypothesis of its complete Christianization (at least before the 6th century) and against the proclamation of Christianity as the state religion already in the 4th century.[433] In 523, the king Tzathios,

427 See Lamberz, Vogt 2004, p. 49, note 191.

428 The seal of the bishop Theodore is similar to the seal of the bishop Narses of the late 7th c. (*PmbZ* # 5224). Since 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 Nerses. Consequently, Theodore, who made his seal by the same matrix of averse as Narses, was also bishop of Kerasous, rather the heir of Narses than his predecessor, because in 681 the bishop of Kerasous was Theophylact.

429 III, 10, 1. See Hansen 2002, p. IX-XI.

430 The mention of the simultaneous conversion of the Lazoi and Iberoi is absent in the sources (Gelasius Cyzicenus, *Anonyme Kirchengeschichte*, 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*, XXI, 480). The mention of the Pontus by Rufinus probably caused the interpolation of the Lazoi.

431 Priscus, fr. 34: εἶλε γὰρ αὐτοὺς τῇ τε θωπείᾳ τῶν λόγων καὶ τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐπιφερόμενος σύμβολα.

432 *Vita Danielis Stylitae*, 51.

433 See *RAC*, 17, col. 91-92.

apparently after a period of de-Christianization and rapprochement with Iran, returned to Christianity.[434]

Most of the bishoprics of *Lazica* were located in the ancient Greek coastal colonies, but the date of their origin is not known.[435] Procopius is the first to mention "the Lazican bishops (οἱ Λαζῶν ἐπίσκοποι)".[436] According to Sophia Giftopoulou,[437] until 608, the seas in the Greek colonies of *Lazica* were part of the eparchy of *Pontus Polemoniacus*, with the centre 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 (like the inclusion of *Pityous* in the *Pontus Polemoniacus* at the first Ecumenical Council), any information about the submission of the Lazican sees up to the mid 7th century is simply lacking. No Greek inscription from *Lazica* (from Sepieti or Vashnari) mentions a local bishop,[438] while a 6th century inscription from Machkhomeri records the bishop of Satala in *Armenia I*.[439]

According to the *Notitiae episcopatuum* I-VI, this area was ecclesiastically subordinated to Constantinople. Until the mid-7th century (*Notitia* I),[440] there was a metropolitan see of Lazica[441] centred in *Phasis*.[442] Four bishops were subject to the metropolitan of *Lazica*: the bishop of *Rhodopolis* (modern Vartsikhe), of *Petra* (modern Tsikhisdziri), of *Ziganis* (modern Gudava) and of *Saisina* (modern Tsaishi).[443] Thus,

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434 *Ibid*.

435 Agathangelus in his Greek *Life of St. Gregory the Illuminator* (*recensio altera*) 170, attributed to St. Gregory the ordination of a Cappadocian Sophronius as bishop of the Lazoi. This information is not in the Armenian *History* of Agathangelus.

436 *De bellis*, VIII, 2, 17.

437 Γυφτοπούλου 2004, p. 107-155.

438 Kauchtschischwili 2009, p. 121-122, 135, n° 77-78, 97.

439 Виноградов 2021.

440 On the date, see Jankowiak 2011, p. 56-57.

441 "Sergius, the patriarch of Lazica" in George Cedrenus (I, 776) is a distortion of "Sergius, the *patricius* of Lazica" in Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, 370.

442 The fact, the bishop of *Phasis* was indeed the Metropolitan of *Lazica*: this is confirmed by the double designation of Cyrus the Monothelite (7th c., see below): "Cyrus, the bishop of Lazica" (*ACO*, II.2.2, p. 562) and "Cyrus, the bishop of Phasis" (Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, 329).

443 See *Georgica*, vol. 4.2, p. 187-193, 413-415. In particular, the editor Simon Kauchtschishvili (*Georgica*, vol. 4.1, 1941) convincingly refutes N. Adonts' identification of Ziganis with the fortress Zigani in

apparently, the metropolis of *Lazica* occupied the territory of *Lazica* as well as of *Skimnia* (modern Lechkhumi) and *Souania* (modern Svaneti), which were submitted to the kings of *Lazica*. 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*.[444] According to the *Notitia* III, *Rizaion* was part of the metropolis of *Lazica*: 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 the modern Western Georgia, to the east of Shorapani.

