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## Bacurius, the Man with Two Faces

Nicolas Preud'Homme

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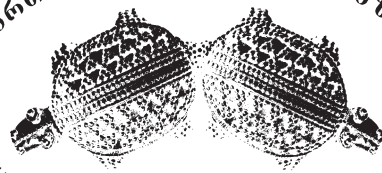
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GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

# იბერია-კოლხეთი

საქართველოს კლასიკური და ადრემედიევური პერიოდის  
არქეოლოგიურ-ისტორიული კვლევანი

## IBERIA - COLCHIS

Researches on the Archaeology and History of Georgia  
in the Classical and Early Medieval Period



№ 13

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GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM  
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## BACURIUS, THE MAN WITH TWO FACES

Nicolas J. Preud'homme

(Sorbonne Université, Paris)<sup>1</sup>

With Peter the Iberian, Bacurius can be considered among the most famous of the emigrants from Iberia in the Roman Empire. However, the tracks that this character left in various sources have not removed many uncertainties, as evidenced by the high hypothetical content of sometimes-divergent positions held by historiography in his regard. Understanding who Bacurius was is crucial to trace the origins of Christianization in K'art'li, not only because of the story about the Iberian king's conversion that this man would have conveyed to Rufinus of Aquileia, but also for considering the movement of men and ideas, the operation of ethnic or religious community networks transcending the borders of the Late-Antique world.

Due to their late writing, the Georgian chronicles of the *K'art'lis C'xovreba* and the *Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay* tell us much more about K'art'velian society from the beginning of the Bagratid era (8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> century) than about ancient Iberia. A careful approach would keep scholars from the temptation of taking at face value the as detailed as romanticized accounts of the medieval chronicles written around half a millennium after evoked events. However, these medieval sources have conserved the traces of a pre-Bagratid past colored by Iranian culture and vague reminiscences of ancient royal annals and court oral traditions. A patient work of erudition crossing various sources should bring out this nutshell of truth from its coating of rewriting and extrapolations; despite being unable to reconstitute a clear account of indubitable facts, it is nevertheless liable to generate fruitful hypotheses and refute false truths generated by hasty and partial statements.

### I. – The king without a throne: Bacurius, the Iberian monarchy and the bidaxšate of Gugark' / Somxit'i

1) « Little King » Bacurius

#### a) Hypotheses for identifying Bacurius with a King Bakur

Called *gentis ipsius rex* by Rufinus of Aquileia<sup>2</sup> and βασιλίσκος by Socrates of Constantinople<sup>3</sup>, Bacurius was commonly identified by scholars with an Iberian sovereign whose rule would have been roughly contemporary with the years when Rufinus of Aquileia composed his ecclesiastical history. If we put aside the testimony of Themistius, Rufinus is indeed our first source to mention namely this royal function for Bacurius. The kingly title appears first in the presentation that Rufinus made of this character, before those of *comes domesticorum* and *dux* of the *limes* in Palestine. For Françoise Thelamon, the order in which Rufinus lists the various functions of Bacurius would indicate the stages of his career back in time; as a result, it would seem logical to admit that Bacurius is king of Iberia at the beginning of the fifth century, at the time when Rufinus was writing<sup>4</sup>. For further evidence of this opinion, Françoise Thelamon relies on an excerpt from the biography of Maštoc', written by his

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my special thanks to Jean-Yves Preud'homme and Victoria Davidson for their help in translating this paper. Revised and corrected working paper dated October 25, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Rufinus of Aquileia, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 10 / §236.

<sup>3</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 20, 20.

<sup>4</sup> THELAMON F. 1981: 94.

disciple Koriwn in the fifth century. Koriwn asserts that his master, supposed to have been the inventor of Armenian writing, would have also developed an alphabet for the K'art'velians with the help of the "King Bakur" (t'agawor [...] Bakur, բազաւոր [...] Բաւոր), Movsēs, "the bishop of the country" (episkopos ašxarhin, եպիսկոպոս աշխարհին), and a K'art'velian translator named Ĵaļay<sup>5</sup>. The hypothesis of Bacurius' identification with King Bakur in Koriwn is attractive insofar as it establishes a continuity between a Bacurius delivering the story of the conversion of Iberia to Christianity, and a king Bakur devoted to the conversion of his countrymen. However, this idea meets serious flaws of consistency both in chronological matters and in the prosopography of Bacurius' / Bak[k]ourios' / Bakur's apparitions in our sources. Two counterarguments can thus be advanced at this position, one based on the Caucasian sources, Koriwn and two Georgian chronicles, *Royal List II* and the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, which can also be crossed with the Syriac version of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, whereas another objection is based on the review of two Greek accounts, the *New History* of Zosimus and the *Ecclesiastical History* written by Socrates of Constantinople.

#### b) Bacurius, Bak'ar I, Aspacures, Bakur and Varaz-Bak'ar

A first issue is about the identity of King Bakur mentioned by Koriwn and the dating of his reign. As potential candidates, the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* refers to two sovereigns: Bak'ar I (r. 361 / 363-365?), who was Mirian's son, and Varaz-Bak'ar (r.380-394?). This first Bak'ar, known to be a devout Christian, comes too early, however, to coincide with the mission of Maštoc', and his death allegedly placed during the second half of the fourth century prevents any identification with Bacurius in Rufinus.

Another Iberian character of the fourth century is alike, at least by name, to Bacurius: the Iberian King Aspacures. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, in 368 AD approximately, the Persians succeeded in overthrowing the pro-Roman king of Iberia, Sauromaces, and replaced him by his cousin Aspacures. The involvement of the *comes* and *dux Armeniae* Terentius with twenty legions for Sauromaces gave rise to an artificial division of Iberia into two kingdoms, separated by the river Kura / Mtkvari: to the west, the area under Roman influence, in the east, the area under Persian influence. This situation continued until the Persian candidate managed to bring together the two territories under his thumb, towards the end of 370<sup>6</sup>.

This conflict between Sauromaces and Aspacures known in Ammianus Marcellinus doesn't explicitly appear in the Georgian chronicle *Life of the Kings*, but this medieval tale seems to have kept certain traits. There are indeed some interesting details: on the one hand, the name of Bak'ar is not so far from that of Aspacures (Varaz-Bakur?); like the latter, Bak'ar appears as an ally of Iran and is facing competition from one of his parents, supported by the Armenians. Moreover, the bidaxšate of Gugark' / Somxit'i, territory held by P'eroz and his heirs, is once again involved in these rivalries, since this territory was profoundly reshaped by this struggle of influences between supporters of Bak'ar and those led by Rev's son. If the partition of Iberia to which Ammianus Marcellinus referred does not appear here, then we note an exchange of territories which strengthens the control of the Iberian king on his eastern borders: Bak'ar, allied with the Iranians, received from the *bidaxš*<sup>7</sup> the territory of Ran

<sup>5</sup> Koriwn, *Life of Maštoc'*, XV, 1-2. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 73.

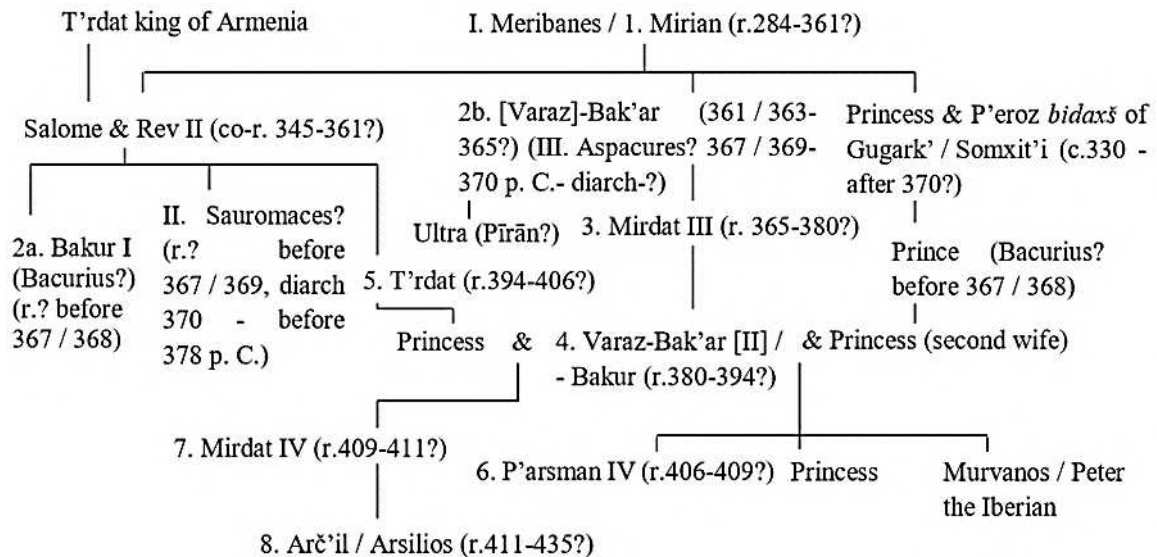
<sup>6</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 12, 16-17 and XXX, 2, 2; *Epic Histories*, V, 15; Themistius, *Speeches*, XI, 149 b.

<sup>7</sup> The word *bidaxš* is a Pahlavi form finding its equivalents in other languages: *vitaxa* in Latin, *pitiaxēs* in Greek, *piṭahš* in Aramaic, *bdeaxš* in Armenian, *pitiaxši* in Georgian, *ṗtaḥšā* in Syriac and *bit'qas* in Arabic. The function of *bidaxš* was equivalent to that of a marcher-lord, or in other cases of a commandant of army occupying the second rank in kingdoms nourished by Iranian culture. Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 3, 6; RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 62-71; TOUMANOFF C. 1963: 154-158, 183-192, 260-264, 467-475.



confining to Albania, while the guardian of the marchland acquired in exchange a territory ranging from Samšwlde to Aboc'i, located further to the west, at the borders of Armenia. The *šāhan šāh* as well as the Roman emperor allegedly involved themselves in the resolution of the conflict that vaguely reminds of the diplomatic game between Valens and Šāpūr II in the years 368-378. It seems plausible to identify this Bak'ar's nephew with Sauromaces, and Bak'ar with Aspacures, even if strong contradictions exist in comparison to Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 1 – Family tree of the early Mihranid-Chosroid kings of Iberia**



Alleged dates for K'art'velian sovereigns are very hypothetical and speculative. TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 21-28; TOUMANOFF C. 1990: 377-378; RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 385-387 (with modifications).

