

THE ROLE OF EMPEROR HERAKLEIOS IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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And Emperor Herakleios cleansed the Christian faith and left.¹

After taking the throne in 610, Emperor Herakleios faced two great threats to the Empire, the Persian invasion and a considerable religious disorder. Therefore, he had to wage war on two fronts, although in many cases the two – religious and political – overlapped. This was especially felt in the Caucasus, one of the regions most vulnerable to the Persian offensive, where the religious stand of the population directly determined the political affiliation.²

The seventh century was a crucial period for the whole Caucasus, not only for the Georgian kingdom. The beginning of the seventh century was marked by one of the most important events of the period: the schism between the Georgian and the Armenian Churches. The Caucasian kingdoms of Iberia, Armenia, and Albania (not to be confused with Iberia and Albania in Europe) soon afterwards took their final cultural, religious, and political shapes. The importance of Herakleios' policy towards the Caucasus is attested by numerous Armenian authors in both historical and legendary traditions. Herakleios was no a less hero in Georgian historiography, and Georgian narratives and tradition attributed a quite distinct function to him. I will try to demonstrate what the role of Herakleios was in the “life of Kartli” according to the medieval Georgian historiographers.

¹ *მოქცევაჲ ქართლისაჲ*. [The Conversion of Kartli] ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები I, V-X საუკუნეები [Monuments of old Georgian hagiographical literature 1, from the fifth to tenth centuries], ed. Ilia Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963), 95–96.

² On the reign of Herakleios and religious situation in the period see: Walter Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Walter Kaegi, *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium* (London: Variorum, 1982); Nina Garsoian, *Armenia Between Byzantium and the Sasanians* (London: Variorum, 1985); Paul Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam*, 2 vols, (Paris: Geuthner, 1951–1965); John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michael Whitby, *Emperor Maurice and his Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

After the death of King Vakhtang Gorgasali around 502, the unity of the kingdom of Iberia³ began to shatter. During the reign of Vakhtang's son, Dachi,⁴ the nobles started to rebel against the central authority. Soon, in the 520s, western Georgia-Lazika became independent from the kings of Iberia. In 523 the Laz rebelled against the Persians and accepted Roman supremacy. In the same year, Gurgen, king of Iberia, rebelled against the Persians, which provoked a long war in the Caucasus between Rome and Persia. In 532 an "eternal peace" was established between the Persians and Romans which divided the spheres of influence: western Georgia (Lazika) entered Roman dominion, while eastern Georgia (Iberia) had to accept Persian supremacy. As a result, around 541 the Persians abolished kingship in Iberia (having already abolished it in Armenia in 428). During the reign of Khosrau Anushirvan (531–539), Iberia was incorporated into the Persian Empire and the highest authority became a Persian *marzpan*,⁵ who resided in Tbilisi. According to Georgian sources (*The Life of Kartli*,⁶ *The Conversion of Kartli*⁷), around the last decades of the sixth century, during the reign of King Hormizd IV (579–590), the princes (*eristavis*) of Iberia decided to institute local authority and chose Guaram Kouropalates as the *erismtavari*⁸ of Iberia. From that moment on the *erismtavaris* of Iberia received Roman titles. Around 571 the Armenians also rebelled against Persian rule, under the leadership of Vardan Mamikonean.

³ The Georgian name for Iberia is Kartli and Egrisi is used for Lazika. Here I will use the European names for convenience.

⁴ The exact dates of his reign are unknown.

⁵ A ruler of a province in Sassanian Iran in the fourth to the sixth centuries. They were usually appointed where the kingship was abolished.

⁶ *ქართველთა ცხოვრება* [The Life of Kartli], ed. Simon Khaukchishvili, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Saxelgami, 1955), 1–50.

⁷ On *The Conversion of Kartli* see: G. Patsch, "Die Bekehrung Georgiens," *Bedi Kartlisa* 33 (1975): 291–292; Margaret Wadrop and Oliver Wadrop, "Life of St. Nino," *Studia Biblica and Ecclesiastica* 5, No. 1 (1900): 1–88; Zaza Aleksidze, "Le nouveau manuscrit Géorgien sinaitique N50, Edition en facsimilé," in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001); Zaza Aleksidze, "Four Versions of the 'Conversion of Georgia,'" in *Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus / The Christianization of Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Albania), Referate des Internationalen Symposiums (Wien, 9. bis 12. Dezember 1999)*, ed. Werner Seibt (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1999), 9–16; Robert W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 84–152; *ქართველთა ცხოვრება*, [The Life of Kartli], ed. Simon Khaukchishvili, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Saxelgami, 1955), reprinted as *Kartlis c'xovreba: The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, with a new introduction by Simon H. Rapp, vol. 1 (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1998).

⁸ A Georgian word (literally the head of *eristavis*) for the prince of princes. Supposedly Guaram was the first ruler of Kartli from the Bagrationi family.

