

**KHAZAR-BYZANTINE-SLAV COALITION AGAINST ABBASID CALIPHATE
AND THE CAUCASUS IN THE 850s****Leri Tavadze***

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Abstract: The rebellion of 852 in Armīniya (Abbasid province in the Caucasus) resulted in the assassination of the governor of the Abbasid Caliphate. Caliph al-Mutawwakil (r. 847-861) dispatched a punitive expedition with intention of conquering and subduing the areas that were out of Abbasid control.

Bughā al-Kabir was appointed in command of the Abbasid army and was sent to the Caucasus in the same year. Bughā's Caucasian military campaign was of large scale, arguably the largest Caucasian military expedition organized by the Caliphate in the 9th century.

The Abbasid army attacked, imprisoned, and killed the population of Armīniya involved in the assassination of the Abbasid governor; Muslim usurpers who were unwilling to yield the orders of the Caliphate got punished; the governor of Tbilisi Ishāq b. Ismā'īl was captured and beheaded while his residence and the center of Muslim position in Kartli, Tbilisi, was submitted. A large number of Christian Armenian and Arranian (Albanian) rulers were imprisoned.

The Georgian rulers, who ruled the northern outskirts of the Caliphate, were divided. They mostly opposed the Abbasids, while some of them supported the Caliph. The 853-854 campaigns were successful for Bughā and his Georgian allies, but other Georgian rulers asked for support from the Byzantines and the Khazars. According to al-Ya'qūbī (the 9th c.), the Caucasian rulers who had escaped captivity called for the help of Khazars, Byzantines, and Slavs in the fight against the Abbasids. They received a positive response. A large force under Khazar leadership was sent against the Caliphate while the Byzantines launched an attack on the Eastern Mediterranean domains of the Caliphate.

In 855, in the course of Khazar-Byzantine-Slav involvement in the Caucasian affairs, the Abbasids adopted a defensive stance. Derbent was successfully protected. The Khazars and their allies were unable to penetrate in the direction of Arran. In the direction of Kartli, the Khazars were more successful, probably with the support of local rulers.

Keywords: *Abbasids, Armīniya, Arran, Byzantium, Caucasus, Georgia, Khazars, Slavs*

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INTRODUCTION

The ninth-century reality in the Caucasus was characterized by the rise and decline of Abbasid hegemony in the region. The great powers influenced political condition of the Caucasus. The primary adversaries of the Abbasids were the Byzantines and the Khazars. The first testimony of the Slavic involvement in Caucasian affairs dates from this period. The middle of the 9th century saw emergence of numerous local states in the Caucasus. All these political entities played a serious role in reshaping the Caucasian political map. The interactions of these entities provide a dynamic picture of alliances, conflicts, diplomacy, negotiations, wars, and border changes, all of which make the political history of the 9th century Caucasus so interesting.

The middle of the 9th century is notable due to the intense military intervention of the Abbasid Caliphate in the Caucasus. The internal conflicts and political intrigues weakened the power of the Caliph in the peripheries of the Abbasid Empire. In the 850s, particularly in 852-855, the Caliphate made a significant effort to subdue the local Christian or Muslim population of the Caucasus. Khazar-Byzantine-Slav involvement in the Caucasian conflict was a single phase of the war that took place in the region.

The 852-855 War in the Caucasus, more commonly known as Bughā al-Kabir's military expedition, has been extensively studied by historians. However, the involvement of the Khazars, Byzantines and Slavs in these events has received less attention. An overview of the historiography of the 850s conflict is a valuable starting point before examining the details of the war and diplomacy.

Medieval Armenian authors provide various accounts of Bughā al-Kabir's military activities in the Caucasus region; however, the accounts of two historians are of greater interest. Tovma Artsruni (The 9th-10th cc.) wrote "History of the House of Artsruni" and describes the political history of Vaspurakan, along with a description of the domains held by the dynasty. His account is particularly valuable about Bughā al-Kabir's campaign, although he does not mention the involvement of the Khazar-Byzantine-Slavs coalition in the conflict [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 175-255]. John Catholicos of Armenia (r. 897-923), also known as Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i, wrote "History of Armenia" [Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 118-125]. His narrative is primarily concerned with the Armenian and Arranian resistance against the Caliphate, with less attention being paid to other aspects of the Caucasian resistance. Step'anos Tarōnec'i provides further insight into the suppression of Armenian princes by the Abbasids [Step'anos Tarōnec'i (2017): 174-177], while Vardan's "History" is the compilation of former authors [Thomson (1989): 183-184].