Reserves can be expressed to qualify such identification of the conflict between Bak'ar and his nephew with the rivalry between Aspacures and Sauromaces. The *Life of the Successors of Mirian* offers indeed a more complex picture, in which Bak'ar must face not only the claims of Rev's son, but also other nephews who aren't named in this source. Precisely, the territory that receive Bak'ar's nephews, the country of Kuxet'i, is located in modern Eastern Georgia, between the rivers Iori and Alazani. Furthermore, these nephews have the title of *erist'avi*, and not the royal one. The city of Rust'avi where these princes are supposed to reside is located between the capital of Armazi-Mc'xet'a in the north and the bidaxšate of Gugark' / Somxit'i in the south, combined with the Iberian king. Therefore, it is unlikely

<sup>8</sup> I share this assumption of identifying Bak'ar and Aspacures with TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 24-26. However, there are limits to this identification. Ammianus Marcellinus argues that Sauromaces reigned on the throne of Iberia until Aspacures usurps the throne, while the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* made Bak'ar the only legitimate sovereign. Cyril TOUMANOFF suggests the existence of a reign of Sauromaces (r. 361-363, co-r. 370-378) obliterated by the editor of this chronicle of the *K'art'lis C'xovreba* who had interest to hide Aspacures / Bak'ar's usurpation and the poor image resulting from this conflict between the first successors to Mirian, who were supposed to have been pious Christians. About the fact that Bak'ar and the son of Rev were respectively uncle and nephew, and not cousins as in the case of Aspacures and Sauromaces, Cyril TOUMANOFF gives further reason to Ammianus Marcellinus and guess a fault also attributable to the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, whose redactor would have confused the relationship between Sauromaces and Bak'ar with the cousinship between Sauromaces and Mirdat III (r.365-380?), who had meanwhile succeeded his father Bak'ar. This hypothesis supposes that Sauromaces was diarch with the son of Aspacures / Bak'ar, an idea that Ammianus Marcellinus does not support. Is also a difficulty to reconcile in chronology the reigns of Mirian, Bak'ar and Mirdat III in the *K'art'lis C'xovreba* with data from ancient sources. It is difficult to believe that Mirdat III had succeeded his father Bak'ar by 365 since Aspacures is mentioned in 370 by Ammianus Marcellinus.

to see the kingdom of Sauromaces there as described by Ammianus Marcellinus, as this account of the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* mentions no Roman military intervention.

Varaz-Bak'ar's portrait (allegedly r.380-394) dressed in the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* is hardly comparable to those of Bacurius in Rufinus as well as of Bakur in Koriwn. Varaz-Bak'ar is indeed described as “*an impious (urcmuno, ურწმუნო) man and a hater of [the] religion (možule sʒulisa, მოძულე სჯულისა)*”<sup>9</sup>. Fearing the reaction of his subjects, Varaz-Bak'ar would have hidden his apostasy from them. However, he did not care to build new churches or to adorn the already existing ones. In punishment for his sins, the Sasanians invaded the country. Varaz-Bak'ar ignored the advice of his nobles and an alliance proposed by the king of Armenia; he fled to Kaxet'i and was forced to yield territories around Albania to Iran, i. e. the Ran and the Movakani. Having lost its legitimacy, the king had to deal with a revolt of the inhabitants of Klarjet'i, who then turned to the Romans. Varaz-Bak'ar thereby also lost territories in the south-west of K'art'li<sup>10</sup>. No stay in the Roman Empire is mentioned for this king, whose reign spans the period when Bacurius held high office in the imperial army. Both paths are consequently distinct.

Nor can Varaz-Bak'ar be identified with Bakur in Koriwn. In addition to their obvious differences of religious policy, details concerning the prelates who ruled during their reigns are disjointed. Georgian sources indeed mention no prelate named Movsēs for the reigns of Bak'ar I and Varaz-Bak'ar. For the rule of this last, the *Royal List II* refers only to an archbishop whose name is Iov / Iob, whereas under Bakur, Rev's son, prelates Iovane and Iakob were ruling the K'art'velian Church<sup>11</sup>. In the Georgian version of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, a Varaz-Bakur appears as a Christian king of K'art'li in the time of Theodosius II (r.408-450)<sup>12</sup>. This Varaz-Bakur described as a fervent lover of the faith can hardly be identified with impious Varaz-Bak'ar, nor with the other kings described in the *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, because none of them contains a resembling name<sup>13</sup>. However, indications delivered by Syriac version of Peter the Iberian's *vita* can allow to identify this Varaz-Bakur with Bakurios, King Arč'il / Arsilios' brother, whose reign (allegedly 411-435) was contemporary with Theodosius II.

### c) About Peter the Iberian's genealogy

Neither *Royal List II* nor the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* mention specifically any character resembling Bacurius by name. The key to solving this problem is to be found in the hagiography of Peter the Iberian (c. 413 / 417-491), whose Syriac version, in its beginning, traces the genealogy of this holy man<sup>14</sup>. This Syriac *vita* identifies Bakurios as the maternal grandfather of Peter the Iberian and as the brother of the Iberian King Arsilios. Jean-Pierre Mahé supposes from this source that King Arsilios and his brother Bakurios were probably coregents, the latter exercising royal functions without having

<sup>9</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŞVILI ed.: 135<sub>23</sub> = R. W. THOMSON transl.: 149. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 267.

<sup>10</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŞVILI ed.: 135<sub>23</sub>-137<sub>6</sub>.

<sup>11</sup> *Royal List II (Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay)*, I. ABULAŽE ed.: 91<sub>15-19</sub>; 91<sub>37-92</sub> = C. B. LERNER transl.: 146-147.

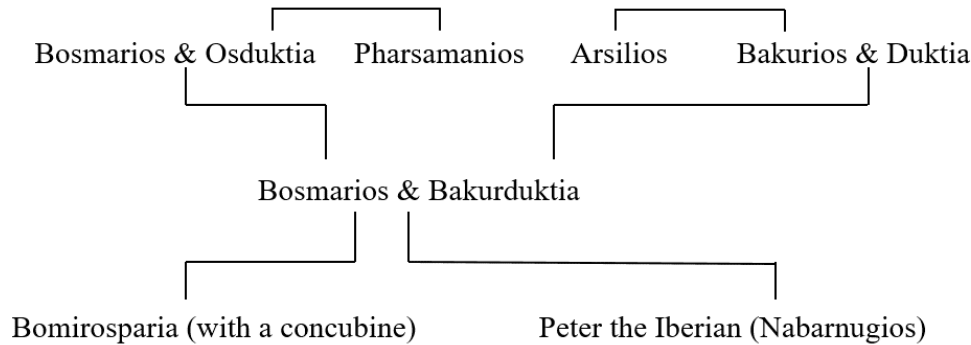
<sup>12</sup> *Life of Peter the Iberian (Georgian)*, II, I. ABULAŽE ed.: 215<sub>5-17</sub>, in the variants Ц and Ч. However, this document presents Varaz-Bakur as “*the fifth king since Mirian's reign*” (“მეოთხე მეფე იყო ესე მირიან მეფობითგან”), while in the *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, Varaz-Bak'ar's reign appears in fourth position from Mirian.

<sup>13</sup> In *Royal List II* however (I. ABULAŽE ed.: 91<sub>15-29</sub> and 92<sub>12-17</sub> = C. B. LERNER transl.: 146-147), two Mihranids called Bakur appear: the first one instead of Bak'ar, the other one in fifth position from Mirian, after Bakur, T'rdat and Varaz-Bakur (i.e. Varaz-Bak'ar) successively, and before P'arsman IV. Even if this last Bakur doesn't appear jointly with King Arč'il, his presence could be reminiscent of this pious Varaz-Bakur or of Bakurios, Arsilios' brother, appearing respectively in the Georgian and Syriac versions of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*.

<sup>14</sup> John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian (Syriac)*: §6-7, C. B. HORN and R. R. PHENIX Jr. ed.: 6-9.

the corresponding title. It would explain the fact that Koriwn places the teaching of Maštoc‘ both under the reign of Bakurios and under the reign of Arjiwł / Arsilios / Arč’il<sup>15</sup>. However, the pieces of information provided by the silver dish of Bori, with an Aramaic inscription found mentioning “*Buzmihr, the good bidaxš*”, are of little use here because the object has been dated to the third century of our era, thus preventing this Buzmihr to be the father or even the grandfather of Peter the Iberian<sup>16</sup>. It is also unclear whether the Buzmihr mentioned on this dish of Bori was a *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K’art’velian marchland or another dynast.

**Figure 2 – The genealogy of Nabarnugios based on the *Life of Peter the Iberian* (Syriac)**



John Rufus, C. B. HORN and R. R. PHENIX Jr. ed., 2008, p.LXXXV (slightly modified).

The timing problem of the possible reign of Bakurios joint with those of his brothers Arsilios and Bosmario still remains, with the prelature of Movsēs supposed to be contemporary. However, the K’art’velian sources don’t mention any prelate named Movsēs for Arč’il’s reign. We can certainly take this data with suspicion, considering that many genealogical details of the *Life of Maštoc‘* and the *Life of Peter the Iberian* are actually wrong<sup>17</sup>. There is, however, an alternative to the hypercritical posture, namely that Koriwn would have inserted a prelature of Movsēs between those of Swm[e]on and Iona, roughly between 410 and 425<sup>18</sup>.

This Bakurios would have been, according to the Syriac version of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, the first Christian sovereign of the kingdom<sup>19</sup>, in contrast to the Georgian tradition attributing this title to Mirian (r. 284-361?). On this point Bernard Flusin gives his interpretation: for Christian history in

<sup>15</sup> Koriwn, *Life of Maštoc‘*, XV, 1; XVIII, 2; J.-P. MAHÉ transl. 2005-2007: 78, n.151; 83, n.190. Movsēs Xorenac‘i, *History of Armenia*, III, 60 = A. and J.-P. MAHÉ transl.: 309, also mentions an Ardzil, king ruling over the land of Virk‘ (Iberia) at the time when Mesrop / Maštoc‘ sent his students to Constantinople as well as to Edessa to translate Greek works and Syriac into Armenian. MAHÉ J.-P. 2005-2007: 78 n.151 regards Bosmarios as a younger brother of Bakurios and Arč’il. However, the *Life of Peter the Iberian* (Syriac), §7, mentions only Arsilios as Bakurios’ brother. This Bosmarios, i. e. Nabarnugios’ paternal grandfather, appears in fact as the foster brother or at least as a fellow of Arsilios and Bakurios.

<sup>16</sup> TOUMANOFF C. 1963: 260-261. About the dish of Bori, see GIORGADZE G. 2008: 255; BURNEY C. A. and LANG D. M. 1971: 227-228. However, the description of royal figures in the hagiography of Peter the Iberian is very unprecise, creating confusion between the institution of the *marzban* and the *bidaxš*. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 75.

<sup>17</sup> TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 33. Following the hypothesis expressed in DJOBADZE W. Z. 1976: 63 n. 2, Bakur would have abandoned arianism for the Nicene orthodoxy, for which he received from Nicaean people the recognition of first Christian king in K’art’li; however, no source supports this assumption.

<sup>18</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2003: 329 n. 67.

<sup>19</sup> *Life of Peter the Iberian* (Syriac), §6, 7 and 11: this latter chapter identifies “*the great Bakurios*” as “*the first Christian king of the Iberians*” = C. B. HORN and R. R. PHENIX Jr. ed.: 13. As the conversion of P’eroz took place under the reign of Bak’ar during his *bidaxšate*, we can say that Bakurios could be the first *bidaxš* to have been a Christian since his accession to the post. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 74-75.