Iberia also took part in that rebellion and in the 570s all of Georgia and Armenia entered Roman protection. In the 580s the war for the Caucasus broke out again. Although the sources about the end of the sixth century are quite confused, one might suggest that Iberia was still under Roman dominion until the very end of the sixth century, when the Persians took over once again. Such was the situation in Georgia before the ecclesiastical schism between the Churches of Iberia and Armenia and before the period of Herakleios' invasion.⁹

The first thing that the student of Georgian history discovers in studying the first half of the seventh century is the fact that the sources give little information about the period. Almost all of the available Georgian chronicles date to a later period, namely, the tenth and eleventh centuries, except *The Conversion of Kartli*, which is from the seventh century. The events of this period seem to have been obscure to later historiographers. Only two Georgian authors mention the events at the beginning of the seventh century, that is to say, the schism between the Georgian and the Armenian sources and the main figure of the event, Katholikos Kyron. These are Arseni of Sapara in the eleventh century and Vakhushti Bagrationi, an eighteenth-century historian. At the same time, every source focuses on the person of Herakleios and his role in the Caucasus; he became the central figure in Georgian narratives. One thing is evident: the period around the invasion of Herakleios is mythologized and is heavily influenced by a general apocalyptic perception of his reign.

The role of Herakleios in Georgian historiography becomes clear if one pays attention to the scope and aims of medieval Georgian history-writing, how it perceived Georgian history and its role in universal history. As the title itself suggests, the program of *The Conversion of Kartli* is to tell the story of the process of Christianization in Georgia. For this narrative as well as for the other sources Christianization was not a single act at a single moment of history,¹⁰ but a long-term process with a beginning and an end. I would argue that the seventh century, namely, the invasion by Herakleios, was perceived as a closing moment in the whole history of “salvation” or the conversion of Georgia, after which peace, unity, and “orthodoxy” flourished in the kingdom.

Looking closely at *The Conversion of Kartli*, only a few passages in the text take the form of a narrative, otherwise it is a mere chronicle, partly only a list of kings and rulers. The three instances at which the annalistic structure turns into a proper

⁹ For the history of Kartli of the period see: [Davit Muskhelishvili] დავით მუსხელიშვილი, *საქართველო მეოთხე-მეექვსე საუკუნეებში* [Georgia in the fourth to eighth centuries], (Tbilisi: Mematiane, 2003), 200–300.

¹⁰ Although a separate extensive passage is dedicated to St. Nino's work.

narrative are: the invasion of Alexander the Macedonian and the founding of the kingdom of Iberia by King Pharnavaz (fourth–third century BC); Constantine and the baptism of King Mirian (first half of the fourth century AD), together with the institution of the office of *katholikos* (patriarch), that is, the granting of autocephaly to the Church by King Vakhtang Gorgasali (c. 540–602); and finally, the invasion by Herakleios and the “final cleansing” of the faith.¹¹

Thus, there are three focal points in history as presented by *The Conversion of Kartli*: the founding of the Georgian kingdom by Pharnavaz and the first idea of Georgian unity, Christianization, and autocephaly; and three central figures: Pharnavaz – the founder of the kingdom, Mirian – the first officially Christian king, and Vakhtang – a great king and the one who secured autocephaly for the Georgian Church. By analogy, three imperial figures triggered these pivotal points in the history of Kartli: Alexander the Great, Constantine, and Herakleios. Therefore, when analyzing Herakleios’ role in Georgian narratives, one must keep in mind that he had a concrete function for the sources and needed to fit into the structure of Georgian “salvation history,” which was nurtured by the general apocalyptic ideas of the period.¹² The activities of Herakleios, both religious and military, played a crucial role in later events in the Caucasus. Herakleios remained in the memory of Georgia as the third great “king” who came and brought radical and long-term changes to the region after Alexander the Macedonian and Constantine the Great. Herakleios was perceived as just as important for the formation of the Georgian kingdom as the first two. According to this semi-historical tradition, Alexander created the kingdom of Iberia: “He ordered the faith for the whole land [of Iberia] and left”¹³ and Constantine baptized it. But

¹¹ *The Conversion of Kartli*, 95–130.

¹² For the apocalyptic ideas around Herakleios see: Gerrit J. Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 81–94; Gerrit J. Reinink, “Die Entstehung der syrischen Alexanderlegende als politisch-religiöse Propagandaschrift für Herakleios’ Kirchenpolitik,” in *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History Offered to Professor Albert van Roey for his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. C. Laga, et al. *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 18 (Louvain: Peeters, 1985), 263–281; Wout Jac van Bekkum, “Jewish Messianic Expectations in the Age of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 95–112.

¹³ *The Life of Kartli*, 19. The whole passage says: “And Alexander ordered Azon to worship the sun and the moon and five stars and to serve an invisible god, the father of all, for there was not a prophet and teacher of true faith in those times, to teach and to show, but he himself made up a faith ordered it for the whole kingdom [of Iberia] and left.” (და უბრძანა ალექსანდრე აზონს, რათა პატივსცემდნენ მზესა და მთოვარესა

what did Herakleios do that remained in the memory of Georgians? The problem is to distinguish what is historical fact from what is another myth¹⁴ of an alien king coming and introducing changes in the history of a people.

Herakleios is widely regarded as one of the few late Roman emperors who left the capital city and personally took part in military campaigns.¹⁵ But the question of how trustworthy the sources actually are which deal with his sojourn in the Caucasus has not yet been posed.¹⁶ In the history of the Caucasus the invasion of Herakleios plays a double role. From the seventh century onward, the three Caucasian kingdoms received their final geopolitical and religious shapes; the process of the unification of Iberia and Lazika started and the Chalcedonian faith finally prevailed there. Armenia chose the anti-Chalcedonian faith, that is, a pro-Persian position. After several decades of uncertainty Albania ceased to exist as a kingdom and a cultural entity.

