

# The History of Georgian Civilization

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**Spread of Christianity in Georgia. Georgia Part of the New Transregional System and Order, Regional Competition between the Great Powers**

- ***Spread of Christianity in Colchis/Lazica***
- ***Spread of Christianity in Iberia***
- ***Origins of Georgian Christianity***
- ***The Iberian Kingdom, Formation of Territorial State, King Vakhtang I, Gorgasali***
- ***Fall of the Kingdom of Iberia***
- ***Christianity and the growth of feudalism***

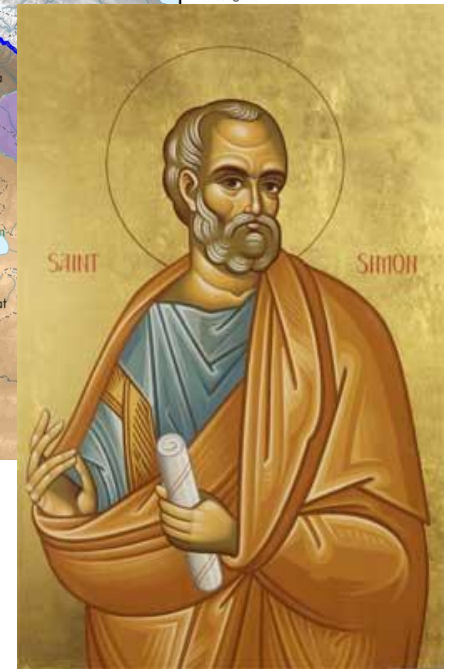
# Lazica /West Georgia

❖ Christianity began to spread in the early 1st century.

□ **St. Andrew, St. Simon the Canaanite, and St. Matata-apostles**

□ the Hellenistic, local pagan and Mithraic religious beliefs would be widespread until the 4th century.

□ In the early 4th century, the Christian eparchy of Pitiunt (*Bichvinta*) was established in this kingdom.



[St. Simon the Canaanite](#)

# Lazica/West Georgia

By the 130s AD, the kingdoms of

- Machelons,
- Heniochi,
- Lazica,
- Apsilia,
- Abasgia,
- and Sanigia had occupied the district from south to north.
- The first Christian king of Lazica was Gubazes I;
- in the 5th century, Christianity was made the official religion of Lazica.



# Lazica/West Georgia

- **Goths (tribes)**, dwelling in the Crimea and looking for their new homes, raided Colchis in 253 AD, but they were repulsed with the help of the Roman garrison of Pitiunt.
- Germanic tribes known as “Crimean Goths”, the exact ethnic origin of the Germanic peoples in the Crimea is a subject of debate.
- By the 3rd-4th centuries, most of the local small kingdoms and principalities had been conquered by the Lazic kings.
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# Spread of Christianity in Iberia, Mirian

## III

- **Mirian III** was a king of Iberia, The founder of the royal Chosroid dynasty (306-337)
  - contemporaneous to the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (306–337).
  - The king's name, Mirian, is a Georgian adaptation of the Iranian "Mihran". The medieval Georgian records give other versions of his name, both in its original Iranian as well as closely related Georgian forms (Mirean, Mirvan).
  - Writing in Latin, the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (XXI.6.8) renders the name of his contemporary Iberian king as *Meribanes*.
  - *Conversion of Kartli to Christianity* identifies Mirian as the son of Lev, who is unattested elsewhere.
- ✓ According to the medieval Georgian chronicle *Life of the Kings*, Mirian was a Persian prince married to an Iberian princess
  - ✓ Abeshura, daughter of the last Georgian Arsacid king Asparug from the Parnavazian dynasty.



# *Spread of Christianity in Iberia*

- While Professor Giorgi Melikishvili an eminent Georgian historian considers Mirian a representative of the local Iberian élite clan to whom the medieval tradition ascribed an exotic foreign royal ancestry to introduce him with more prestige.
- Upon the death of Aspagur, Mirian was installed on the throne of Iberia by his father whom the medieval Georgian chronicles refer to as "K'asre" ([Khosrau](#)), [Great King of Iran](#).
- After the death of his first wife **Abeshura**, he married **Nana "from Pontus , daughter of Oligotos"**, who bore him two sons— **Rev** and **Varaz-Bakur**—and a daughter, who married Peroz, the first **Mihranid** dynast of **Gogarene**.



# Tomb of King Marian, Church of Samtravo



# *Spread of Christianity in Iberia*

- King Mirian and leading nobles converted to Christianity around 317/334
- According to tradition, Mirian's second wife, Nana, preceded her husband in conversion.
- The event is related with the mission of a Cappadocian woman, Saint Nino, who in the year of 303, started preaching Christianity in Iberia.



# *Origins of Georgian Christianity*

- Saint Nino, to whom is attributed the conversion of the Georgians to Christianity, is traditionally portrayed as a holy captive woman living about the year A.D. 330 , in the time of Constantine the Great.
- According to custom, she was born in Cappadocia and became a slave. she belonged to a Greek-speaking Roman family from Kolastra, Cappadocia and was a relative of **Saint George**.

Nino came to Georgia from Constantinople. Other sources claim she was from Rome, Jerusalem or Gaul (modern France). As the legend goes, she performed miraculous healings and converted the Georgian queen, Nana, and eventually the pagan king Mirian of Iberia, who, lost in darkness and blinded on a hunting trip, found his way only after he prayed to "Nino's God".