Iberia, the fact that Bakur the Great (or Bakurios) can be presented as the first Christian king of the Iberians seems to imply that between the converted king whom Bacurios recalls (and who would be later identified with Mirian), and, on the other hand, the grandfather of Peter the Iberian reigning at the beginning of the fifth century, several non-Christian rulers could be inserted: in particular, without doubt, Pharsamanios, Peter's great-uncle<sup>20</sup>. Bernard Flusin is so partisan of an identification of Bacurios' lineage to that of the kings of Mc'xet'a. The challenge is therefore to test the compatibility of this genealogy compared to the data given in the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*.

Actually, most of the names given in the Syriac version of the *Life of Peter the Iberian* are not in the narrative of the *Life of K'art'li*. Certainly, two names of kings in Mc'xet'a can be corroborated: Arsilios, maternal grandfather of Peter the Iberian, with Arč'il, and maybe the great-uncle of Peter the Iberian, Pharsamanios, with King P'arsman IV in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*. However, no Bosmarios / Buzmihr indeed seems to have been king of Iberia at the end of the fourth or in early fifth century, from the indications of this compilation of chronicles; in addition, King Mirdat V, son and successor to the throne of Arč'il, also no longer appears in the genealogy of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*.

Three deductions are to be drawn from this genealogical investigation. On the one hand, if Peter the Iberian's great-uncle was King Arč'il, the saint would be descended through him from Mirian. On the other hand, if one accepts the identification of Pharsamanios with P'arsman IV<sup>21</sup>, then Peter the Iberian would be a descendant of the *bidaxš* P'eroz, the first of these leaders in the Armeno-K'art'velian marchland of Gugark' / Somxit'i to have accepted Christianity. Accordingly, Bosmarios and Bakurios would be members of one or several younger branches of the dynasty of the Chosroids-Mihranids, and their kingship on the Iberians would not affect the monarchy of Mc'xet'a, but rather their princely sovereignty in the Gugark' / Somxit'i marchland.

## 2) Was Bacurios the *bidaxš* of the Gugark' / Somxit'i marchland?

Several sources considered as kings dynasts who had not the title strictly speaking. Bacurios can be placed in this category of almost-kings owing to these fluctuations in the designation of his royal title through Greek and Latin sources. Indeed, the man called *rex* in Rufinus of Aquileia, and *basiliskos* in Socrates of Constantinople and Theodore the Reader, gets no royal title in the Anonymous (Pseudo-Gelasius) of Cyzicus, who noted, however, that Bacurios was “*the most illustrious of the royal family of these Iberians*” (τοῦ βασιλικοῦ γένους τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς Ἰβήρων περιφανέστατος)<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, the study of Peter the Iberian's genealogy suggests familial ties between the rulers of Mc'xet'a and the *bidaxš* of Somxit'i / Gugark'. The fact that Zosimus describes that Bacurios is native from a family of Armenia (ἐξ Ἀρμενίας τὸ γένος)<sup>23</sup> could thus refer to a possible homeland of Bacurios in the Armeno-K'art'velian marchland<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> FLUSIN B. 1991: 366.

<sup>21</sup> P'arsman IV was the eldest son of Varaz-Bak'ar and the grandson of P'eroz, who was Mirian's co-regent and alleged *bidaxš* of Gugark' / Somxit'i. *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'ISVILI ed., 137<sup>18</sup>-138<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous of Cyzicus (Pseudo-Gelasius), *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 10, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, IV, 57, 3.

<sup>24</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 73. This region was called Somxit'i, the marchland of Armenia by K'art'velians, and Gugark', marchland of Virk' or Iberia, by the Armenians. Accordingly, for a K'art'velian, Bacurios came from the marchland of Armenia. According to the hypothesis (unlikely in my opinion) that Bacurios would be the keeper of this marchland, this character should, however, not be confused with another *bidaxš* named Bakur, Armenian well this time, but in another border territory, Aĭjnik' located southwest of Armenia, bordering with Syria. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of Armenia*, III, 4 = A. and J.-P. MAHÉ transl.: 252, reports indeed during the reign of

In terms of chronology and genealogy, Stephen H. Rapp Jr. believes that after 394 Bacurius was invested as *bidaxš* of the Armeno-K'art'velian marchland and that he reigned there until after 430<sup>25</sup>. Cyril Toumanoff considers for his part that Bacurius had arrived at the head of this Gugark' / Somxit'i marchland after 394<sup>26</sup>, and even identifies him as the son of the *bidaxš* P'eroz, first of these marchland leaders to have accepted Christian faith<sup>27</sup>. We'll see below the impossibility of this assignment insofar as Bacurius seems effectively to have died at the Battle of the Frigidus on 5 and 6 September 394.

### 3) *Bacurius, grandson of Mirian?*

A last possibility would be to identify Bacurius with Rev's son<sup>28</sup>, using an excerpt from the *Royal List II* (in *Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay*) where it is written that after the death of Mirian, "*Bakur, the son of Rev, sat upon the throne*"<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, according to *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, the first successor of Mirian was Bak'ar, another of his sons, Rev's brother<sup>30</sup>. The difference between the two documents can certainly be explained by confusion over one of them<sup>31</sup>, but it is also possible to attribute this contradiction to the actual existence of a Bakur, son of Rev, who would have been called to the Iberian throne but who would have been then supplanted by his uncle Bak'ar. According to the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, Bak'ar's affirmation for royal power had caused a rallying of the *bidaxš* ruling on Somxit'i / Gugark', P'eroz, to oppose the machinations of the Armenian king willing to impose on the Iberian throne Bak'ar's nephew, the son of Rev, related by his mother Salome at T'rdat the Arsacid king of Armenia<sup>32</sup>. The *Life of the Successors of Mirian* is silent on what happened to Rev's son, even if it refers to other Bak'ar nephews who would have been settled at Rust'avi as *erist'avis* with a government in Kuxet'i<sup>33</sup>. This source is also silent on Sauromaces, who could have been among the contenders for the throne supported by Armenians in the dynastic conflict between them and Bak'ar.

Could this pretender to the throne who remains anonymous in the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* find his name in *Royal List II*, thus identifying Bakur, son of Rev, to this Iberian ruler who would not have reigned? If this is the case, the identification of this Bakur with Bacurius would likely be true.

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Constantius the revolt of this *bidaxš* wishing to defend his autonomy, which led him to join the *šāhan šāh*. This pro-Iranian orientation allows to differentiate this Bakur from a pro-Roman Bacurius.

<sup>25</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 74.

<sup>26</sup> TOUMANOFF C. 1971: 133, n. 90.

<sup>27</sup> TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 32. The daughter of Mirian would have been the mother of Bacurius according to this hypothesis. No direct evidence does, however, support this possibility which operates a conjecture from the silence of the sources about the identity of the *bidaxš* ruling Armeno-K'art'velian borderland, between P'eroz, still alive during the reign of Bak'ar, and Bakurius in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, living during the first decades of the fifth century.

<sup>28</sup> Rev II, son of Mirian, co-regent with his father from 345 to 361, according to TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 24, and RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 386.

<sup>29</sup> *Royal List II (Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay)*, I. ABULAŽE ed.: 91<sub>15-16</sub>, variant Ц : « და დაჯდა მფვედ ბაკურ, ძე ზგობო »; LERNER C. B. 2004: 146 (*Conversion of K'art'li*, A I, 3); RAPP S. H. Jr. 2003: 303.

<sup>30</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŠVILI ed., 130<sub>18-1312</sub>.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the *Royal List II* doesn't mention any removal of Bakur and seems to assimilate him completely with Bak'ar, since it attributed to Bakur the construction of the church of Cilkani that started Bak'ar in the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*. It is possible to assert that the *Royal List II* deals with Bak'ar under the name of Bakur, attributing wrong ancestry to Bak'ar. This is the choice apparently adopted by TOUMANOFF C. 1969: 26. However it seems that the *Royal List II* had in view a character who occupied a distinct dynastic place from Bak'ar, as it is for the Iberian king T'rdat (r.394-406?) the brother of Bakur; now the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* considers T'rdat as another son of Rev, which corresponds entirely with the *Royal List II*. There was therefore a lineage from Rev able to take the succession to the Iberian throne at the expense of the lineage of Bak'ar. *Royal List II (Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay)*, I. ABULAŽE ed.: 91<sub>15-29</sub> = C. B. LERNER transl.: 146; *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŠVILI ed.: 131<sub>8-11</sub> = R. W. THOMSON transl.: 147.

<sup>32</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŠVILI ed.: 130<sub>18-1316</sub>.

<sup>33</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŠVILI ed.: 131<sub>7-8</sub>.

Once removed from the throne, despite the support brought to him by the King of Armenia, Bacurius would have given up his claims and integrated the Roman army to start a military career in the service of the Emperor Valens, leaving Sauromaces, probably one of his parents, the role of a suitor assigned by the Romans.

Although the identification of Bacurius with the son of Rev, and thus nephew of Bak'ar, remains fragile, we know the context in which Bacurius was forced into exile out of Iberia seems to be sufficient to exclude the possibility of making the latter the *bidaxš* of Gugark' / Somxit'i. At the time of Bak'ar's advent, the *Life of the Successors of Mirian* seems to suggest that P'eroz occupied this function<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, the party of P'eroz consisted in staunch support for the cause of Bak'ar. If the latter is identifiable with Aspacures, the *bidaxš*'s position would be that of an enemy of the pro-Roman party and of Sauromaces. As a result, it is difficult to consider that Bacurius was present (or at least remained) in the entourage of P'eroz. In the absence of more specific sources on the functions occupied by different dynasties of Mc'xet'a and Gugark' / Somxit'i at the end of the 360's, it is impossible to determine with certainty if Bacurius held, prior to his departure from Iberia, a position of king or royal heir, *bidaxš*, or the *bidaxš*'s heir, of *erist'avi* or a simple suitor without title.

Whether Bacurius was a prince or even king, his office in Iberia could take place only before the arrival in imperial territory of this character in 367 or early 368, date from the beginning of his career in the Roman army. Gugark' / Somxit'i, territory located at the edge of Armenia, and passed to the fourth century under the obedience of the monarchy of Mc'xet'a, was indeed able to be assimilated by the penchant sources to a Caucasian kingdom. Its marchland situation could justify that Greek and Latin sources have placed the homeland of Bacurius sometimes in Iberia (Rufinus of Aquileia), sometimes in Armenia (Zosimus)<sup>35</sup>. In any case, this prestigious ancestry would have thus allowed Bacurius to assume a kingly title, or at least almost kingly. Bacurius' death at the Battle of the Frigidus (5 and 6 September 394), deducted from the indications of Zosimus crossed with those of Socrates of Constantinople, allows to disprove the hypotheses identifying Bacurius with the more or less homonymous Iberian kings and princes living in the first decades of the fifth century.

The rivalry between monarchy and *bidaxšate*, inconspicuous in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* as in the first chronicles of the *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, can be nevertheless invoked to explain the silence of the Georgian Chronicles on Bacurius; they are indeed pro-royal and so very reluctant to tell the high points of this almost-king prince. It was therefore in another context, in the Roman East, that Bacurius' name entered history.