In 628/629, the metropolitan of *Lazica* was Cyrus, one of the founders of monothelitism and later Patriarch of Alexandria.[445] A Lazican bishop George, whom Michel Lequien took from the *Life of St. John the Merciful*, actually does not appear there.[446] The Metropolitan of *Lazica*, Theodore, took part in the sixth Ecumenical Council in 680.[447] The same Theodore of Phasis, together with Faustinus of Ziganis and John of Petra, participated in the Quinsext council in 690.[448]

Lazica had a double territorial structure. The old capital of the kingdom of *Lazica* was *Archaeopolis* (Tsikhegoji, modern Nokalakevi), but in the ecclesiastic

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Chaldia. The latter (modern Kalkandere Kale) is situated at an altitude of about 2000 m, and was probably the winter base of a Roman cohort (Bryer, Winfield 1985, I, p. 326; cf. Ломоури 1986, p. 63). Nothing indicates that it was ever a city (cf. Bryer, Winfield 1985, I, p. 297). In fact, this fortress too far from Phasis for being a bishopric under the metropolitan of Phasis. The decisive argument against this identification are the *Martyrdom of St. Orentius and his six brothers* and the identification of Ziganis with Gudakva (modern Gudava) in a *scholion* of the Georgian manuscript A-97, with the translation of this *Martyrdom from Great Synaxarion of St. George Mtatsmindeli* (*Ibid.*, p. 327). Hewsen 1992, p. 58, note 12, wrongly identifies Ziganis with Igani, mentioned in the *Armenian Geography*, and places it inside *Lazica*, "near the village Mudzhuna" (maybe Sudzhuna in the Abasha municipality). Finally, in favor of the identification of *Ziganis* with Gudava speaks also the Pseudo-Arrian, *Periplous*, 48 (9v20-22 Diller), which places the river *Sigama-Ziganis* 52 miles north of the river Phasis (modern Rioni), and 58 miles south of Sebastopolis the Great (modern Sukhumi): this corresponds exactly to the position of Gudava.

444 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 2, 17-18. Анчабадзе 1959, p. 16, n. 33, refers the corresponding passage to Sanigoi, what seems to be not right judging from the context.

445 *ACO*, II.2.2. p. 534, 562; Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, 329.

446 Lequien 1740, col. 1343. Fedalto 1988, I, p. 400, contains a similar error.

447 *ACO*, II.2.2. n° 164.

448 Ohme 1990, p. 183, 304.

administration, the centre of Lazica was Phasis. On the one hand, this is not necessarily a contradiction, because the metropolitan status of Phasis is known to us only from the *Notitiae*, *i. e.* from the mid-7th century, when the administrative centre of *Lazica* remains unknown: the Lazican kings are not mentioned after the mid-6th century,[449] but the *patrikioi* of *Lazica* are known only after mid-7th century.[450] After 697, the centre of Byzantine possessions in *Lazica* was *Phasis*, but its status in the late 6th and early 7th century is not clear.[451] Meanwhile, *Lazica* was not included among the provinces of the Empire: the Quinsext council calls it not an "province" (ἐπαρχία), but a "territory" (χώρα).[452] In addition, the absence of a see in *Archaeopolis* reflects the situation only after the mid-7th century, while the presence of two large basilicas supports the idea that there could be a bishopric before the end of the Lazican kingdom in the second half of the 6th century. On the other hand, the metropolitan status of the *Phasis* can be linked both with the ancient origins of this see (a Greek colony), and with the later Christianization of the Lazoi.

The end of the metropolis of *Lazica* is connected with the proclamation of independence by the new rulers of Lazica—the Abkhazian mtavars—shortly before 787. During the seventh Ecumenical Council, the metropolis of *Lazica* was abolished, and the title "of Lazica" passed to the metropolitan of Trebizond.[453]

Zekchia

In 497-523, the ancient Bosporan kingdom ceases to exist, and its territory passes under the authority of the Empire. In 527, a Byzantine garrison appears in *Bosporos*.[454]

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[449] The hypothesis according to which the kigndom in Lazica was abolished only under Heraclius (see Ломоури 1997), finds no support in the sources.

[450] Anastasius Apocrisiarius, *Epistula ad Theodosium Gangrensium*, 6; Theodorus Spoudaeus, *Commemoratio*, 5 (see below).

[451] 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). *Archaeopolis* kept its military importance up to the early 710s, when it was besieged by Byzantine-Armenian army, and in 736-737, when it was taken by Merwan-ibn-Muhammed.

[452] Ohme 2006, p. 304.

[453] See Виноградов, Гугушвили 2013; unconvincing looks the attempt to date the *Notitiae*, IV, 6 by the early 9th c. in Komatina 2013, p. 193-214.

[454] See Виноградов 2013b; Vinogradov 2017.

Also, in 536, the hierarch of Bosporus suddenly raised his status to that of a metropolitan. Already in 519 a bishop of the neighbouring Phanagoria was mentioned,[455] obviously subordinate to the Bosporan metropolitan as a suffragan. Finally, in the second third of 6th century, in the context of Justinian's christianization of the Eastern Euxine Pontus (when the bishops of the Abasgoi and of the Tetraxitai Goths appeared, according to Procopius)[456] an episcopal see was also founded for the Zekchoi in *Nikopsis*.[457] The appearance of Simon's relics in the *Nikopsis* cathedral (see above) shows that it was consecrated by means of the relics and carried out with the help of the metropolitan of Bosporus, who obviously had also control over the bishopric of *Nikopsis*, and who gave the relics of the apostle for the consecration of its new cathedral. In all likelihood, the remainder of this large metropolitan of Bosporus is a very special ecclesiastical diocese of *Zekchia*, consisting of three autocephalous archbishoprics—of *Bosporos*, *Cherson* and *Nikopsis*—and mentioned for the first time in the 660s, in the *Notitia episcopatuum* I.[458]