- Mirian declared Christianity the official religion (c. 327/337) and Nino continued her missionary activities among Georgians until her death.

# *Origins of Georgian Christianity*

- Iberians set to work to build a church at Mtskheta.
- Nino of Georgia- A Woman Evangelist “, Equal to the Apostles”
- Nino find the grapevine cross in her hand. She tied the cross in her hair and began her missionary journey.
- The grapevine cross continues to be an important symbol of the Georgian Orthodox Church.



# Iberia in III-IV cc.

- The religion became a strong tie between Iberia and Eastern Rome / Byzantine Empire and had a large-scale impact on the state's culture and society.
- From 363 **King Varaz-Bakur I** (Asphagur) (363-365) became a **Persian vassal**, an outcome confirmed by **the Peace of Acilisene** in 387.
- Although a later ruler of Iberia/Kartli, **Pharsman IV** (406-409), preserved his country's autonomy and finished to pay tribute to Persia.





# Iberia in III-IV cc. – “the double” political authorities

- Sassanian kings soon began to appoint their Viceroys (pitiaxae/bidaxae) to keep watch on Iberia/Kartli.
- The Persians eventually made Viceroyal office hereditary in the ruling house of **Lower Kartli**, thus inaugurating the Kartli pitiaxate bringing under their control quite an extensive territory.
- **Although it remained a part of the kingdom of Kartli, its viceroys turned their domain into a center of Persian influence.**



# Iberia in III-IV cc. - the double Religious authority

- By the middle of the 5th century, Zoroastrianism became a second official religion in eastern Georgia alongside Christianity.
- Sassanian kings sent their priests to convert Iberians.
- However, efforts to convert the common Georgian people were generally unsuccessful.

# Zoroastrianism

- **Mazdaism and Magianism**, is an ancient Iranian religion and a religious philosophy.
- the one God, Ahura Mazda



## *The Iberian Kingdom, Formation of Territorial State, King Vakhtang I, Gorgasali*



- Iberian king Vakhtang I also known as Gorgasali (447-502) - ***the Wolf Head***- possible reflection of the wolf cult in ancient Georgia
- Beyond the *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* (hereinafter LVG), the medieval Georgian sources mention Vakhtang only briefly, yet with respect rarely afforded to the pre-Bagratid Georgian monarchs

# Relationship with Byzantine

- Kings first wife was Iranian princess **Balendukht** who died at childbirth , He married Helena, "daughter" (possibly relative) of Emperor Zeno.
- Received permission from Constantinople to elevate the head of the church of Iberia, **the bishop of Mtskheta, to the rank of Catholicos**
- Newly appointed 12 bishops,
- to be consecrated at Antioch eparchy.

# Reformation and the state building program

- Formally vassal of the Persians.
- He secured the northern borders by subjugating the Caucasian mountaineers
- Brought the neighboring western and southern Georgian lands under his control
- He established an *Autocephalic Patriarchate* at Mtskheta
- He made Tbilisi as a capital.

# War for independence

- In 482, Vakhtang Gorgasali led a general uprising against Sassanian Persia with support of Byzantine Empire.
- Almost 20 years
- the kingdom failed to gain active Byzantine support and was finally defeated in 502 when King Vakhtang was wounded in battle.
- The wounded king was transported to his castle at Ujarma where he died and was interred at the cathedral in Mtskheta.
- Javakhishvili puts Vakhtang's death at c. 502.

# Castle at Ujarma





# ***Fall of the Kingdom of Iberia***

- The continuing rivalry between Byzantium and Persia for supremacy in the Caucasus,
  - and an unsuccessful rebellion of the Iberians under **King Gurgen** that followed (523), had tragic consequences for the country.
- In 580, Hormizd IV (578-590) **abolished the monarchy after the death of King Bakur III,** and Iberia became a Persian province ruled by *a marzpan (governor)*.

# ***Fall of the Kingdom of Iberia***

- In the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, Iberian nobles urged Byzantine Emperor **Maurice to restore the Kingdom of Iberia**, and the independence was temporarily restored in 582.

591, Byzantium and Persia agreed to division Iberia, **Tbilisi went to Persian, while Mtskheta remaining under Byzantine control.**

# *Fall of the Kingdom of Iberia*

- At the beginning of the 7th century, the treaty between Byzantium and Persia collapsed.
- **The Iberian Prince Stepanoz I (ca. 590-627)**, decided in 607 to join forces with Persia in order to reunite all the provinces of Iberia under one crown, a goal he seemed to have accomplished.
- **Heraclius' armies in 627 and 628, resulted in the defeat of both Iberians and Persians and secured Byzantine dominance in the South Caucasus until the beginning of the Arab invasion.**



Heraclius overcoming Khosrau II; plaque from a cross (Champlevé enamel over gilt copper, 1160–1170, Paris, Louvre)



# *Christianity and the growth of feudalism*

- Georgian *mamasakhlisi*, or 'fathers of the house', as the tribal chiefs of old were called.
- nine dukes or *eristavi* ('head of the people').
- who were simultaneously civil governors and military heads of their respective provinces.
- The knights.
- The peasants.