## II. – Bacurius at the service of the Empire: an Iberian network in the Roman army

### 1) *The Iberians in the imperial army*

Contemporary with the time when Rufinus of Aquileia was writing his *Ecclesiastical History*, several testimonies dating back to the turn of the fourth and the fifth century allow to detect an Iberian presence in the Roman army, a phenomenon not only visible in the auxiliary body formed according to

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<sup>34</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K'art'lis C'xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ'İŞVILI ed., 131<sub>1</sub>. = R. W. THOMSON transl.: 146.

<sup>35</sup> Another hypothesis to explain the Armenian origin of Bacurius in Zosimus would be to see a closeness of this man with the court of Armenia, which could support him against his pro-Iran rivals from Iberia before his departure to the Empire. If Bacurius can be identified with hypothetical Bakur I, son of Salome and Rev, and therefore grandson of Trdat the Arsacid by his mother, he would be a half-Armenian prince by his origins.

an ethnic factor, but also attested through the individual careers of a few senior officers who climbed the ladder of the hierarchy of dignities<sup>36</sup>.

#### a) Iberian auxiliary troops

The speech n. 15 of Themistius, pronounced January 19, 381 in front of the Senate of Constantinople, for the second anniversary of Theodosius' advent, is the first explicit testimony of the presence of Armenians and Iberians in the auxiliary corps of the late Roman army.

“For the love of God, beloved friend, do not hide ourselves from the justice of God, let us make sure that by it all of these goods are provided to us: let it remain among us, immaculate, sitting next to you, on a pure throne, maintaining together the destinies of men. You do not need for yourself guards or soldiers, slingers or archers, no contingent of Armenians and Iberians, either as squires or bodyguards: you only “are sufficient for yourself”, because the will is sovereign in this area. The prince who does not treat justice is justified in nothing; he can't blame the vileness of the soldiers or the ineptitude of the subordinates. You alone, sitting on the throne, you are responsible, suffice you a word or a nod to preserve justice and get with it this universal power”.<sup>37</sup>

Another documentary evidence, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, whose eastern part was written in 401 according to Constantine Zuckerman<sup>38</sup>, lists the great commandments of the Roman army and units that each senior officer had at his disposal. This administrative text was formed by a series of layers of updates, that go from the time of Diocletian until at least the beginning of the fifth century<sup>39</sup>. For the eastern part of the Empire, two auxiliary units composed of Caucasian Iberians can be identified: an *ala prima Hiberorum* based on Thmou in Upper-Egypt and entrusted to the *dux Thebaidos*<sup>40</sup>, as well as a Palatine auxiliary wing of Iberians among the eighteen at the disposal of the *magister militum praesentalis*<sup>41</sup>. It is likely that the command of these auxiliary units, provided by officers of Iberian origin, was, for the latter, the first step of their career in the Roman army, before they could reach the higher positions in the military hierarchy.

#### b) Pharsamanios, Subarmachios, and Nabarnugios: Iberians at the imperial Court

Bacurius' itinerary is not unique in its kind, because several nobles of Iberian origin, like him, had a career in the Roman army, reaching prestigious positions integrated into the influential circles of the imperial Court. In his part tracing the genealogy of Peter the Iberian, the Syriac version of his hagiography comes to describe briefly the path of Pharsamanios, soldier at the court of Arcadius (r.395-408).

“The brother of Osduktia, his paternal grandmother, was Pharsamanios, the one who was held in glory at [the court of] Arcadius, emperor of the Romans, having both the honor of a military leader and of the first honors. Subsequently, after Pharsamanios had fled from the injury of Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius, and was able to hide himself, he hastily returned to his country. Once he became king over the Iberians and

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<sup>36</sup> About this type of career, see HOFFMANN D. 1978: 314.

<sup>37</sup> Themistius, *Speeches*, XV, §6 /189C-190A. Personal translation from R. MAISANO ed.: 557.

<sup>38</sup> ZUCKERMAN C. 1998: 146.

<sup>39</sup> LE BOHEC Y. 2006: 64-65.

<sup>40</sup> *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Orientis*, O. SEECK ed.: XXXI, 46.

<sup>41</sup> *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Orientis*, O. SEECK ed.: V, 60. This unit shouldn't be confused with the *scola scutariorum sagittariorum* (XI, 7), whose command was put under the responsibility of the master of offices, and which worked in the imperial guard. It is in this unit that Bacurius could his career and would have fought in the battle of Adrianople.

had brought along with him the White Huns who are the neighbors of the Iberians, he was the cause of many evils for those who are subject to the Romans”.<sup>42</sup>

According to Stephen H. Rapp Jr., it is possible that this Pharsamanios, Peter the Iberian’s great-uncle, is identifiable as King P’arsman IV (r. 406-409?), whose alleged reign is close to that of the Emperor Arcadius (r. 383-395 with his father Theodosius, r. 395-402 alone on the throne of Constantinople)<sup>43</sup>. The major problem with this hypothesis is that our only source on P’arsman IV, the *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, describes this sovereign as an ally of the Romans, to the point that he would have revolted against the Persians. A point of agreement between the two sources lies nevertheless in the warlike qualities of this character, described as a fearless hero of Iranian type, “*a pious man, an intrepid mounted warrior*” (*kac’i morcmune, mq’edari šemmart’ebeli*)<sup>44</sup>. However, neither the stay in the Roman Empire, nor the alliance with the Huns is mentioned in the notice of the Georgian chronicle. It is certainly possible that the veracity of this is failing due to the lateness of his writing, not earlier than the ninth century.

Also contemporary to the reign of Arcadius, the career of another Roman officer from Iberian origin appears through a notice in Suda containing a fragment of the history written by Eunapius of Sardis (fourth - fifth century)<sup>45</sup>. The eunuch Eutropius, for whom Subarmachios would have been a loyal henchman, was the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, all-powerful in the East since the murder of the prefect of the praetorium Rufinus on November 395 until his own fall on August 399. Subarmachios would have served with him as a commander of a special unit of *sagittarii*, probably of mounted archers, because the *scholae palatinae* were all cavalry units<sup>46</sup>. His functions are still discussed, given that the authors of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* identified him as *comes domesticorum* of the East<sup>47</sup>, while he appears here as a “*leader of the guards*” (τῶν δορυφόρων ἡγεμῶν). This man would be “*a pure Colchian from beyond Thermodon and Phasis*”, an origin neighboring geographically the Iberian area.

Finally, the case of Nabarnugios (c.413 / 417-491), alias Peter the Iberian after his conversion, is located a few decades after the time of Bacurius, Subarmachios and his great-uncle Pharsamanios. According to Syrian historian Zachary the Rhetor<sup>48</sup>, Nabarnugios received a military commission while he was a hostage in Constantinople, and served as *equis regiis praepositus*. For his part, David BRAUND thinks that Pierre the Iberian was probably the tribune of a schola of *domestici equites*<sup>49</sup>.

In short, it is quite surprising to see that one ethnic group could almost monopolize the command of a *schola palatina* and produce several high-ranking officers, sharing their royal or princely origins for many of them. A further investigation into the case of Bacurius should allow to better understand this type of career.

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<sup>42</sup> John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian* (Syriac) §6, C. B. HORN and R. PHENIX Jr. ed.: 9.

<sup>43</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 72, n. 196.

<sup>44</sup> *Life of the Successors of Mirian (K’art’lis C’xovreba)*, S. QAUXČ’IŠVILI ed., 137<sub>21</sub> : “[...] კაცი მორწმუნე, მკედარი შემართებელი” = R. W. THOMSON transl.: 151. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 268.

<sup>45</sup> *Suidas 1, Lexicon*, 793 = fragment 67.8 in BLOCKLEY R. C. 1983: 104-106; fragment 77 in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* 4, K. MÜLLER, T. MÜLLER and V. LANGLOIS ed., Paris, 1874-1885. WOODS D. 1996: 365 for translation.

<sup>46</sup> WOODS D. 1996: 365-367.

<sup>47</sup> MARTINDALE J. R. 1980: 1037, s. v. “Subarmachius”.

<sup>48</sup> Zachary the Rhetor, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 4, mentioned in WOODS D. 1996: 367, n. 15.

<sup>49</sup> BRAUND D. 1994: 285.



## 2) *Bacurius military: a career for the service of Rome*

### a) Tribune of a Palatine *schola* at the Battle of Adrianople

The first explicit appearance of Bacurius in sources figures in the history of Rome from Ammianus Marcellin, who reports his participation at the battle of Adrianople on August 9, 378<sup>50</sup>. Bacurius then probably commanded a unit of archers on horseback recruited at the eastern borders of the Empire<sup>51</sup>. His colleague Cassio, who is not known otherwise, probably headed a unit of *scutarii*, i.e. horsemen carrying shields<sup>52</sup>. Warlike Bacurius' fearlessness, which seems to be a trait shared with Subarmachios, appears to match the ideal of the Iranian hero portrayed in Armenian and pre-Bagrattid Georgian epic literature. It was in large part of their warrior value from which the Caucasian rulers rooted in the Iranian culture were supposed to draw their legitimacy. In the *Life of the Kings* and the *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali*, K'art'velian sovereigns are indeed described as heroes-kings of Iranian type. These texts are characterized by the salience of the words *gmiri* (გმირი, "hero"), *goliat'i* (გოლიათი, "Goliath", i.e. "giant"), and *bumberazi* (ბუმბერაზი) (duelist champion). Occasionally, we find the term *čabuki* (ჭაბუკი), derived from the old Persian *chāpūka*, "young"<sup>53</sup>, similar to the Persian *mard-juwān* ("young man"), with its qualities of male prowess, courage and manly strength. There were also K'art'velian equivalents of the *asabārān*, i. e. elite warriors of the Sasanian army<sup>54</sup>. The *asbār* (in Old Persian *asbāra*, in Pahlavi *aswār*) was a specialist in single combat (*mard-u-mard*) and an elite rider; he accumulated honors by proving his prowess and his manhood, including the detention of the *hizārmard*, namely a distinction which indicated that the *asbār* had the strength of a thousand men, the title of *mubāriz* (in Georgian *bumberazi*, ბუმბერაზი), those of *pahlawān* ("hero"), of *jahān pahlawān* ("hero of the world") and *zih sawār* ("exceptional horseman")<sup>55</sup>. In the case of Bacurius, we find this same passion in the narrative drawn up by Socrates of Constantinople in his account of the Battle of the Frigidus, heroism that probably cost him his life<sup>56</sup>.

### b) Dux of the Palestinian *limes* and *comes domesticorum*

Bacurius held high positions in the Roman army, serving as *dux Palaestinae* and *comes domesticorum*. The testimony of Rufinus is the most accurate on the rank that the officer of Iberian origin was able to achieve in his career.

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<sup>50</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXXI, 12, 16: "eo ad uallum hostile tendente sagittarii et scutarii, quos Bacurius Hiberus quidam tunc regebat et Cassio, auidius impetu calenti progressi iamque aduersis conexi, ut immature proruperant, ita inertis discessu primordia belli foedarunt".

<sup>51</sup> Note, however, that the formulation of Ammianus Marcellin remains quite vague, and it is possible that Cassio has ordered the mounted archers, and Bacurius the *scutarii*.