The march route of Herakleios in the Caucasus has been reconstructed from sources. In 619, Herakleios established a truce with the Avars and, having moved his troops from Thrace to the east in 621, started to prepare a major offensive against the Persians. According to the traditionally accepted route, Herakleios first took quarters near Nikomedia. He spent the winter in Pontus and in April 623 crossed Armenia (Erzerum – Kars – Shiraz – Dvin) and invaded Atropatene (Dvin – Nakchevan – Khoi – Ganzak). In Pontus he met and discussed Christological issues with Kyros of Phasis. In the spring of 624, the allied army of Laz, Abazgs and Iberians¹⁷ joined him. The campaign ended in failure and in the winter 625–626 Herakleios returned to Pontus. In summer 626 Herakleios started another campaign and passed through Lazika; with the Khazars as allies he crossed the Likh ridge and assaulted Tbilisi in 627. He left the Khazars there and invaded Persia and returned victorious to the city of Ganzak in Atropatene

და ვარსკულავთა ხუთთა და კმასხურდებდნენ ღმერთსა უხილავსა, დამბადებელსა ყოვლისასა. რამეთუ მას ჟამსა არა იყო წინასწარმეტყუელი და მოძღუარი სჯულისა ჭეშმარიტისა, რომელმანცა ასწავა და ამხილა, არამედ თვით მოიგონა სჯული ესე ალექსანდრე. მეფობასა შინა მისსა ყოველსა ქუეყანასა სჯული ესე დაუღვა. და წარვიდა ალექსანდრე.)

¹⁴ I would rather use the word *myth* than *legend* to stress the foundational meaning of Herakleios' invasion.

¹⁵ Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 156–192; James Howard-Johnston, “Heraclius’ Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630,” *War in History* 6 (1999): 1–44.

¹⁶ Hereafter I will mention the Caucasus as a single geopolitical entity.

¹⁷ Laz, Abazgs, and Iberians lived in southwestern, northwestern, and central Georgia, respectively.

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in the spring of 628.¹⁸ He returned to Constantinople via Armenia and, according to other sources, once again passed through Iberia. Georgian historical chronicles are more or less unanimous about his sojourn in Iberia and the assault on Tbilisi, but reconstructing the whole story is still problematic. However, they do not say anything about his travel to Lazika.¹⁹

The attitude towards Herakleios was affected by the period when the historian was writing. For example, Sumbat Davitisdze had a definite mission as a historian in the eleventh century, when Georgia was a united kingdom with great ambitions. The main aim of his treatise *The Life and the History of Bagrationis*²⁰ is to chronicle the lives of the members of Bagrationi dynasty and how they came to power.²¹ The story starts, of course, from the creation of the world and argues for a Davidic descent of the royal dynasty. But the chronicle has another aim, too: By that time (the beginning of the eleventh century) the idea of a united Caucasian kingdom was flourishing in Georgia and, most importantly, this idea was formed in opposition to the Greeks. The Georgians had the ambition of being equal to the Greeks, deserving a strong kingdom which would be an alternative power in the region.²² Therefore, Sumbat wanted to tell the story of opposition and enmity between the Greeks and Georgians and starts the narrative from Herakleios' invasion of Iberia. This time Herakleios appears at the beginning of the narrative, followed by two crucial events in the history of Georgia: the invasion of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer (976–1025) and the battle with King George I of Georgia, and later the war with Constantine VIII (1025–1028).²³ Therefore, once again the history of Georgia is shown through the prism of the world, i.e., Byzantine history, but this time not as the acquisition by but as opposition to the Greeks. For Sumbat, the united Georgian kingdom was formed by rivalry with the Greeks and Herakleios' invasion was the first step in this process. Thus, Herakleios was a central figure

¹⁸ Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 122–156.

¹⁹ Except for one, an eleventh-century compilation entitled *The Wonderful Stories of the Deeds from the Old Books*, which repeats the Greek narratives.

²⁰ For Sumbat Davitisdze see: Stephen Rapp, "Sumbat Davitisdze and the Vocabulary of Political Authority in the Era of Georgian Unification," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, No. 4 (2000): 570–576; Cyril Toumanoff, *Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth–XVth Centuries)* (New York: Traditio, 1943), 149–153.

²¹ See Rapp, "Sumbat Davitisdze," 570–576.

²² The work of the Georgian Athonite fathers is another witness to this new ideology.

²³ *The Life of Kartli* 1, 229–245.

in the Georgian conception of a united Georgian history.²⁴ On the one hand, he was seen as the finalizer of Georgian “salvation history” and, on the other hand, as the initiator of “national” history.

Sumbat repeats *The Conversion of Kartli* almost word for word when describing Herakleios’ activities in Kartli, but he adds some additional information.