The *Notitia* III is a special case: unlike the two preceding and two subsequent notices, it mentions two archbishops of Abasgia: the archbishop of *Nicopsis* (place 89) and of *Sebastopolis* (place 94, the last among the archbishops). Beside it, among the three usual archbishops of *Zekchia*, *Nikopsis* is replaced by an archbishopric of Σουγδάων[459] (the existence of the see of *Sougdaia* in the mid-8th century is known from the *Life of St. Stephen of Sougdaia*[460] and from the signature of its bishop under the acts of the seventh Ecumenical Council in 787).[461] The only logical explanation for this anomaly is the assumption that the *Notitia* III reflects a reform of the Byzantine ecclesiastical eparchies in the North-Eastern Black Sea: most likely, at the time of the *Notitia* III, *Nicopsis* became a part of the Abkhazian kingdom (which is known for the mid-10th century from Constantinus Porphyrogenitus).[462] The dating of the *Notitia* III to the 8th century is now generally rejected. Indeed, even during the years 815-820, Epiphanius the Monk mentions *Nicopsis* as "of Zekchia", speaking at the same

455 See Fedalto 1988, p. 391-392.

456 *De bellis*, VIII, 4, 12.

457 Виноградов 2009.

458 *Notitiae episcopatuum*..., p. 206.

459 *Ibid*., p. 232-233.

460 Виноградов 2009, p. 188; De la Vaissière 2002, p. 211-222.

461 Lamberz, Vogt 2004, p. 46.

462 Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, 42.

time about the decline of Christianity here: "Cruel are these people, barbarians and still half unbelievers" (Σκληροὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ βάρβαροι καὶ ἕως τοῦ νῦν ἄπιστοι ἡμίσεις).[463] This led to the speedy abolition of the see of Nicopsis, which no longer exists in the *Notitia* VIII, where the archbishopric of *Zekchia* is transferred to *Tamatarcha* on the Taman peninsula. Thus, only a small period at the end of the 8th century, after the years 780s, when Byzantium regained its influence in Abkhazia, corresponds to this situation. However, this fact did not influence the ecclesiastic organization in Abkhazia and *Lazica*.

2- The Byzantine Fortresses

2.1- From the 4th to the 6th century

The history of 4th-6th centuries fortresses in Eastern Black Sea area 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 only some remarks.

The exact localization of the *Tsachar* fortress remains unclear: the Byzantine authors also call it *Sideron*, "Iron".[464] Since it belongs to the Missimianoi, one may locate on the middle or upper Kodori River. Yurij Voronov wrongly believed that the *Tsachar* fortress was different from the *Sideron*, which he identified with the Tsebelda fortress, and identified the *Tsachar* with the Pskal fortress.[465] However, none of these fortresses corresponds to the description of Theophanes the Confessor,[466] 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 (modern Chirks-Abaa), where a solid of Justinian I was found.[467] This identification is confirmed not only by the similarity of the names, but also by the fact that it was the only fortress in the Kodori gorge that completely blocked the road from the Alans to the sea.

463 Виноградов 2005b, p. 145, 178.

464 Agathias, *Histories*, III, 16, 5.

465 Воронов 1998 (cit. after Воронов 2010, p. 424).

466 *Chronographia*, 393-394.

467 Воронов 1977 (quoted after Воронов 2009, p. 326-330).

Another problem concerns the identification of the Lazican fortress *Sarapanis*, on the border with Iberia, with modern Shorapani.[468] 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 exaggerated,[469] it would be unwise to completely reject all of his information as implausible.

Finally, the *Ouchimereos* fortress, mentioned by Procopius,[470] has no precise location; most likely, it should be identified with the Motsameta fortress, near Kutaisi.[471]

2.2- The 7th century

For the 7th-century fortresses situated on the Eastern Black Sea coast, we have two sources written by people who visited this region in the 660s. These are the *Letter of Anastasius Apocrisiarius to Theodosius of Gangra*, written about 665 and partly preserved only in Latin, and the *Hypomnesticon* by Theodore Spoudaeus, compiled about 668.[472] Their compilation was provoked by the exile of St. Maximus the Confessor to *Lazica*: 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), the *synaxaria*,[473] and the Georgian translations of the lives and their *scholia*[474] do not contain further authentic information about the fortresses (see also below). Only the above-mentioned Epiphanius the Monk, in the early 9th century, says that *Chemarin* (identical to *Schemarin* from the 7th-century texts) lies on the way from *Susania*, *i. e*. *Souania*/Svaneti, to Alania; furthermore, he mentions the city of *Phousta* between Alania and *Sebastopolis* the Great in Abasgia.[475]

According to the *Letter* 4, after arriving in *Lazica*, Maximus was immediately separated from his companions and carried on a stretcher to the fortress Schemarin,

468 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 13, 15-20. See *Georgica*, vol. 3, 1936, p. 304-307.