<sup>52</sup> Even if there were *scutarii* and *sagittarii* in the Roman army outside the units of the imperial guard, I believe that a cross-checking with indications delivered in Themistius' speech n. 8, §116a-c/174-175 allows to think that Bacurius was in one of the Palatine *scholae*. DELMAIRE R. 2008: 40: according to Ammianus Marcellinus (XVI, 10, 8), the Emperor is surrounded by riders carrying shields (*scutarii*) and armored riders (*clibanarii*) would come further: these are the oldest corps and the other *scholae* created later, *armaturae*, *gentiles*, *sagittarii* would further follow the imperial procession. The *Notitia Dignitatum* gives for the East, at the beginning of the fifth century, seven Palatine *scholae* under the command of the *magister officiorum*: "Sub dispositione viri illustris magistri officiorum: Scola scutariorum prima. Scola scutariorum secunda. Scola gentilium seniorum. Scola scutariorum sagittariorum. Scola scutariorum clibanariorum. Scola armaturarum iuniorum. Scola gentilium iuniorum" (*Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Orientis*, XI, 3-10).

<sup>53</sup> *Life of the Kings* (K'art'lis C'xovreba), S. QAUXČ'İŠVILI ed., 2017 about P'arnavaz.

<sup>54</sup> ZAKERI M. 1993: 68-87, 113-114 and following.

<sup>55</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2009: 663-664.

<sup>56</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 25, 13.

“This is Bacurius, man in whom you could trust, the king of this nation, who was *comes domesticorum* with us and very concerned about religion and truth, who told us that things had gone so when, being then *dux* of the *limes* of Palestine, he lived on very good terms with us in Jerusalem”.<sup>57</sup>

In the late imperial military hierarchy, the counts were immediately after the *magistri militum*. The word “count” comes from the Latin *comes*, “companion”, and has two meanings. On the one hand, it could be only an empty honorary title, on the other hand it is also possibly a real function. In the Early Empire, the count designated any character that is part of the entourage of the Emperor, a lawyer, a writer, or any other friend of the sovereign, although he had no political or military office. The Roman State distinguished some of them, those occupying army, *comites rei militaris*<sup>58</sup>, at the top of whom were the masters of militias. The title was also given to less important characters placed at the head of the army in secondary areas, from the military point of view, compared to those which were assigned to the *magistri militum*. A count could take the lead of several legions, or only a few detachments<sup>59</sup>.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* and sometimes Ammianus Marcellinus attribute counts to Egypt and Isauria in the East, to Africa, to Britain, to Tingitana, to the region of Mainz and the Saxon shore, corresponding to the coast of Southeast Britain and Northwestern Gaul. For the less important and border provinces, the Roman State had planned the *duces*, one per province: Ammianus Marcellinus signals their presence in Egypt, Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Thrace and Moesia<sup>60</sup>. They were also placed under the authority of the count if there was one, and masters of the militias in all cases. They could receive important responsibilities. The title of *dux* can also be used to name any officer<sup>61</sup>.

The Anonymous of Cyzicus (Pseudo-Gelasius) introduces the idea that Bacurius ordered a campaign against Saracens in the mountains of Palestine, which would have resulted in a brilliant victory<sup>62</sup>. These territories are probably the Sinai and the edge of the Negev where several groups, collectively known as Saracens, were practicing nomadism<sup>63</sup>. After the reorganization of the Eastern provinces by Diocletian in the late third century, Sinai became indeed a part of the *Palaestina Tertia* or *Salutaris*, created in 357-358, while the northwest part of the Sinai Peninsula was attached administratively to Egypt. After 297 the *limes arabicus* was also strengthened, especially in the region extending south from Bosra to the upstream part of the Wādi Sirhān, to prevent incursions by the warriors of the desert<sup>64</sup>; during the 360's and 370's, new forts were built in the area located at the south-south-east of Bosra, to which belong the *castella* of Umm ej-jemal and Deir el-Kahf<sup>65</sup>.

During the fourth century, a process of Christianization sprang up in the Sinaitic margins through pilgrimage and monasticism, particularly visible in the Jebel Musa site frequented by faithful

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<sup>57</sup> Rufinus of Aquileia, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 10 / §236: “*Haec nobis ita gesta, fidelissimus uir Bacurius, gentis ipsius rex, et apud nos domesticorum comes, cui summa erat cura et religionis et ueritatis, exposuit, cum nobiscum Palaestini tunc limitis dux, in Ierosolymis satis unanimiter degeret*”. Translation adapted from THELAMON F. 1972: 8.

<sup>58</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 10, 6 and 12, 13.

<sup>59</sup> LE BOHEC Y. 2006: 81.

<sup>60</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XVI, 9, 2 ; XXIV, 1, 9 ; XXV, 1, 2 ; XXV, 8, 7 ; XXIX, 6, 14 ; XXX, 2, 4 ; XXXI, 4, 9, 5 ; 1, 5, 6.

<sup>61</sup> LE BOHEC Y. 2006: 81 for this development.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous (Pseudo-Gelasius) of Cyzicus, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 10, 21 : “<ὁ> σατράπης Ῥωμαίων καταστάς καὶ ταῖς ἀκρωρείαις τῆς Παλαιστίνης κατὰ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν βαρβάρων ἐπιστρατεύσας πόλεμον ἄκρως ὅτι μάλιστα τὴν κατ’ αὐτῶν νίκην ἤρατο” : “[Bacurius] established as a commander of the Romans, led a campaign against the Saracens in the mountains of Palestine and won a major victory against them”. Personal translation.

<sup>63</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XIV, 4; *Expositio totius mundi*, XX.

<sup>64</sup> THELAMON F. 1981: 128.

<sup>65</sup> THELAMON F. 1981: 134.

people<sup>66</sup>. Rufinus of Aquileia reports the conversion in the 370's of a Saracen tribe led by Queen Mauvia and identified as being the Tanūkhids<sup>67</sup>. This people would have led a series of attacks on the Roman fortified positions in Palestine and Arabia, and would greatly compromise the Roman army, commanded by the *dux* of Phoenicia as well as by the *magister equitum* Victor<sup>68</sup>. During peace negotiations, the Queen Mauvia (or Mavia) would have received, among others, Moyses, a loner ascetic living in an area neighboring Saracen territory, to be ordained bishop of his people, probably in the Sinai Peninsula<sup>69</sup>. It is therefore likely that Bacurius, in charge of the confines of Palestine, could build relationships with these Saracen communities, including those engaged in a process of Christianization.

Operations in which Bacurius engaged in Palestine as a commander must have occurred only between his tribunate of a Palatine *schola* in Adrianople (August 9, 378), and June 388, days when the war began against Maximus, in which Bacurius was also involved. Moreover, a new revolt of the Tanūkhids broke out against Rome between 378 and 383, the latter date being that of the crushing of their uprising<sup>70</sup>. The presence of the *magister militum* Richomer in Antioch in 383 allows one to regard him as the commander of the military campaign against the revolted Tanūkhids<sup>71</sup>; as a *dux* of the *limes* in Palestine, Bacurius was therefore one of his employees in the conduct of repressive operations. The success of the Iberian prince probably favored his ascension through the military hierarchy in the Theodosian army.

#### c) General of Theodosius against Maximus and Eugenius

Socrates of Constantinople reports the role of Bacurius as a general (ὁ στρατηλάτης) in the service of the Emperor Theodosius twice.

“Rufinus said having learned it [sc. the story of the conversion of the Iberians] from Bakkourios, who was initially a little king among the Iberians, but who then, by moving to the Romans, was established as a taxiarch on the army of Palestine. After that, he fought as a general with Emperor Theodosius against the tyrant Maximus”.<sup>72</sup>

[Account of the Battle of the Frigidus] “Bakkourios, a general, took so much courage that he rushed with fighters on the front line to the side where the barbarians were under pressure; he breaks through the ranks of the enemies and puts to flight those who pressed them before”.<sup>73</sup>

The first quotation refers to the war of Theodosius against the usurper Maximus (r. 383-388)<sup>74</sup>, which occurred from June to August 388, in which Socrates of Constantinople is the only one to involve

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<sup>66</sup> BLUMELL L. and *alii* 2014: 57-61.

<sup>67</sup> Rufinus of Aquileia, *Ecclesiastical History*, II, 6. SHAHID I. 1984: 203.

<sup>68</sup> Victor 4 according to JONES A. H. M. and *alii* 1971: 957-959. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVI, 5, 2; Zosimus, *New History*, IV, 2, 4. THELAMON F. 1981: 135.

<sup>69</sup> THELAMON F. 1981: 123-147.

<sup>70</sup> SHAHID I. 1984: 203-205.

<sup>71</sup> SHAHID I. 1984: 210-211. After their defeat, the Tanūkhids lost their supremacy on the Arabs for the benefit of the Salīhids.

<sup>72</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 20, 20 : “Ταῦτα φησὶν ὁ Ρουφῖνος παρὰ Βακκουρίου μεμαθηκέναι, ὃς πρότερον μὲν ἦν βασιλίσκος Ἰβήρων, ὕστερον δὲ Ῥωμαίοις προσελθὼν ταξίαρχος τοῦ ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ στρατιωτικοῦ κατέστη καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα στρατηλατῶν τὸν κατὰ Μαξίμου τοῦ τυράννου πόλεμον τῷ βασιλεῖ Θεοδοσίῳ συναγωνίσαστο”. Translation adapted from P. MARAVAL, 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, V, 25, 13: “Βακκούριος γὰρ ὁ στρατηλάτης αὐτοῦ τοσοῦτον ἐπερρώσθη, ὥστε σὺν τοῖς πρωταγωνισταῖς εἰσδραμεῖν, καθ’ ὃ μέρος οἱ βάρβαροι ἐδιώκοντο· καὶ διαρρήσσει μὲν τὰς φάλαγγας, τρέπει δὲ εἰς φυγὴν τοὺς πρὸ βραχέως διώκοντας”. Translation adapted from P. MARAVAL, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> KELLY C. 2015: 215-217.

Bacurius. On the war of Theodosius with Eugenius<sup>75</sup> (393-394), the second quotation from Socrates of Constantinople shows the offensive role that Bacurius played, portraying a personality like that which Ammianus Marcellinus had described for the same character fighting in Adrianople.

On this war against Eugenius, the testimony of the poet Claudian (c. 370 - c. 404), although more vague, reflected nevertheless the presence of soldiers in the East countries in Theodosius' army<sup>76</sup>. Claudian is here referring to the civil war between Theodosius and Eugenius ("*abject client*" v. 67) supported by Arbogast ("*barbarian exile*" v. 66). While the latter are despised, no mention being made about supports that the usurper had gathered in the West, Claudian gushes about Theodosius' supports through a catalogue of his troops. The poet then takes pleasure in highlighting the scale of the Roman rule over the Eastern world: Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, Arabia, Media, Anatolia and the Caspian shores would have provided their own contingents. Of noticeable interest is the geographical inaccuracy of the author regarding the Phasis, river of Colchis corresponding to the current Rioni, as part of Armenia<sup>77</sup>. This inventory is more in line with the epic tradition than with historical data<sup>78</sup>, since the presence of the 20 000 Goths of Gaianus and Alaric has been concealed: these soldiers also paid a heavy price for victory, but subsequently become very cumbersome for their employers.