After he left the fortress of Tbilisi, he went to Gardabani, to Varaz Gageli, and camped on the place called Khuzasheni, and blessed Varaz Gageli and all of his people. And he started to erect a church – the most splendid one of the churches. And he went to Berduji and stood in the middle of the village. And here he erected a stone cross and laid the foundation of the church of the Holy Mother of God and finished its dome... and from Gardabani he left for Lal and he summoned Prince Metsekevneli and blessed him and left for Baghdad.²⁵

Once again, foundation myths mention Herakleios, and moreover, as blessing two local princes, Gageli and Metsekevneli. One should not think, however, that most of the information provided by Georgian sources is either purely mythological or inaccurate. The existence of the Albanian house of the Metsekevneli is attested in other Georgian sources. Namely, according to the N/Sin-50 manuscript, recently discovered on Mt. Sinai, the Metsekevnelis transferred the bodies of the Georgian royal family from one place to another at the beginning of the Arab invasion.²⁶ By the first half of the eighth century they were already a

²⁴ This is the period when the term Georgia *Sakartvelo* emerged for the first time to describe the territory with one language and one faith under the single rule of a member of Bagrationi dynasty.

²⁵ *The Life of Kartli* 1, 374–375. და მივიდა გარდაბანს, ვარაზ გაგელისასა, და დაილაშქრა ადგილსა მას, რომელსა ჰქვიან ხუზაშენი, და ნათელ-სცა ერეკლე ვარაზ გაგელსა და ყოველსა ერსა მისსა. და იწყო შენებად ეკლესიასა, რომელი იგი უბრწინვალეს არს ყოველთა ეკლესიათა. და წარვიდა ბერდუჯს და დადგა გულსა სოფლისასა. და აღმართა ჯუარი ქვისა და დადგა საფუძველი წმიდისა ღმრთისმშობელისა ეკლესიისა, და აღასრულა გუმბათი მისი. ხოლო მან ჯიბლუ წარიღო კალა და ციხე იგი ტფილისისა გამოიღო, და ციხისთავი შეიპყრა. და დრაჰკნითა პირი აღუესო ამისთეს, რამეთუ თქუა სადიდებელი იგი მეფისა ერეკლესი. ხოლო კადრებისა მისთეს ტყავი გაჰ ადა და მეფესა მისწია იგი გარდაბანს ვარაზ გაგელისასა. და გარდაბანით მეფემან მიცვალა ლალს, და უწოდა მეწეკევენელთა მთავარსა, ნათელ-სცა და წარვიდა ბაღდადს.

²⁶ [Zaza Alexidze] ზაზა ალექსიძე, “გარეჯიდან სინას მთამდე: უცნობი მასალა სამონასტრო კომპლექსის შესახებ სინას მთის ქართულ ხელნაწერთა ახალი კოლექციიდან” [From Gareja to Mount Sinai: Unknown material in the Gareja Monastic Complex from the new collection of Georgian manuscripts from Mt. Sinai], in *Desert Monasticism – Gareja and the Christian East*, ed. Zaza Shkirtladze (Tbilisi: n.p., 2001), 48–62.

powerful dynasty in the Kingdom of Georgia.²⁷ The main point is that almost all the important building activities are more or less close to that period and the roots of the great families are directly connected to Herakleios.

Another text, attributed to Leonti Mroveli, *The Martyrdom of Archil King of Kartli*, is a good example of how the period of the Heracleian invasion was blurred:

Don't you know who this Archil is? He is the son of Stephanoz, relative of great King Vakhtang of the descendant of Mirian, the son of Kasre. And he was with his father when the latter was burying the treasury of the kingdom of Kartli. And he knows that King Herakleios buried his treasure... Know firmly that I was young in my years when King Herakleios passed through these lands, for my father and brother hid all the treasure in that fortress, which that deaf emir²⁸ assaulted and which belongs now to the Greeks.²⁹

The burying of treasure is another *topos* around Herakleios. The information that Herakleios or somebody connected to him buried a treasure is repeated by every medieval Georgian narrative. The text is also full of anachronisms. Archil (738–762) claims to be a witness of events which happened a hundred years earlier. The reason is that the author mixed Archil's father, Stephanoz III (711–735), with Stephanoz II (639–663) – a contemporary of Herakleios. Herakleios' invasion or, perhaps better, his personal role, affected almost all accounts of seventh-century history in medieval Georgian historiography.

Although Herakleios was a popular hero in Georgian narratives, most of them see him as a conqueror and the one who liberated (or captured, according to the point of view) Tbilisi. Few of the sources mention Herakleios' religious

²⁷ The mention of Gagelis may be a scribal or other kind of error because at that time the Gageli house did not exist yet. One could also suggest that this was an attempt of Gagelis to legitimize their rule.

²⁸ “Deaf” was a popular Georgian nickname for Murvan because of his exceptional cruelty.