Movses Kaghankatvatsi (or Movses Dasxurançi) is the 10th century author of "History of Aghuans". He wrote on Bughā's incursion in Armenia, Arran, and Georgia in the 850s [Movsēs Dasxurançi (1961): 218-219]. Arab authors provide insight into the materials preserved in the archives of the Caliphate. Those authors were: al-Balādhurī (the 9th c.), al-Ya'qūbī (the 9th c.), and al-Ṭabarī (839-923) [al-Balādhuri (1916): 331-332; al-Ṭabarī (1989): 111-116, 121-124]. The Campaign of Bughā is narrated by all of them, but only al-Ya'qūbī mentions the Khazar-Byzantine-Slav alliance against the Abbasids [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1266-1267; Шагинян (2018): 362-363]. The compilation of above-

mentioned Oriental authors was presented by other Muslim historians, e.g. Ibn al-Athīr [Ибн ал-Асир (1940): 68-69].

The Georgian authors also provide considerable and informative insight. Mat'iane Kartlisa ("A History of Kartli". Also known as Royal Georgian Annals) was written in the 11th century and it was based on documents kept in the chancellery of the Georgian Kingdom. Similarly, as al-Ya'qūbī, it also describes Bughā al-Kabir's campaign and subsequent events [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142-143]. Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian was written soon after these events and concentrates attention on the Caliphate's campaign and the passion of Kostanti the Georgian, a native of Kakheti Korepiskopate [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 164-172; Javakhishvili (1977): 86-90; Abashidze & Rapp (2004): 137-173]. Michael Modrekili composed a work of hymnography, entitled "Hymns". It describes the passion of Kostanti the Georgian based on aforementioned hagiographic work [Michael Modrekili (1978): 324-326]. Michael Modrekili's work was composed in the second half of the 10th century, but the particular hymn could have been written before. A contemporary Georgian inscription from the Ateni Sioni Church (the end of August, 853) sheds some light on Bughā's incursion in Georgia [КСК III (1989): 131-132].

The study of the Caliphate's Caucasian policy is extensive in scholarly literature. Proficient authors have written about Abbasid policy in the Caucasus. These researchers are not only Orientalists; rather many are involved in Caucasian or Khazar studies, hence their primary research areas are countries of the Caucasus or Khazar Khaganate. Mkrtsich Ghazarian, Panteleymon Žuze, Aram Ter-Ghewondyan, Arsen Shahinyan and Allison Vacca are among those, who studied the Abbasid policy and administration in the Caucasus [Ghazarian (1903): 43, 51-54; Жузе (1937): 166-214]; Sikharulidze (1976): 139-143; Ter-Ghewondyan (1976): 41-44; Тер-Гевондян (1977): 138-148; Silagadze (1991): 146-153; Шагинян (2011): 299-313; Japaridze (2014): 11-43; Vacca (2017): 66-112; Vacca (2020): 229-253]. The military career of Bughā al-Kabir in the context of the Arab-Byzantine conflicts is studied by Konstantinos Takirtakoglou [Takirtakoglou (2018): 83-120].

Some other authors use to write from different perspectives rather than keeping their minds on Abbasid policy and Arabic sources. In this case, a more local, Caucasian approach is employed. Ivane Javakhishvili was one of the first to employ Ateni Sioni fresco inscription and narrative sources for the study of the 850s [Javakhishvili (1965): 97-100; КСК III (1989): 131-132], Mariam Lordkipanidze researched the history of Tbilisi Emirate [Lordkipanidze (1951): 185-201], Ziya Buniadov explored the issue regarding the history of Azerbaijan [Буниатов (1965). 190-194]. Elene Tsagareishvili studied the same period largely based on Armenian sources [Tsagareishvili (1968): 105-114], Jaba Samushia analysed Bughā's military campaign against Tbilisi with an emphasis on topographic research of the city, largely based on al-Ṭabarī [Samushia (2003): 365-384] and Farida Mamedova was interested to study the same topic in connection with a history of Caucasian Albania [Мамедова Ф. (2005): 391-395].

Douglas Morton Dunlop, Anatoly Novoseltsev, and Tatiana Kalinina wrote more on Khazar involvement in the events of the 850s based on al-Ya'qūbī and other primary sources [Dunlop (1967): 193-194; Новосельцев (1990): 192; Калинина (2015): 172]. The latter author extensively researched the relations between the Khazars and Slavs,

based on various Arabic and Persian sources [Калинина (2015): 166-176]. Alexander Abdaladze's approach towards the issue was to view the entire process as the mutual struggle of the Albanians, Armenians, and Georgians for independence against the Abbasids [Abdaladze (1988): 50-51, 56-59]. The Abbasid war in the Caucasus from Kakhetian perspective were examined by Tengiz Papuashvili [Papuashvili (1982): 179-186] and Hamlet Mkrtumian. The latter author pays special attention to Armenian-Kakhetian relations as well [Мкртумян (1983): 78-85]. My latest research is also devoted to the History of Kakheti Korpiskopate, with a particular focus on the Abbasid policy towards the Caucasus and its impact on Georgia [Tavadze (2022): 173-182].