This indication given by Claudian about the presence of Orientals, although dubious, can, however, be backed by sources attesting the presence of Bacurius in the ranks of the Theodosian army. The *New History* of Zosimus indeed completes the testimony of Socrates thereon, by mentioning the presence of a Bakourios among the generals commanding the Theodosian forces at the Battle of the Frigidus (5 and 6 September 394). The testimony of Zosimus in this regard poses several problems, to the point that the identification of this character with Bacurius in Rufinus and Ammianus Marcellinus has not been made without hesitation<sup>79</sup>.

"Bakourios also had with them a part of the command; he was a native of Armenia, and it was a man devoid of any bad feeling and more trained to war; such was the way in which he [sc. Theodosius] fixed the choice of generals".<sup>80</sup>

We saw above that the mention of Armenia as Bacurius homeland should not be taken literally, given that Zosimus could either point through this the border territory of Gugark' / Somxit'i, or, as Claudian did, confuse the Armenian territory with another Caucasian area like Iberia. Further, once he

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<sup>75</sup> MODÉLAN Y. 2003: 154-155.

<sup>76</sup> Claudian, *Panegyric for the third consulship of the Emperor Honorius*, v.67-72: "*Pro crimen superum! Longi pro dedecus aevi! / Barbarus Hesperias exul possederat urbes / sceptraque deiecto dederat Romana clienti. / Iam princeps molitur iter gentesque remotas / colligit Aurorae, tumidus quascumque pererrat / Euphrates, quas lustrat [H]alyis, quas ditat Orontes: / turiferos Arabes saltus, uada Caspia Medi, / Armenii Phasin, Parthi liquere Niphatem*". This poem dates from the beginning of the year 396.

<sup>77</sup> The origin of this confusion dates back at least to Xenophon, *Anabasis*, IV, 6, 4, who during his description of his route in Armenia seems to designate by Phasis the Araxes, thinking that this river led to the river Phasis of Colchis, today Rioni in western Georgia. I. K. PARADEISOPOULOS, 2014: 220, 231.

<sup>78</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, IV, 57, 2, does not support the presence of Eastern troops.

<sup>79</sup> THELAMON F. 1981, 93, n. 19, considers as conditional Bacurius' death at the Battle of the Frigidus reported by Zosimus, then (p.94) ignore it and qualifies Bacurius as an Iberian king who would have reigned "before 361 or after 395".

<sup>80</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, IV, 57, 3: "Εκοινώνει δὲ τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτοῖς καὶ Βακούριος ἔλκων μὲν ἐξ Ἀρμενίας τὸ γένος, ἔξω δὲ πάσης κακονθείας ἀνὴρ μετὰ τοῦ καὶ τὰ πολεμικὰ πεπαιδεῦσθαι - ἢ μὲν οὖν ἀρχαιρεσία τοῦτον αὐτῷ διετέθη τὸν τρόπον". Translation adapted from F. PASCHOUD, 1979.

has completed the account of the battle, Zosimus returns to the singular figure of this general (στρατηγός, maybe in the sense of *magister militum*)<sup>81</sup>.

“That same day, the allies of the Emperor Theodosius in their majority were killed, including Bakourios: among their generals, he faced the danger with the greatest courage, while the others, in an unexpected way, fled with survivors”.<sup>82</sup>

The essential fact is that Socrates appears as the only author making obviously one character out of the Bacurius delivering the story of the conversion in Iberia and the Bacurius fighting in the Theodosian army. Although Zosimus is the only author to indicate the death of the general during the Battle of the Frigidus, since Socrates of Constantinople mentions only his presence in the confrontation, we can deduce that Bacurius in Rufinus and his successors is well comparable to the Bakourios of Zosimus, thanks to the link of identification carried out by Socrates of Constantinople. Bacurius’ death in 394 is consequently a certain fact, and constitutes a crucial factor in deciding the issues of identification which involve Bacurius facing his Armeno-K’art’velian namesakes<sup>83</sup>.

Bacurius’ presence in Jerusalem mentioned by Rufinus has therefore not been continuous between 380 and 392, but was interrupted by various military and political activities to which the character took part. However, this career in the Roman army did not prevent Bacurius, far from there, from building bridges of cooperation and friendship with the civilian elite of the Roman East.

### III. – Bacurius, a sociable man: beliefs and conviviality

Enjoyed as much among Christians as among Pagans, Bacurius appears as a man who managed to build relationships and win the friendship of characters as opposed as Rufinus and Libanius. The notion of conviviality tends to express this logic of togetherness between individuals who are not of the same religious allegiance, a life of relationships with its agreements, mutual contributions but also conflicting friction between the various components of a multicultural society.

#### 1) *An inter-confessional sociability*

##### a) Friend of Christians

Rufinus of Aquileia described Bacurius as “*a very trustful man*” (*fidelissimus uir*), “*who took greatest care of religion and truth*” (*cui summa erat cura et religionis et ueritatis*)<sup>84</sup>. Socrates of Constantinople and Theodore the Reader do not extend to the moral qualities of the character; as for Sozomen and Theodoret of Cyrus, they fail to report the identity of the one who reported the story of the conversion of the Iberians. However, the Anonymous of Cyzicus (Pseudo-Gelasius) evokes the “*very loyal Bakkourios, a man filled with the fear [of God]*” (ὁ πιστότατος Βακκούριος ὑψηγῆτης γέγονεν ἀνὴρ εὐλαβέστατος [...])<sup>85</sup>. Bacurius’ *fides* is underlined with insistence all the more since it is the guarantee of the validity of his testimony in the eyes of Rufinus of Aquileia and his successors.

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<sup>81</sup> See François PASCHOUD’s critical apparatus in his edition of the *New History* of Zosimus, Paris, 1979: 463-464, n. 208.

<sup>82</sup> Zosimus, *New History*, IV, 58, 3 : « [...] κατ’ αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέραν, τὸ μὲν πολὺ μέρος τῶν Θεοδοσίου τῷ Βασιλεῖ συμμαχοῦντων ἀποθανεῖν, καὶ τῶν στρατηγῶν Βακούριον ἀνδρειότατα τῶν σφετέρων προκινδυνεύσαντα, τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους παραλόγως ἅμα τοῖς περιλειφθεῖσι διαφυγεῖν ». Translation adapted from F. PASCHOUD, 1979.

<sup>83</sup> That’s the reason why, about Georgian inscription n. 1 found at Bir-el-Qutt in Palestine (dating from first half of the fifth century), the Christian Bakur mentioned on it could not be our Bacurius died several decades earlier. FÄHNRIKH H. 2013: 179-180, n. 112.

<sup>84</sup> Rufinus of Aquileia, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 10 / §236.

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous of Cyzicus (Pseudo-Gelasius), *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 10, 21.

This praise remains paradoxically imprecise on the confession professed by Bacurius, who was incidentally not specifically called Christian. Rufinus and his successors have thus retained an active spirituality, integrated, curious and respectful of Christianity, rather than a displayed confession in a partisan way. Such a choice of life combining piety and open mind seems allowing Bacurius not to limit his support to Christians alone, as is shown by the favor that this character received from some Pagans.

#### b) Friend of Pagans

If the first face of Bacurius is that of a witness to the expansion of Christianity in Iberia, through his account of the royal conversion in this country told to Rufinus<sup>86</sup>, then another side of this character appears through the testimony of the rhetor Libanius. This man was also frequented by Bacurius, the latter having met especially during a visit to Antioch probably in 391. Three mentions of Bacurius appear in correspondence of the professor of Antioch. One of these references is a letter from Libanius to Bacurius himself.

“Your letter came to us while we were just talking about you, as we do to keep the circle of friends, and as the good opportunity that comes to praise your person gives us immense joy. As subjects of praise, one pleads in favor of your righteousness and of your belief that the gods see and know everything that happens on Earth, another one praises your moderation and the fact that you master your desires more than your soldiers, a third finally praises your wisdom that gives victory to your weapons. We are told that your soul was never afraid of any danger. But the largest of your merits seems to me that you like speeches and each of those who work on them; and that makes you the favorite of these gods, who have interest in the speech; they have interest in them, because that is their gift. Among these species of flowers so we stayed, and you were the meadow on which they grew, this is where the messenger got me your letter in the hands, which provides evidence of your love for speeches. Indeed, if the man who cultivates the art of war honors and carries in his heart the man of speeches, honoring him not only by his thought, but also by what he writes – how could it not come from a man who honors the rhetoric by what constitutes the lot of orators? However often I am about to write you, and yet some reason stopped me, not always the same, but still any reason, and it is also the same reason that the gods have sent you to increase your happiness. Because it is not the same to write a letter and answer a letter”<sup>87</sup>.

The letter would intervene shortly after Bacurius’ travel to Constantinople in 392 after his appointment to the position of *comes domesticorum* by Theodosius<sup>88</sup>. It raises the question of Libanius’ relationship with the military. While in general, men-at-arms were despised by the Antiochian professor, as being presented as rude, greedy for booty, and mostly uneducated, Bacurius would represent – according to Bernadette CABOURET – “a counter-model”<sup>89</sup>, with his qualities of justice, moderation, self-control, wisdom, piety and love of literature. The fact that Libanius appears favorable to a cultivated general, even a barbarian one, demonstrates that the cultural factor prevails over the ethnic factor in terms of criteria for categorization of others in the Roman East elites’ mentalities. In this letter, we guess interested motive, namely the quest by Libanius for an ally able to defend the cause of a Paganism deeply undermined since the reversal of the emperor in favor of the supremacy of Christianity in the Empire<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Since Rufinus was present in Palestine between 380 and 397, Bacurius could tell him this story only between 380 and 394. VESSEY 2004: 318-327.

<sup>87</sup> Libanius, *Letters*, n. 1060 in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. Translation adapted with Rebecca LAFFIN’s help from G. FATOUROS and T. KRISCHER ed., Munich, 1980, 72: 180-183.

<sup>88</sup> G. FATOUROS and T. KRISCHER ed. 1980: 461-463. RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 73, suggests an earlier date, 380.

<sup>89</sup> CABOURET B. 2012: 433.

<sup>90</sup> Since the emperor’s penance before Ambrosius at Christmas 390, Theodosius operated a turning point in his religious policy by giving overall support to official Christianity institutions. New measures were taken against

However, it appears disturbing to read Libanius praising Bacurius' belief in “*that the gods see and know everything that happens on Earth*”, the same *uir fidelissimus* who gave to Rufinus of Aquileia the account of the Iberian conversion to Christianity. The way in which the very pagan Zosimus portrayed him favorably might also suggest that Bacurius had not completely broken with the pre-Christian beliefs. It seems fruitless to try to see a hypothetical conversion of Bacurius to Christianity from the time of his correspondence with Libanius and his encounter with Rufinus of Aquileia. Indeed, Bacurius was *comes domesticorum* of Theodosius when the professor of Antioch praised his respect for the gods, and only *dux* of the *limes* of Palestine – the previous grade – when he delivered his testimony to Rufinus, according to the latter (*cum nobiscum Palaestini tunc limitis dux*). A conversion in the reverse direction (from Christian to Pagan) is also unlikely, since Rufinus' account was written in the very first years of the fifth century, namely after Bacurius' death<sup>91</sup>.