²⁹ *The Life of Kartli* 1, 246–247. არა უწყია, თუ ვინ არს ესე არჩილ? ესე არს ძე სტეფანოზისი, ნათესავი დიდისა მეფისა ვახტანგისი, რომელი იყო ნათესავისაგან მირიანისა, ძისა ქასრესა. და ესე იყო მამისა თქუსა თანა, რაჟამს იგი დაჰფლვიდეს საგანძურთა სამეფოსა ქართლისათა; და იგიცა იცის, რომელ ერაკლე მეფემან დაფლნა საგანძურნი თქსნი, რამეთუ ერაკლეცა უჩუენებდა, სადაცა დაჰფლვიდა... უწყოდე მტკიცედ, რამეთუ მცირე ვიყავ ასაკითა, ოდეს-იგი განვლო ქუეყანა ესე ერაკლე მეფემან. ხოლო მამამან ჩემმან და ძმამან დასხნეს ყოველნი საგანძურნი ციხესა მას, სადათ-იგი მიექცა ყრუ ამირა და აწ აქუს იგი ბერძენთა.

policy. *The Conversion of Kartli* gives an account of Heraklios' campaign in the following way:

Then the king of the Greeks, Herakleios, came. And the commander of the fortress³⁰ called upon him and called him a goat, but the king was stubborn and he brought the book of Daniel and found the words: 'The goat of the west will come and will destroy the horns of the ram of the east.' And he said: 'For these are the words of the prophets regarding me and you will receive what you deserve.' And he left Jibgho³¹ to fight the fortress and went to Babylon to fight Khosrau. And soon Jibgho overtook the fortress and captured the head of the fortress and filled him with Drahkans, then tore [off] his skin and sent it to the king. And King Herakleios came to Babylon and captured Khosrau and destroyed Baghdad. And he brought the Wood of Life, turned back and started to rebuild Jerusalem by the Lord's command. And he put Modestos as a patriarch.³² And he left and before he came to Tpilisi, they had already finished building Sioni³³ and only the dome was left. And the king sent the messengers to Tpilisi, Mtsketa and Ujarma and ordered all the Christians to gather in the churches and all the *magi* and the fire worshipers should either be baptized or perish. But they did not wish to be baptized and they mingled [with the Christians] and the king took the sword and blood flooded the churches. And the emperor cleaned the Christian faith and left. And the *erismtavari* at that time was the same great Stephanoz and the katholikos was Bartholomeos II.³⁴

³⁰ *Kala* (კალა) – a Georgianized form of the Arabic *Qaa'lab* – fortress. Sometimes it is mistakenly considered as a proper name for a city, see Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, 144–145. *Kala* is a just a word for the main fortress or the citadel of the city.

³¹ The person of Jibgho has not yet been identified in prosopography. According to one theory, Jibgho was the title of the Khazar viceroy, the second person after the khagan. Moses Kalankatuatsi mentions "Jibghokhakan," which might mean "vice-khagan". On the Khazars, see Svetlana Pletnjowa, *Chasaren, Mittelalterliches Reich an Don und Wolga* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1978).

³² Patriarch of Jerusalem in 632–634.

³³ A cathedral in Tbilisi built by Vakhtang Gorgasali in the fifth century and later rebuilt by *erimstavari* Adarnase in 639.

³⁴ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature*, 95–96. მაშინ ჩამოვლო ერაკლიმ მეფემან ბერძენთამან. და უკმო ციხის თავმან კალაით თვილისით მეფესა ერაკლეს გამოძრახვად, ხოლო მან ფერკი დაიპყრა და დანიელი წიგნი მოიღო და მოიძია სიტყუა ესე ვითარმედ: "მაშინ მოვიდეს ვაცი იგი მზისა დასავლისა და შემუსრნეს რქანი იგი ვერძისა მის მზისა აღმოსავლისანი". და თქუა ერაკლე: "უკუწითუ ესე ესრეთ იყოს სიტყუა წინასწარმეტყუელისა ჩემთკს, მე მიგაგო მრჩობელი მისაგებელი

The mention of the Book of Daniel is an apocalyptic insertion in the text and a popular topos. Taking this information literally and, moreover, drawing some general conclusions from it, like “Herakleios here took counsel from the Book of Daniel, which he used to vindicate claims to divine aid. Frequent resort to the Bible reinforced the religious character of this campaign,”³⁵ is not acceptable. This passage rather shows the attitude of the sources towards Herakleios – he was perceived as an apocalyptic figure with a divine mission.

The expression: “The emperor cleaned the Christian faith and left” is subject to different interpretations. Some see this action of Herakleios as an issue of Church dogma, claiming that according to this sentence the victims of Herakleios were local Anti-chalcedonians or pro-Persian Christians.³⁶ A slightly different interpretation says: “Herakleios’ efforts to restore ecclesiastical unity were also recorded in Georgia.”³⁷ Neither the first nor the second interpretation sounds reasonable to me, first of all because nothing of this kind is said in this or any