469 See Braund 1991, p. 221-225.

470 *De bellis*, VIII, 14; VIII, 16.

471 Lanchava, Kartsidze 2009. On the location of the *Bouchloon* fortress mentioned by Agathias, see below; on the localization of *Trachea* see above, n. 413.

472 Edited by Allen, Neil 1999, p. 173-189; Allen, Neil 2002, p. 132-147.

473 Delehaye 1902, col. 409, 887, 910, 924.

474 See Кекелидзе 1912, p. 451-486; Khoperia 2009, p. 45-46; Larchet 2013.

475 Виноградов 2005b, p. 144-145, 312.

near the "people called Alans". He died there, 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). Anastasius Apocrisiarius was transferred later "to the regions of *Apsilia* and *Missimiania*", to the fortress of *Phousta* (*Letter* 6). Finally, he was transferred to same *Schemarin*, but at this moment the princeps of *Lazica* was overthrown, and the new princeps (Gregory, according to the *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 the monks".

Theodore Spoudaeus, who visited *Lazica* soon after the saints' deaths, confirms the existence of Maximus's tomb in Schemarin, referring to its *comes* called Mistrianus, 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 the 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 Abasgoi, who love Christ, and of the people of the Alans, about five miles from the 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 Lazi",[476] which is also evoqued but without a direct mention of his name in the *Letter* 7.

Let us clarify the localization of the above-mentioned toponyms from the *Letter* and the *Hypomnesticon* (for the map see **fig. 8**).

[476] ἐν κάστρῳ ἐπιλεγομένῳ Θουσούμης κειμένῳ ἀπάνω χωρίου Μόχοις, κλίματος Ἀψιλίας τέλους, κατ' ἀνατολὰς τῆς Ποντικῆς θαλάσσης, παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν πόδα τῶν Καυκασίων ὀρέων, πλησίον τῆς τῶν φιλοχρίστων Αβασγῶν χώρας καὶ τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Ἀλλανῶν, ὡς ἀπὸ σημείων πέντε τοῦ χωρίου Ζιχαχώρεως, ἤγουν τοῦ πρώτου οἴκου Γρηγορίου τοῦ ὄντως φιλοχρίστου πατρικίου καὶ μαγίστρου τῆς αὐτῆς τῶν Λαζῶν χώρας (Allen, Neil 1999, p. 203-205).

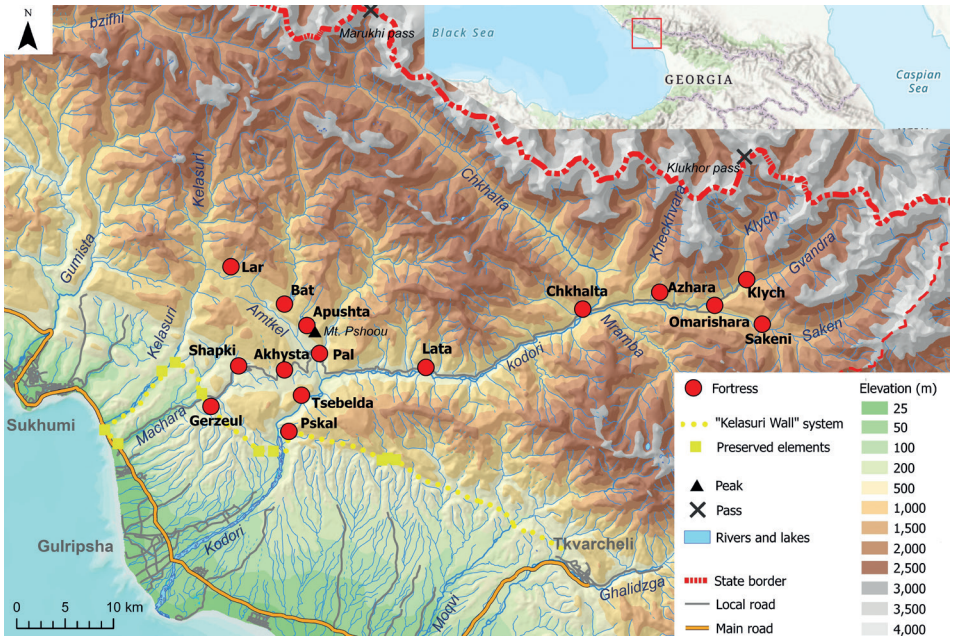

Figure 8: Map of the Byzantine fortresses of the 7th century.
Credits/source: A. Vinogradov, M. Elashvili.