Regardless of the intimate content of the beliefs of Bacurius, which remains inaccessible to us, it is nevertheless remarkable that this man could make use of them to attract such laudatory opinions, especially from personalities as contrasted as Libanius and Rufinus. What is more, two other mentions of Bacurius in another two Libanius' letters attest that the orator did not double talk about this character.

“A nice letter came to us, from someone good through someone good, having well received it from you through Bakourios, brilliant as much by the body than by what he gave to his similar soul. I had not ordered it to you, but you, for love of us, you thought of doing it on your own in having sent up to here the diligent Bakourios [...]”<sup>92</sup>

“Bakourios, having delivered Aristaenetus' letter, since he had been persuaded to do it with pleasure, said that this one was for you, from Leontius. [...]”<sup>93</sup>

These letters show a Bacurius amicably deigning to serve as a messenger between some Libanius' correspondents: Aristaenetus (II) of Antioch<sup>94</sup>, born in 371, an alumnus of Libanius, to whom he was related, briefly held the post of prefect of the city of Constantinople somewhere between June 25, 392 and February 27, 393; Leontius (VI) was also a former student related to Libanius as well as Aristaenetus (II), and become *consularis Phoenices* in 392<sup>95</sup>. So Bacurius tied familiar relationships with influential figures of the senior administration in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, links that probably contributed to his rise in the military hierarchy.

## 2) Faith and politics: Bacurius' projects for Iberia

### a) The story of the Iberian conversion - a plea for a Roman intervention in Caucasia?

Bacurius' periods of presence in Palestine, roughly between 380 and 392, are contemporary with the reign of Theodosius (r. 379-392 on the East, and 392-395 on the Empire). The time coincides

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Paganism: in February 391, sacrifices and visits to the temples were prohibited. on 8 November 392 was completely prohibited the worship to the pagan gods. CHUVIN P. 1991: 63-95.

<sup>91</sup> THELAMON F. 1972: 5.

<sup>92</sup> Libanius, *Letters*, n. 1043 to Aristaenetus: “Ἦκεν ἡμῖν γράμματα καλὰ παρὰ καλοῦ διὰ καλοῦ, παρὰ σοῦ καλῶς ἔχοντα διὰ Βακουρίου τοῦ λάμποντος μὲν τῷ σώματι, ψυχὴν δὲ ὁμοίαν ἐκείνῳ παρεχομένου. Σὺ δ' ἡμῶν ἐρῶν οὐκ ἄρκειν σοι τοῦτο νομίζων προσέθηκας σαυτῷ τὸν χρηστὸν Βακούριον [...]”. Greek text from *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, Irvine: University of California, 2001-. Personal translation.

<sup>93</sup> Libanius, *Letters*, n. 1044 to Leontius: “Δοὺς τὴν ἐπιστολὴν τὴν Ἀρισταίνετου Βακούριος, ἐπειδὴ ἀνέγνωστό τε καὶ μεθ' ἡδονῆς, αὕτη δὲ ἔφη σοι <παρὰ> Λεοντίου. [...]”. Greek text from *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, Irvine: University of California, 2001-. Personal translation.

<sup>94</sup> Aristaenetus II should not be confused with Aristaenetus I, who was the best friend of Libanius, dead in the earthquake of Nicomedia on 24 August 358.

<sup>95</sup> See the commentary on Libanius delivered in G. FATOUROS and T. KRISCHER ed. 1980: 461-463.

with a phase of negotiations with the King Šāpūr III to address the issue of Armenia. Wishing to avert the Persian danger, Theodosius was induced to conclude a treaty of peace and friendship, whereby Armenia was split between two Arsacid puppet kings. This Treaty of Acilisene, probably concluded in 387, yielded four fifths of the Armenian area to the kingdom protected by the Persians<sup>96</sup>. The fact that the territories bordering the Iberia north and northwest have been included in this area of Iranian influence has probably raised concerns among the pro-Roman Iberian elites to which Bacurius belonged.

If one reads the story of the Iberian conversion through this political reading, it would be possible to detect a message intended for the Emperor Theodosius and his successors. The closing of the narrative on the Iberian embassy to Constantine would in this sense defend a model of the good emperor attentive to the interests of the Church everywhere it grows. The integration of Iberia into Christianity would counterbalance its belonging to the Iranian world, and would arouse a political response from the guarantor of Christianity: namely the Roman emperor. The fact that the story narrating the appearance of Christianity in Iberia was developed in a Roman context, by a high-ranking officer benefiting from privileged links with the imperial Court and the ruling elite, very probably inspired a political reading of a religious phenomenon that was much less so before its recovery and its restatement by Bacurius. Certainly, once transcribed in the forms of ecclesiastical history, this episode tended to become more of the celebration of the work of the universal Church rather than a program of imperial strategy in the Caucasus. However, can we believe that Bacurius told his story to Rufinus only? It remains an open question, for lack of sources, but an affirmative answer would tend to give back all its political content to the first context of the reception of this story.

Whatever may have been the religious convictions of Bacurius, his friends, Christian as well as Pagan, leads to believe that his action was not monopolized by a confessional factor. As a result, his account of the conversion of Iberia to Christianity was not so much aimed to celebrate a religious phenomenon already half a century old when Bacurius was supposed to say it, as it was to keep Iberia in Theodosius' political agenda while the Treaty of Acilisene was being negotiated. Replacing Bacurius in the political history of international relations helps to capture the attitudes of these pro-Roman Iberian elites towards their hosts as well as about ideas dominating the minds in these host communities.

#### b) Bacurius' arrival to Valens' Court

In March 368, the orator Themistius visited Marcianopolis, a city not far from the Danubian border in Thrace. It is in this place that the emperor Valens, engaged in a campaign against the Goths, celebrated the fifth anniversary of his ascension to the throne (*quinquennalia*)<sup>97</sup>. The public attending the ceremony was largely made up of soldiers. Despite the martial nature of the circumstances, the eighth discourse of Themistius, titled Πενταετηρικός and pronounced on this occasion, is essentially devoted to the issues of tax justice and governance. On behalf of his fellow senators, Themistius expressed implicitly and skillfully his disagreement on the warmongering policy led by the sovereign, arguing that economic and financial problems should take precedence over those of the defense against external enemies. From Themistius' perspective, the Roman state isn't able anymore to provide the means for a policy of conquest: such means also benefited small groups of individuals, while the benefits of a policy of tax fairness and repopulation of the countryside would concern the whole of the Empire if such measures were implemented<sup>98</sup>. Nevertheless, Themistius shall save the image of the military as an

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<sup>96</sup> STEIN E. 1959: 205.

<sup>97</sup> I disagree with HOFFMANN D. 1978: 314, who chooses March 369. The *quinquennalia* were indeed celebrated at the beginning of the fifth year of reign, and not at the end of the fifth year. CHASTAGNOL A. 1980: 106. As Valens was called to join on the imperial throne his brother Valentinian in March 28, 364, the fifth year of his reign began March 28, 368.

<sup>98</sup> See introductory note to speech n. 8 of Themistius in R. MAISANO ed. 1995.



instrument of imperial glory. It is in this last tone that takes place a passage describing a body of mounted archers, the flagship of Valens' army, then the arrival of a character who, although not named, presents several details that could remind one of Bacurius.

“Only yesterday I saw an army, better trained than any chorus. Homer is obviously quite outdated in admiring Menestheus as one fit to handle infantry and cavalry. The poet did not know the ordered movement of your phalanx, the instinctive understanding of your cavalry or those trained to live with their weapons, nor was he ever struck with joyful amazement at such a sight. He would, I believe, mock the story of the line and the dove<sup>99</sup>, having seen the mobile archers who, leaving the reins to their steeds, shoot more accurately than those with their feet on the ground. It is not surprising that Priam called Agamemnon blessed for bringing so many Phrygian soldiers from Greece<sup>100</sup>. Now in your case, there is a man who, rejecting his ancestral throne – and that of no obscure kingdom – comes as a wanderer to bear arms: a good omen of victories in the East”.<sup>101</sup>

If Themistius doesn't explicitly associate the two facts, it would be tempting to assume that this ex-king or this prince, come to serve Valens, has been, somehow or another, bound with a corps of mounted archers. These archers could have been recruited by his own care, unless he was himself part of them, maybe as a commander, such a hypothesis would bind the mounted archers in Themistius' speech with the *schola scutariorum sagittariorum* appearing a decade later at the battle of Adrianople and commissioned by Bacurius, always on behalf of Valens<sup>102</sup>.

A future participle qualifies the position occupied by this royal prince: *δορυφορήσων*, “*intended to be a bodyguard [literally spear holder]*”, apparently poorly compatible with the hypothesis of a body of mounted archers. The *δορυφόρος* operates at the base as a Greek equivalent of the Latin *protector domesticus*<sup>103</sup>, namely, an officer belonging to a privileged body attached to the service of the emperor and his staff<sup>104</sup>. It seems that during the 360's there was a *schola domesticorum*, formerly known as *schola protectorum*, bringing together the cavalry of the imperial guard<sup>105</sup>. These Palatine *scholae* consisted partly of soldiers of foreign origin<sup>106</sup>. Admittedly, all units of elite riders were armed with spear and shield, except the *sagittarii* employing bows and arrows. However, it is possible that

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<sup>99</sup> In *Iliad*, XXIII, 850 and following, an archery competition was given on the funeral games in honor of Patroclus, where a bird was attached by a link. Teucer missed the bird and cut through the rope with his arrow, but Meriones won the prize for killing the bird in flight. Libanius means so that Homer would make fun of his own story, and the exploits of Valens' mounted archery would surpass those of heroes in *Iliad* who stood on the floor. HEATHER P. J. and J. MATTHEWS 2004: 31 n.55.

<sup>100</sup> *Iliad*, III, 164-190.

<sup>101</sup> Themistius, *Speeches*, 8, §116a-c/174-175 = HEATHER P. J. and J. MATTHEWS 2004: 31, slightly modified. See n. 56 p.31 for the identification of this character with Bacurius.

<sup>102</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXXI, 12, 16. On the other hand, Themistius, *Speeches*, XV, §6-189C, evokes of the “*slingers and archers*” appearing in conjunction with the “*contingents of Armenians and Iberians*” of the Roman army (οἱ σφενδονῆται καὶ οἱ τοξόται οὐδὲ Ἀρμενίων Ἴλαι οὐδὲ Ἰβήρων). In case the prince would be not part of this unit of mounted archers when Themistios gave his speech, it is possible to simply imagine a career development leading Bacurius to exercise successively in the *scutarii* and the *sagittarii*. We saw however also that the formulation of Ammianus was vague enough to leave open the possibility that Bacurius ordered the *scutarii*, and not the *sagittarii*, in the battle of Adrianople.

<sup>103</sup> DELMAIRE R. 2008: 38.