შენ”. დაუტევა ჯიბლო ერისთავი კალას ბრძოლად და იგი წარვიდა ბაბილოვნად ბრძოლად ხუასრო მეფისა. ხოლო ამან ჯიბლო მცირეთა დღეთა შინა კალა გამოიღო და იგი ციხისთავი შეიპყრა, დრაჰკანით აეგსო, და მერმე ტყავი გაჰხადა და მეფესა უკან მიაწია. მოვიდა ერაკლე მეფე ბაბილოვანს და შეიპყრა ხუასრო მეფე და შემუსრა ბაღდადი და ბაბილოანი. და მოაღებინა ძელი ცხორებისაჲ, უკმოიქცა და იწყო ბრძანებითა ღმრთისაჲთა შენებად იერუსალჴმისა. და მოდისტო დასუა პატრიარქად. და წარვიდა კუალად მუნვე. და ვიდრე მოსლგამდე ტფილისს სიონი გაასრულეს, ხოლო ჯუარისა ეკლესიასა აკლდა. ამან ერაკლე მეფემან ტფილისს და მცხეთას და უყარმას განაელონინა ქადაგნი, რამთა ყოველნი ქრისტეანნი ეკლესიათა შინა შემოკრბენ და ყოველნი მოგუნი და ცეცხლის მსახურნი ანუ მონათლნენ ანუ მოისრნენ. ხოლო მათ მონათულაჲ არა ინდომეს, ზაკუვით თანა აღერივნეს, ვიდრემდის ყოველთა ზედა წარმართთა მეფემან იკადა მახკლი. და ეკლესიათა შინა მდინარენი სისხლისანი დიოდეს. და განწმიდა ერაკლე მეფემან სჯული ქრისტესი და წარვიდა. ერისთაობდა იგივი დიდი სტეფანოზ და კათალიკოზი იყო ბართლომე.

³⁵ Kaegi, 144.

³⁶ “In cleaning the Christian faith, as correctly suggested by scholars, the extermination of Monophysites is meant, whose anti-Chalcedonian stand was supported by Persia.” [Mikheil Gogoladze] მიხეილ გოგოლაძე, *ქართლის სოციალური და პოლიტიკური ისტორია მოქცევა ქართლისაჲს მიხედვით* [The social and political history of Kartli according to *The Conversion of Kartli*], (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2004), 193–194.

³⁷ Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 66. This is a mistranslation of the source. First of all, *Qadagi* is not a priest but rather a messenger or a prophet and, secondly, it is not said that *all Christians would be united in the Church*, but that all Christians should enter the Church. In entering the Church a mere physical entrance is meant and not receiving the union. Otherwise it would not be possible to explain how the magi could have mingled with them and been exterminated in the Church.

other source. Judging from the syntactic construction this sentence directly follows the passage in which the author describes Herakleios' slaying fire worshippers. The religious policy of Herakleios also enters the picture. It is improbable that he would have slaughtered the Anti-chalcedonians if at the same time he was trying to create a union with them. This sentence might have two explanations; it might be a logical conclusion from Herakleios slaying the fire worshippers and "cleaning" Christianity – in short, another *topos* befitting a "holy king." But it also might be the case that attributing the cleansing of the faith to Herakleios was an allusion to the "real cleansing" of the faith by the break with the Armenian Church and returning to the Chalcedonian, i.e., imperial faith.

The same information is repeated almost word for word by Sumbat Davitisdze and Juansher. The only indication of Herakleios' religious policy is that he slaughtered pagans and enforced Christianity. No Georgian source records anything about an "imperial heresy" and Monotheletism/Monenergism. The only negative information on Herakleios' religious activity appears in the *Life of Vaktang Gorgasali* by Juansher:

Some years after this there appeared in Greece a man who was a vassal of the Emperor Maurice, by the name of Herakleios. He slew the Emperor Phocas and seized Greece. He grew powerful and brought Turks from the west. He gathered innumerable troops and attacked Persia in order to seek out the Wood of Life. First he came to Kartli. Stepanoz did not wish to betray the Persians. So he fortified the citadels and took up his position in Tpilisi. King Herakleios arrived and laid siege to Tpilisi. But Stepanoz was a valiant and resolute warrior. Daily he made forays out of the city gates and fought against the Greeks. Then in one encounter they cut down Stepanoz and killed him. So the emperor seized Tpilisi.³⁸

King Herakleios entered Persia and slew King Khuasro. He captured Baghdad and took away the Wood of Life. He returned along the same

³⁸ *The Life of Kartli*, 223–224. ხოლო შემდგომად ამისსა რაოდენთამე წელიწადთა გამოჩნდა საბერძნეთს კაცი ერთი, თჳსი მაკრიკ კეისრისა, სახელით ერაკლე. ამან მოკლა ფოკას კეისარი, და დაიპყრა საბერძნეთი. განძლიერდა იგი და მიიყვანნა დასაუღლეთით თურქნი, და შეკრიბნა სპანი ურიცხვნი და წარმოემართა სპარსეთად ძებნად ძელისა ცხოვრებისასა. და მოვიდა პირველად ქართლს. ამან სტეფანოზ არა ინება განდგომა სპარსთაგან, და განმაგრნა ციხე-ქალაქნი, და დადგა ტფილისსა შინა. მოვიდა ერაკლე მეფე და მოადგა ტფილისსა, ხოლო სტეფანოზ იყო ქუელი მკვედარი და შემმართებელი: დღეთა ყოველთა გამოვიდის კართა ქალაქისათა და ებრძოდის ბერძენთა. მაშინ უკუე მას წყობასა შინა ჩამოაგდეს სტეფანოზ და მოკლეს. და დაიპყრა კეისარმან ტფილისი.