A) The fortress *Boukolous* (identical with *Bouchloon* in Agathias),[477] located in *Missimiania* on the border with the Alans (*Letter* 4), where Anastasius Apocrisiarius was originally exiled, should be on the upper Kodori valley, which belonged to the Missimianoi. Since two sources mention it as a place of transit of the tribute to the Alans,[478] it must be close to a pass of 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),[479] means that it was near the Klukhor pass on the Klych river, where there is a Byzantine fortress with regular masonry of lime mortar, buttresses, and towers with stone vaults.[480] Its position corresponds exactly to the localization of *Boukolous* in the *Letter* 4: "on the borders of the Alans" (ἐν τοῖς μεθορίοις

[477] Agathias, *Histories*, III, 16.

[478] Agathias, *Histories*, III, 16, 9; *Letter* 4.

[479] Menander Protector, *De legationibus gentium ad Romanos*, 22.

[480] Воронов 1997, p. 332; 1998, p. 424.

τῶν λεγομένων Ἀλανῶν). This expression (ἐν τοῖς μεθορίοις) also suggests that *Boukolous* was closer to the Alans than *Schemarin*, described as "near (πλησίον) the Alans".

B) *Moukourisin* (Μουκουρίσιν) is apparently identical to Procopius's *Mocheresis* (Μοχηρήσις) and to Agathias's *Moucheirisis* (Μουχειρίσις). In Procopius,[481] it is the name of a region with the centre in *Kotais* (modern Kutaisi); in Agathias,[482] it is a fortress in the Rioni valley. The *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 Svaneti.[483] However, an 11th century Georgian *scholion* in the manuscript Tbilisi A-97 (see above) identifies the first fortress, remained anonymous, with fortress Muri. In this case, both Anastasii would have to have leaved from *Moukourisin* together upstream of Rioni to Muri and Takveri respectively. Their separation in *Moukourisin* speaks in favour of their different ways—upstream of Inguri and Rioni respectively.

D) The identification of the fortress *Thousoumes* and of the villages *Mochoes* and *Zichachoris* in the *Hypomnesticon* 5 (see above) depends upon their neighbourhood with the Alans, who were separated by *Missimiania* from *Apsilia*. *Zichachoris* was the first residence of the Lazican ruler. Therefore, we should search for it in *Apsilia*, and not faraway, in *Missimiania*. However, since this is clearly a Lazican name (from Jikha-khora, "house-fortress"),[484] we should recognise it as an important fortress of *Apsilia*, renamed by a Lazican ruler. From Agathias[485] we know that the upper boundary of Apsilia was controlled from the *Tibeleos* fortress (Τιβέλεος), identical to Procopius's *Tsibile* (Τζιβιλή) and reliably identified with the Tsebelda fortress.[486] Therefore, *Zichachoris* could not be located in the upper Kodori gorge and must be identified with one of the biggest fortresses of *Apsilia*: Tsebelda, Gerzeul or Shapky.

This identification is confirmed by the position of *Zichachoris* about 7.5 km from the fortress *Thousoumes*, which is located above the village of *Mochois*. Since there

481 Procopius, *De bellis*, VIII, 14, 54.

482 Agathias, *Histories*, II, 19.

483 Khrouchkova 2006, p. 57, without references and arguments identifies *Thakyria* with *Tsakhar-Sideron*, which completely contradicts to the *Letter* 4.

484 Ingorokva 1954, p. 132 (in Georgian). The form *Xichachoris*, often used in scholarship, goes back to an error in the Latin translation of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.

485 *Histories*, IV, 15, 5.

486 Воронов 1998, p. 415-421.

are no villages mentioned on the Kodori gorge, the *Mochoes* village should be on the coastal plain. If *Mochois* should be identified with the ancient village of Mokva,[487] the only candidate for the *Thousoumes* fortress above it would be the 6th century Achapara fortress. But there is no fortress which could be identical with *Zichachoris*, 7.5 km away from Achapara. The nearest major monuments, the Pskal and the Tsebelda fortresses, are more than 20 km away. In addition, according to this scenario, *Mochois* would be very far away from Abasgia. Therefore, this localization of *Mochois* should be rejected. We retain that *Mochois* could be any ancient settlement in the coastal plain and we search for a pair of fortresses at a distance of about 7.5 km from each other, one of which was a major centre (*Zichachoris*), and the other dominating the plain (*Thousoumes*). Only two pairs of fortresses correspond to this condition: Tsebelda—Shapky and Tsebelda—Gerzeul. Shapky and Gerzeul alone cannot be the pair of fortresses we are looking for, because the distance between them is significantly less, about 3 km. Logically, the residence of the Lazican ruler should be the largest centre of Apsilia, that is *Tsibile/Tibeleos*: Anastasius Apocrisiarius was there, near the house of the *patrikios* of Lazica, for about a year during his second imprisonment, according to the *Letter* 6. *Thousoumes*, "truly fitting for monks", can correspond both the Shapky and the Gerzeul fortresses, where there are also the churches.[488] In addition, this double possibility of localization of *Thousoumes* (at Gerzeul as well as at Shapky) perfectly corresponds to the indication of *Hypomnesticon* 5 that *Mochois* is "at the end of the climate of Apsilia [...] near the land of Abasgoi, who love Christ" (κλίματος Ἀψιλίας τέλους [...] πλησίον τῆς τῶν φιλοχρίστων Αβασγῶν χώρας): in fact, the territory of the Abasgoi was very close, behind the Kelasuri wall.[489]