<sup>104</sup> BABUT E.-C. 1914: 267-269.

<sup>105</sup> BABUT E.-C. 1914: 262-265.

<sup>106</sup> See especially for the reign of Constantius the testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XIV, 7, 9: the *protectores* are cited together with *scholae palatinae*, *scutarii* and *gentiles*, i.e. the units of the Palatine guard, shields-holders and “foreigners”.

Themistius wouldn't have used *δορυφορήσων* in its strict sense of “*carrying the spear*”, but in a more generic one, to serve in the imperial guard, regardless of the weapon<sup>107</sup>.

Another decisive argument for the identification of this prince in Themistius with Bacurius: the portrait of the man described by the orator at Marcianopolis corresponds perfectly with what is known of Bacurius from the indications of Rufinus of Aquileia and his successors of ecclesiastical history, because each of these documents deals with a man of royal rank come to serve the Empire in the Eastern army. The fact that neither the precise identity of this character nor the kingdom from which he is supposed to come are mentioned in Themistius could be explained by the fact that this information was already known to the audience of high-ranking military officers. It is likely that this man himself attended Themistius' speech. If he was Bacurius, a very probable hypothesis, this would be a confirmation of the favorable image enjoyed by this character in elite circles of the Roman East, thus corroborating Libanius' evidence.

Three points can be drawn up from the admittedly allusive Themistius' indications about the circumstances of the emigration of this royal character. The phrase “τὰ σκῆπτρα ὑπεριδὼν τὰ πατρῶα”, with an aorist participle meaning literally “*having looked down*”, and that can be translated as “*having despised / scorned / given up the paternal scepter*”, seems to suggest that the reason that led this character to emigrate in the Empire must have more to do with a voluntary departure than a forced exile. On the other hand, the presence of an adjective referring to the legacy of the ancestors to qualify the royal power held by this character could mean that this man would not have the opportunity to exercise the kingship, but that he was destined to. Finally, the way by which Themistius praises the arrival of this prince in the Roman army suggests that this was, at the time when the speech n. 8 was pronounced, a recent event.

For the first two reasons given above, the possibility that this warrior of royal rank in Themistius designates the king Sauromaces in Ammianus Marcellinus can be reasonably excluded<sup>108</sup>. Sauromaces' fall was the upshot of Sasanian intervention during a period of Iranian supremacy in South Caucasia after Julian's defeat, although we cannot determine with certainty whether the departure of the Iberian king had been or had not been included in the terms of the Treaty of Jovian with the Persians July 10, 363. One hypothesis would be to see in this passage of Themistius' speech the praise of king Sauromaces working to recover his throne, efforts which would eventually lead to the campaign led by Terentius in 370<sup>109</sup>. However, some details in Themistius' text don't seem to correlate with Sauromaces' situation. The departure of the latter was obviously forced; as a result, the Iberian king couldn't have “*despised the scepter of his ancestors*” that he sought to recover with the help of the Romans. Moreover, the mention of the paternal scepter would appear somewhat incongruous if it applied to a king who had already ruled before emigrating in the Empire, which is precisely the case for Sauromaces.

The date of Sauromaces' arrival in the Empire could be practically coincident with that of Bacurius, even if we don't know precisely when Sauromaces was expelled from his throne: Ammianus Marcellinus places it at the reversal of Šāpūr II, after this Persian sovereign was shown to be “*during some time friend of the Romans*” (*cum suis paulisper nobis uisus amicus*), and was interested in Armenia

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<sup>107</sup> DELMAIRE R. 2008: 40. Moreover, the fact that the official designation of the Palatine *schola* of mounted archers is “*Scola scutariorum sagittariorum*”, “*schola of scutarii and archers*”, could explain this trend of Greek authors to designate the imperial guards only as carrying spears and shields. A limit to this argument in our case is that Themistius mentions explicitly Valens' mounted archers and therefore could have said simply that the prince was part of them, if it had been the case.

<sup>108</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 12, 1-4 and 12, 15-18.

<sup>109</sup> BAYNES N. H. 1910: 637-638, opts for 371.

once again. In the sequence of events described by the author of the *Roman History*, Sauromaces' expulsion is placed after the capture and death of the Armenian king Aršak II, tortured by the Persians in the jails of the fortress Agabana. This capture is set commonly in 367<sup>110</sup>, however, the matter is discussed<sup>111</sup>. It would give for the arrival of Sauromaces a possible date in 367, 368 or 369. In the case of low dating from Norman H. BAYNES<sup>112</sup> — namely during Sauromaces' expulsion in 369, the arrival of this Iberian king would intervene after Themistius' speech, disabling at the same time his hypothetical identification to the royal prince mentioned by this orator.

The alternative hypothesis to see in Themistius' royal character prince Pap<sup>113</sup>, king of Armenia (r.367/368-374) doesn't seem to surpass Bacurius' track. This Pap, son of the king Aršak II, could escape from the besieged citadel of Artogerassa to reach Roman soil, where he was greeted by Valens, who allowed him to reside in Neocaesarea, a city of Pontus. This episode is placed by Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>114</sup> in the direct continuation of the story narrating Sauromaces' expulsion, suggesting that these two events were almost coincident. However, as pointed out by Dietrich HOFFMANN, Pap was only a high-ranking refugee who obviously was not hired as a bodyguard in the imperial service<sup>115</sup>. Consequently, if the royal prince in Themistius can be identified with Bacurius, his arrival in the Empire can be dated to 367 or during the first three months of the year 368. If one accepts that the arrival of Bacurius occurred shortly after the Persian intervention drove Sauromaces from his throne in favor of Aspatures, we could interpret it as a sign of a migration of Iberian pro-Roman elites fleeing the new plan introduced by pro-Sasanian elites supported by the Persians.

*Epic Histories* allege that around 370, shortly before the restoration of Sauromaces' power and the partition of Iberia, *sparapet* Mušel, a sympathizer of the Romans, led a campaign against what should be supporters of the Sasanians in South Caucasia. Now in this campaign, Mušel "*seized and beheaded the bdeašx of Gugark', who had formerly served the king of Armenia and subsequently revolted*"<sup>116</sup>. It is highly probable to locate the reasons of this reversal operated by the *bidaxš* of Somxit'i / Gugark' in the particular context of 367-368, marked by the fall of the allies of Rome in Armenia with the capture of Aršak II, as well as in Iberia by the exile of Sauromaces<sup>117</sup>. The Armeno-K'art'velian marchland from which Bacurius left had therefore tipped in the pro-Sasanian camp as it changed allegiance for Aspatures' protection. The chances are high that some members of this pro-Roman Caucasian elite, notably Bacurius in Gugark' / Somxit'i marchland, were reluctant to see their territory exposed to the appetites of the pro-Sasanian parties emerging especially in the monarchy of Mc'xet'a, and would have sought a necessary support to counter the risks of destabilization induced by political and military changes in South Caucasia at the end of the 360's. Bacurius' arrival in the imperial army thus occurs at a crossroads in the Iberian history when the question arises of a new Roman intervention in the Caucasus to overthrow King Aspatures protected by the Sasanians. The testimony of Themistius evokes implicitly the presence of Iberian protagonists enjoying a close relationship with the community leaders of the imperial Court of the East, able to influence the foreign policy of the Romans.

Beside these casual factors, cultural features can be detectable in what appears to be a real family tradition for sending young Iberian nobles to the imperial Court in order to receive an education for

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<sup>110</sup> See the chronology of Arsacid sovereigns' reigns in Armenia delivered by LANG D. M. 1983: 517-518.

<sup>111</sup> BAYNES N. H. 1910: 636 refuses to date this event before late 368 or even the beginning of 369.

<sup>112</sup> BAYNES N. H. 1910: 637.

<sup>113</sup> About this Pap, see JONES A. H. M. and *alii* 1971: 665-666.

<sup>114</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 12, 5-10.

<sup>115</sup> HOFFMANN D. 1978: 307-318.

<sup>116</sup> *Epic Histories*, V, 15 = N. G. GARSOĪAN transl.: 201, very slightly modified.

<sup>117</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 12, 1-4.

fighting and ruling. A network seems to be implemented on at least three generations from Bacurius, including Subarmachios, Pharsamanios and Nabarnugios. Even if we know clear links only between these last two characters, respectively great-uncle and nephew, it is not impossible to see in this succession the testimony of a longer chain of intergenerational solidarity, in that a young Iberian performing his military training path would be supported upon arrival in the Empire by an older relative occupying a higher rank, taking on the role of guardian (მზრდელი, *mzrdeli*) or foster father (მამამძუღე, *mamamžuže*), a typically Iranian educational institution<sup>118</sup>. As for the Romans, they could find a pool of senior officers, talented and loyal, able to ensure the recruitment and management of auxiliary units whose composition may have been ethnically dominated, and whose expertise was recognized and appreciated in the Roman army. The fact that these princes have likely received an education of the letters, including Greek, the main language of communication with Armazian in Iberia, was also sure to please the refined elites of the Roman East.

It is difficult to draw all the conclusions about Bacurius' background and identity with certainty. The numerous homonyms concerning this name as well as the gaps in our documentation complicated the demonstration aimed to identify the same figure and distinguish it from that of other Caucasian princes. Nevertheless, the Bacurius frequented by Rufinus and Libanius would have every chance to designate a unique character, having served in the Roman army in the last third of the fourth century, before falling during the Battle of the Frigidus. In any case, there is no definitive evidence, in my opinion, to demonstrate that there would have been rather several Bacurius having gained such notoriety in the Empire. On the other hand, the man who reported the story of the conversion of the Iberians is properly distinguished from the Armeno-K'art'velian *bidaxšes* and Iberian kings active in the early decades of the fifth century. If Sauromaces and Pap could return to their homeland in 370 with the expedition led by the *dux* Terentius, Bacurius did not go back to his country, possibly for the greatest happiness of the historian, who otherwise may not have known the story of the conversion of the Iberians transcribed by Rufinus of Aquileia and his successors. Whatever it is, the most memorable of Bacurius' legacies remains without doubt this figure of the *captiua*, modestly hatched in this first story, from which a long and rich tradition developed into the cycle of St. Nino.

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<sup>118</sup> RAPP S. H. Jr. 2014: 88-89. I don't consider that these four senior officers of the Iberians would have known personally each other and would have directly taken turns at the head of the same position, because our information is much too fragmentary to restore the number and details of such careers involving Iberian princes. For we know about Pharsamanios and Nabarnugios, we see that the second was born around 413 / 417 — between nine and thirteen years after the *terminus ad quem* for the departure of his great-uncle Pharsamanios from the imperial Court, which had to happen before 404, date of the death of his persecutor Eudoxia, wife of Arcadius. Accordingly, Pharsamanios could be the guardian of his nephew Nabarnugios in his early military career within the Empire. On the other hand, the fact that Pharsamanios, Nabarnugios and probably Bacurius have belonged to the same family of *bidaxšes* in Somxit'i / Gugark', related to the ruling dynasty of Mc'xet'a, shows that a familial solidarity should exist and involve co-operation and support between its members, particularly in relation with the ruling elite of the Roman world.

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