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road to Kartli in the seventh year since he had set out. The Church of the Venerable Cross and the Sioni of T'pili had been completed by Adarnase, *mtavari* of Kartli. Then King Herakleios took away the foot-rest and nails of our Lord Jesus Christ, which had been given to Mirian by Constantine. Adarnase, *mtavari* of Kartli, importuned and begged the emperor not to remove these gifts from God. But the emperor did not heed his request and took them away. In the time of Adarnase three *katholikoi* passed away: John, Babila and Tabor. Adarnase died, and his son Stepanoz succeeded [him].³⁹

The information that Herakleios took relics from Georgia may be the mirror image of his same action in Jerusalem. According to one Armenian text, *On the Holy Cross and the Narrative on King Herakleios*, after having regained the Holy Cross, “he put it on a wagon and with a multitude of troops he took it on the main road of Iberia and brought it to the kingdom of the Greeks, Constantinople.”⁴⁰ Although in reality he did not pass through Iberia with the Cross, the “main road of Iberia” really did exist and was a pathway through the broad valleys of the ridge connecting the basins of the Chorokhi (according to Arrian, the Acampsis River in the southwest of modern Georgia) and Euphrates rivers. It is interesting to note the motifs of Herakleios taking the relics from Georgia, thus stressing his apocalyptic role. This might also be a mirror image of Herakleios’ similar activities in Armenia.

Several manuscripts of the text have an interesting addition from a much later period (the eighteenth century), which indicates the strong tradition of the foundational activities of Herakleios:

And he came to Samtskhe and heard about the wonder-working nature of the icon made by the Holy Virgin and given to Andrew the Firstcalled, who brought it and put in the chapel at Atskhuri. So the emperor came to see and venerate the icon. And the emperor began

³⁹ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 236.

⁴⁰ [Nicholas Marr] Н. Марр, “Антиох Стратиг: Пленение Иерусалима Персами в 614 г.” [Antiochos Strategos: The capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614], in [N. Marr] Н. Марр, *Тексты и разыскания по армяно-грузинской филологии* [Texts and studies in Armeno-Georgian philology] 9 (1909); Antiochus Monachus, “La Prise de Jerusalem par les Perses,” in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Georgi* 203, ed. and tr. G. Garitte (Louvain: Peeters, 1960), 15–30.

to build the foundation of the great church of Atskhuri which was finished later by faithful men and made into a bishopric.⁴¹

No Georgian source mentions anything about Herakleios introducing the Monenergist heresy or him traveling to Lazika. The narrative of his invasion of Iberia sounds rather like legendary information based on Herakleios' real travel to Georgia. Herakleios appears suddenly and out of nowhere, captures the city, cleans the faith, leaves to fight the Persians, on the way back passes through once again, victorious, and while passing by takes with him the relics Constantine had given to the king of Iberia. A conclusion one can draw from these stories is that these sources were interested in Herakleios only insofar as he concerned the ruling dynasty of Georgia. The story of baptizing the magi might be another literary topos. The fact that Herakleios's heresy is not mentioned at all, however, might mean that it did not exist in Georgia, but it also might be the case that this fact was deliberately omitted by the historiographers.

Herakleios' effect on dogma in Armenia is recorded by the eleventh-century Georgian polemicist, Arseni of Sapara. Even this great dogmatic polemicist of the period, who should definitely have known what the essence of Monenergism/ Monothelitism was, does not mention anything about this heresy.

After a while Emperor Herakleios came to Armenia and saw the heresy of the Armenians and was worried for their damnation because of their involuntary rejection of the true faith. He summoned a big council of the bishops and priests of Armenia and wrote a letter to Katholikos Ezer and the princes to gather at the city of Karin and study the creed of the council of Chalcedon and for the Armenians to accept the true two natures in Christ. So everybody gathered there in front of the king and after much study they received the truth. And the Armenians obeyed by signing the document so that nobody would object to it."⁴²

⁴¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 224. მოვიდა სამცხეს, და ესმა სასწაულო-მოქმედება ხატისა მის, რომელი წმიდასა ღმრთისმშობელსა გამოესახა და მიეცა პირველწოდებულისა ანდრიასოვს, და მას მოესვენა და დაესვენებინა მცირესა ეკუდერსა შინა აწყუერს. მოვიდა კეისარი ერაკლე ხილვად და თაყუანისცემად ხატისა მის. მაშინ იწყო ერაკლე აწყუერს დიდისა საყდრისა საძირკუელისა შთაგდებად და შენებად, ვიდრემდის მიერთგან განსრულნა მორწმუნეთა კაცთა მიერ, და მიერ შექმენს საეპისკოპოსო.

⁴² Z. Aleksidze, *Arseni of Sapara; On the Severance of the Armenians from the Georgians* (Tbilisi: Mecniereba: 1980), 90. მოვიდა პერაკლე მეფე სომხითს და იხილა წვალება სომეხთა და ფრად შეწუნა წარწყმელისა მათისათვის უნებლიებით მიქცევითა. და ბრძანა კრებად დიდი ყოფად ეპისკოპოსთა და მოძღუართა სომხითისათა და მიწერა წიგნი ეზრა კათალიკოზისა და აზნაურთა, რაათ შემოკრბენ კარნუ-ქალაქს და გამოიდიონ სარწმუნოება კრებისათვის ქალკილონისა და ცნან ჭეშმარიტად ორი