In order to distinguish between the Shapky and the Gerzeul fortresses, we need to pay attention to Shapky's unique church-martyrium, rebuilt from a square building, with a shrine for relics to the left of a Π-shaped altar screen: this is the likely origin of the famous so-called Tsebelda screens with narrative reliefs (possibly dated to the 7th-8th centuries).[490] The church in the Gerzeul fortress was built only after 1000. Therefore, the Shapky church may be the burial place of St. Anastasius Apocrisiarius in *Thousoumes*, mentioned in the *Hypomnesticon* 5.

[487] Амичба, Папуашвили 1985, p. 58.

[488] Воронов 1998, p. 412-415.

[489] Метревели 2008, p. 108-112.

[490] Хрушкова 2002, p. 322-327.

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 the *Hypomnesticon* 5 (see above). This toponym was usually compared with the hydronym Kodori and located somewhere in the middle stream of the Kodori.[491] Therefore, the best candidate for *Skotorin* is the Pskal fortress near Tsebelda. However, against this localization of *Skotorin* speaks the mention of the neighbouring Abasgia in the *Letter* 4: as we saw above, this is how the *Thousoumes* fortress (to be identified with which should be Shapky or less probably with Gerzeul) is also described. Accordingly, the same two major Byzantine fortress here, Shapky or Gerzeul, as well as other smaller fortifications on the border with Abasgia (Lar, Bat and Akhysta) are candidates for the identification with *Skotorin*.[492]

F) The *Phousta* fortress should be somewhere on the upper or middle Kodori, because through it Epiphanius the Monk leads the apostle Andrew from Alania to *Sebastopolis* the Great. Epiphanius mentions the *Phoustoi* people,[493] whose name is obviously derived from the toponym *Phousta*;[494] the qualification of the place as a "city" is indicative of its importance. Furthermore, in the *Letter* 6, the unusual designation of a fortress by an ethnonym—*castrum Phustensium*—is used twice. The *Letter* 6 confirms the location of *Phousta* on the Kodori, in the "regions of Apsilia and Misimiania" (*ad partes Apsiliae et Mesimianae*). This points to its identification somewhere near the border of *Apsilia* and *Missimiania, i. e*. in the middle stream of the Kodori (while the other fortresses are located by the *Letter* as being either in Missimiania, near the Alans, or in *Apsilia*, near Abasgia). According to the *Letter* 7, on the road from *Phousta* to the mountainous *Schemarin*, Anastasius was "brought back" to *Thousoumes*, above the coastal plain (see above). In the *Letter* 6, Phousta's negative description contrasts with the positive characteristics of *Thousoumes*, located above the plain: this suggests that *Phousta* was a place hard to inhabit: apparently, a mountain fortress.

Among the fortresses in the upper and middle stream of the Kodori, there are not many candidates for such a significant role as that of the city of *Phousta*. 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 centuries, is not credible.

491 Khrouchkova 2006, p. 57, without references and arguments identifies *Skotorin* with Tsebelda fortress.

492 See Воронов 1998, p. 421-422.

493 Виноградов 2005b, p. 117, 287.

494 Like *Sousoi*—from misspelled *Sou[s]ania* (see above).

The same applies to *Tsibile*/Tsebelda (see above). On the Chkhalta and Saken rivers, there are no Byzantine fortresses, and on the Klych river, there is only one, most likely identical to *Bouchloon/Boukolous* (see above). The best candidate for *Phousta*, from a phonetic point of view, is Apushta, in the strategically important valley of the Amtkel river, where the road from Alania to Sebastopolis the Great deviates from Kodori to the west. However, this fortress is too small and primitive, as it was built without mortar:[495] therefore, it cannot be an important centre which gave the name to a people and would be a mandatory crossing point on the road from Alania to Sebastopolis, between the 7th and the 9th century. The ancient *Phousta* should be rather identified with 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 plain.[496] This fortress is located on the border of *Apsilia* and *Missimiania*, which began somewhere behind *Tsibile* (see above), at the rocks of Bagad, at the entrance to the Kodori gorge.[497] Accordingly, in the 7th-9th centuries, the term *Phustenses/Phoustoi* could refer to the population of the Amtkel and Machara valleys.

G) Researchers have actively searched for the location of *Schemarin*, where St. Maximus died and was buried. There are five hypotheses:

1. Moisej G. Dzhanashvili[498], Karl Gan[499] and Evgenija Alekseeva[500] 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 due to the absence of Byzantine or Lazican control over the Northern Caucasus, but also because the *Letter* 4 (in the passage about *Boukolous*) mentions *Schemerin* "near the Alans" (πλησίον τῶν Ἀλανῶν).[501]

[495] See Воронов 1998, p. 423.

[496] Ibid.

[497] *Georgica*, vol. 2.1, 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*.

[498] Джанашвили 1899, p. 11, n. 20.

[499] Ган 1909, p. 148.

[500] Алексеева 1971, p. 132.

[501] Cf. Бриллиантов 1922, p. 39.

The same applies to the attempt of identifying the *Phousta* fortress with the settlement Ulu-Dorbunlar, in the Kislovodsk basin.[502]

2. Aleksandr Brilliantov[503] identified *Schemarin* with the *Uchemereos* fortress (see above). However, in addition to the linguistic difficulties, the researcher also pointed out that Procopius's *Uchemereos* was near *Kotais*-Kutaisi. To correct this geographical stretch, Brilliantov tried to bring *Schemarion* closer to Muri in Lechkhumi; but this is also unacceptable (see below). This hypothesis was first supported by Vladimir Kuznetsov,[504] who changed his opinion later (see below).
3. An 11th century Georgian manuscript (Tbilisi A-97) mentions the Georgian names of the above-mentioned fortresses: Kotori for *Skotorin*, Bokeli for *Boukolous*, and the unnamed "fortress of Souania", which it identifies with the fortress Muri in Lechkhumi. Another Georgian manuscript (Tbilisi A-222, from the 12th century) contains on folio 440, opposite a cinnabar 12th century *scholion* which can be translated as follows: "The relics of saint Maxim are [...] near [...]eri" (**fig. 9**). In the middle of the *scholion*, its author tried to write two Greek words, that Korneli Kekelidze mistakenly read as "in the fortress Muri", and a beginning of the toponym which is now lost but that he arbitrarily reconstructed as Tsageri.[505] The first attempt to localize *Schemarin* in Lechkhumi and in the Lower Svaneti goes back to Vakhushti Bagrationi, who recorded a local tradition of the 18th century. In the scholarship, this localization subsists with three variations:
    a. the fortress Muri;[506]
    b. the fortress Takveri on the middle Rioni and Tskhenis-Tskali.[507] One must remember, however, that Takveri is a district and not a fortress, and that it is mentioned in *Letter* 4 under the name of *Thakyria* and not associated with *Schemarin*;
    c. Skemeri in Lentekhi[508]. Nonetheless, 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; it is not "near the Alans", because between Lechkhumi and Alania there is the Upper Svaneti region, where

[502] Коробов 2013, p. 137.

[503] Бриллиантов 1922.

[504] Кузнецов 1978, p. 34.

[505] Кекелидзе 1912, p. 35.

[506] Cf. Khoperia 2009, p. 39, n. 52.

[507] Чиковани 1971, p. 134-135.

[508] Калайджашвидли 2005, p. 232-245; Larchet 2013, p. 80-84.

the Alans have never lived; this is not on the way from Svaneti to Alania. In addition, *Thakyria*, clearly identified with Takveri-Lechkhumi, is described in the *Letter* 4 as being "near Iberia" and not "near Alania", unlike *Schemarin*.

4. The toponym Tskhmari, attested on the left bank of the river Inguri, in the community of Syupi/Swipi, determined Brilliantov to search for *Schemerin* in the Upper Svaneti region. Finally, Brilliantov rejected this identification, because this place was outside ancient Lazica.[509] However, the *Letter* 6 does not say that *Schemarin* was in *Lazica*, but only that it was under the control of the *patrikios* of *Lazica*, who also controlled areas outside *Lazica* itself: *Apsilia* and *Missimiania*. Moreover, the localization of *Schemarin* in the Upper Svaneti also corresponds to a position "near the Alans" and on the way from Svaneti to Alania (through one of the passes). The main objection against this localization is the fact that on the upper Inguri, or on the river Nenskra, no Byzantine fortress is attested, while *Schemarin* was a regular garrison, headed by a *comes*.
5. David Muskhelishvili[510] pointed to the toponym "Sgimar" on the Saken river (in the modern Ochamchire district of Abkhazia), which joins 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 the Saken lake,[511] which Voronov dated not later than the 9th or the 10th century.[512] The localization of *Schemarin* on the upper basin of the Kodori river corresponds at most to our sources (see below).

Schemarin/Chemarin cannot be neither on the Saken valley (see above), nor on the Chkhalta valley (due to the lack of fortresses) nor on the Klych valley (the only Byzantine fortress there must be identified with *Bouchloon/Boukolous*; this was said to be closer to the Alans than *Schemarin*, see above). *Schemarin/Chemarin* must be on the middle and or the upper stream of the Kodori river, above Apushta-*Phousta*, around the Dal gorge, because the exile of Anastasius from *Phousta* to the mountainous *Schemarin* is described in the *Letter* 6 as a crime.