To the best of my knowledge, even the Armenian sources do not speak about the religious policy of Herakleios. The most popular Armenian cycle around Herakleios deals with the story of the travel of the True Cross through the Caucasus, namely, Armenia. Authors like John of Draskhanakert (John the Katholikos), Asoghik, and other sources like the *Tshar'ntirs*⁴³ tell stories of the travel of the Holy Cross to Armenia. Although these stories do not have a direct relation to the subject here, it is useful to show the kind of popular narratives which existed around Herakleios in the region. Herakleios was once again in the center of a semi-mythological cycle of the restoration of the True Cross and just as in Georgian sources he is portrayed as the founder of churches and monasteries. Once again, there is no indication about Herakleios' religious policy. The religious policy of Herakleios is mentioned in a single case, when the story of the ecclesiastical union with Katholikos Ezr is told.⁴⁴

A problem arises here, namely, that none of the Armenian sources mention a union achieved by a dogmatic compromise between Herakleios and Ezr, nor does John of Odzun, the author of the history of Church councils of Armenia, mention anything about any Monenergist or Monothelite formula of Herakleios. According to the unanimous testimony of the sources the reasons for accepting the union were purely political. Then where do the claims such as “a union based on Monenergist formula was accepted and signed at the synod of Theodosiopolis”⁴⁵ come from? Logically speaking, there is only one possibility, that in the midst of the Monoenergist controversy Monoenergism was the basis of the union with the Armenian Church. Even if such a compromise based on a Monoenergist

ბუნებას ქრისტესი სომეხთა. და მოიწივნეს ყოველნი ერთობით წინაში მეფისა და გამოიწულილეს მესამედ მრავლითა ძიებითა და დაამტკიცეს მართალი. და დაემორჩილნეს სომეხნი ფიცით კელ-წერილითა, რაითა არღარავის წინააღმდეგნ ცილობად მისთვის.

⁴³ Literally, *The Chosen Words*, the equivalent of the Georgian *Mrvanltavi*.

⁴⁴ The story is that Herakleios tried to achieve a union with Katholikos Ezr based on the compromise formula of Monoenergism. According to John of Draskhanakert, Ezr yielded to temptation after having received one third of the revenue of Kolb and the revenues from the salt mines in exchange. Herakleios also threatened Ezr that he would establish a parallel hierarchy if he rejected the union. Soon, in 632, a synod was summoned to Theodosiopolis, which Herakleios himself supposedly attended. Five *katholikoi* after Ezra and just before John are usually considered as Chalcedonian and therefore heretical and condemned by the Armenian Church. These are: Nerses III, Anastasius, Israel, Sahak III, and Elias. The union was kept until 726, when Katholikos Hovanness of Odzun finally rejected Chalcedon at the Council of Manazkert and returned to the Monophysite formula.

⁴⁵ Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom*, 65.

insertion really occurred, then the next five *katholikoi*, who were condemned by the Armenian Church, would have been adherents of the Monothelite doctrine and condemned by the council of 681. Or there should be some indications that after Monoenergism was condemned the Armenian Church was requested to do the same. This is not the case, however, and the Armenian Church at that time was even collaborating with the Church of Constantinople without any problems. The one and only text which I have yet found where the Armenians are accused of Monoenergism is the Georgian translation of the Greek text *Thirty Chapters of the Armenian Heresy*:

The evil Armenians say that after the union the Son of God has one nature, one will, and one energy, which is the faith of Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul and all the communion of theirs which was condemned by the sixth Holy Synod called in Constantinople by one hundred and seventy fathers during the reign of Constantine.⁴⁶

The problem here is that “one nature, one will, and one activity” was not the faith of Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul, but two natures, one will, and one activity. This formula could not have been the compromise achieved at the council of Theodosiopolis because it was already the faith of the Anti-Chalcedonian Armenians. However, this might be explained by the polemical character of the treatise.

As noted above, the evaluation of Herakleios’ invasion of the Caucasus in particular and the attitude towards his person in general differs between Georgian and Armenian sources. It also depends on the period when the author was writing. The approach of a seventh-century Armenian author might be different from that of an eleventh-century author, because by that time Armenia had joined an ecclesiastical union with Herakleios. In the later period, however, this union was an object of execration for Armenians. Generally speaking, the Armenian sources give more detailed information on Herakleios’ travel to the Caucasus than the Georgian ones.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ [Zaza Alexidze] ზაზა ალექსიძე, “არსენი ვაჩეს ძის “დოგმატიკონში” შესული ანტიმონოფიზიტური ტრაქტატი და მისი გამოძახილი ძველ სომხურ მწერლობაში” [An anti-Monophysite treatise included in the *Dogmatikon* of Arseni Vacheszde and a reaction to it in the Armenian literature], *Mravaltavi* 1 (1971): 133–158.

⁴⁷ See: James Howard-Johnston, “Armenian Historians of Heraclius: An Examination of Aims, Sources and Working Methods of Sebeos and Movses Daskhurantsi,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 41–62; *The Armenian Sources Attributed to Sebeos*, tr. Robert W. Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).



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To conclude, one can say that the role of Herakleios in the Georgian medieval tradition was highly overestimated. Moreover, his overemphasized character was the reason for neglecting other crucial events of the period. This period of Georgian history was much confused and almost every major event, including the building activities of the period and the ecclesiastical and dogmatic reforms, were attributed to Herakleios. Later historians such as Sumbat inserted Herakleios in their ideological program, thus attributing a pivotal role to the emperor in the formation of Georgian cultural, religious, and political identity.