509 Бриллиантов 1922, p. 38-39.

510 Очерки, II, 1988, p. 387.

511 Кузнецов 2002, p. 30-32.

512 Воронов 1997, p. 333.

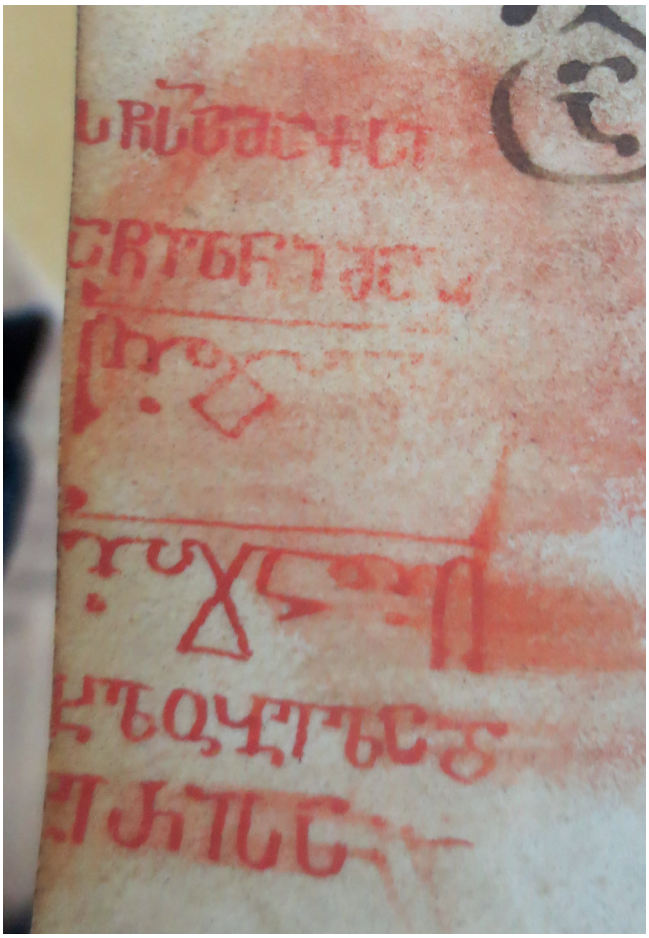

Figure 9: Scholion in the manuscript Tbilisi A-222, f. 440.
Credits/source: curtesy of B. Kudava.

The closeness of *Schemarin* to the Alans and to the "peak of the Caucasus" is a strong argument for restraining the search to the upper Kodori river. Here, the Lata fortress was too small for a garrison, headed by a *comes*; moreover, its construction is dated to the 11th-14th centuries.[513] The same applies to the Azhara fortress.[514] In

[513] Воронов 1997, p. 328.

[514] Воронов 1998, p. 423-424.

addition, they do not fit the description of *Schemarin* as a point on the way from Svaneti to Alania through the Nenskra gorge and the upper Kodori: a traveller would have to leave the road and get down the Kodori river in order to reach them. Moreover, the identification of *Schemarin* with the fortress of Chkhalta is theoretically possible, but Chkhalta is probably *Tsakhar*/*Sideron* (see above).

More suitable for the identification of the *Schemarin* is the Omarishara fortress at the confluence of Gvandra and Klych.[515] Here the ruins present a masonry with lime mortar; there are also the remains of a church, where later (in the early 9th century) the relics of St. Maximus might be revered. The Omarishara fortress is also situated on the way from Svaneti to Alania through the Nenskra gorge, close to the "peak of the Caucasus" (that Theodore Spoudaeus could not reach during winter, due to the high altitude), near the Alans. The "night-watch" of the *comes* of *Schemarin* can therefore be easily understood: when the neighbouring *Boukolous*/Klych fortress was occupied by the Alans, the *Schemarin*-Omarishara fortress became the main guarding point on the edge of the Byzantine possessions on the Kodori river valley. The absence of a toponym similar to the ancient *Schemarin* here can be easily explained by the multiple changes of the population in the Dal region. Yet, if the toponym *Schemarin* derives from the Svanian word "sgimar", which means "mineral springs", it could have been given to this place in the time of the Missimianoi (relatives of the Svans), due to the existence of mineral springs about 4 km from Omarishara.[516]

Conclusion

Most of the Byzantine fortresses, mentioned in 7th century sources, must be 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. This research shows that not all the sources on the toponyms of the Eastern Euxine Pontus are fully understood. New discoveries and corrections are possible, especially through the comparison of ancient texts and archaeological surveys, in less studied but more complex in-between regions.

[515] Воронов 1997, p. 331-332; on his map (fig. 1), this it mistakenly placed at the confluence of rivers Gvandra and Saken.

[516] Бондарев 1981.

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BHG = Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca, ed. F. Halkin, Brussels, 1957 [3rd ed., repr. 1969].

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