Abbasid Policy towards Caucasian States

The Caucasus in the 9th century was a profoundly disintegrated region. The northern part of the region was Khazar Qaghanate's territory or sphere of influence, the southern part was claimed by the Abbasid Caliphate, and the western part of the Caucasus Byzantine Emperors insisted on themselves. Despite such a division among the three great powers that operated in the Caucasus and claimed most of the region, the genuine political condition was much different. The Caucasus was also divided among petty states and they mostly depended on the great powers. Minor political entities were much more insignificant than the above-mentioned world power, particularly in terms of their political or socioeconomic condition. However, these local Caucasian states exerted considerable political influence in the South Caucasus.

The political reality of the 9th century South Caucasus was unique compared to previous centuries. Prior to this period, local Southern Caucasian states were few. Three of them had dominated local Transcaucasian policy. Armenia, Arran, and Kartli were large territorial states in the Caucasus. These three political subjects played a key role in the region, either defending their interests or competing with neighboring superpowers. However, by the 9th century, all three major local political entities were largely fragmented. In the 9th century all those countries were divided and governmental centers, such as Dvin, Barda, and Tbilisi, were occupied by the Caliphal forces. Furthermore, the Abbasid administration that operated in the South Caucasus brought with them numerous Arab, Persian, and Transoxanian tribes, resulting in a significant loss of land for the locals to the newcomers. The Caucasian map was gradually transformed. Despite two hundred years of Muslim expansion, the natives retained much of their possessions and formed new competing political entities that challenged the Abbasid authority in the region.

Georgia is located in the northwestern part of the South Caucasus. It was unified in the mid-8th century, but the Abbasid incursion led to its collapse into much reduced states. The principal Georgian state was the Kartvelian Kingdom ruled by the Bagrationi Dynasty. The Bagrationi emerged as a new dynasty and claimed the legacy of Kartli Kingdom otherwise known as the Kartvelian Kingdom. The Bagrationi Dynasty possessions were divided among three brothers by the mid-9th century: Adarnase, a senior brother, possessed Klarjeti as his central domain; Bagrat I Kouropalates, a middle brother, controlled Tao as his main domain and was proclaimed a king; Guaram Mampali, a junior brother – controlled Samtskhe and Artani. They established collegial

rule over the Kartvelian Kingdom and Bagrat acted as a *de jure* ruler [Lordkipanidze (1963); Javakhishvili (1965); Muskhelishvili (1980); Abdaladze (1988); Tavadze 2020].

Kakheti Korepiskopate was one more pretender for the legacy of Kartli Kingdom. Kakhetian rulers controlled the eastern portion of the former united Kartli Kingdom. In the mid-9th century they controlled several provinces including Zena Sopeli (the Upper Land), Kakheti, Kukheti, Gardabani, and Tsanareti together with the entire Mtiuleti. Local elites recognized the ruler with the titles of Korepiskopos and King. Samuel Korespiskopos from the Donauri Dynasty served as a Korepiskopos and, most probably, was called a King simultaneously [Papuashvili (1982); Мкртумян Г. Г. (1983); Tavadze (2022)].

The Abkhazian Kingdom was a western Georgian political entity established at the end of the 8th century by the Abkhazian dynasty from Abasgia (Abkhazia). King Leo II successfully unified Abkhazia and Egrisi and subsequently established an independent kingdom. He dismissed the Byzantine political authority and embraced a Georgian political system. His sons continue their father's policy. Demetre II, a second son of Leo, ruled in the 850s. The policy of the Abkhazian kings was to maintain the integrity of the western Georgian possessions and to expand in the direction of Zena Sopeli, which was commonly called "Kartli" [Lordkipanidze (1963); Javakhishvili (1965); Muskhelishvili (1980)].

Armenia in the mid-9th century was politically fragmented and the most vulnerable area for the Abbasid expansion. The Bagratuni Dynasty possessed a central authority in Armenia. Abul Abbas Smbat VIII Bagratuni was at the top of hierarchy, while his son, Ashot, served as nominal *Ishkhan Ishkhanats* of Armenia. Despite the formal unity of Armenia, the country was divided among confronting *Ishkhans* and they competed with each other for land and power. The most influential among Armenian *Ishkhans* were Artsruni family of Vaspurakan; *Ishkhans* of Taron were Ashot and David, sons of Bagrat II Bagratuni a previous ruler of Armenia; Philip was *Ishkhan* of Syunik; Vasak Ishkhanik was *Ishkhan* of Vayots Dzor; Mamikonians and other influential families continued to hold formidable power in Armenia [Тер-Гевондян (1977); Abdaladze (1988); Шагинян (2011)].

Arran was similarly divided in the same century. The Aranshahik Dynasty possessed the Shaki region, Hereti, and also territories on the right bank of the Kura River. The head of the house was Sahl, son of Sumbat, and his son, Muawiyah-Ioannes. The latter held the office of Chief of *Baṭrīqs* in Armīniya. Next to the Aranshahik Dynasty, the territories on the right bank of Kura River were controlled by relatives of the old Mihranid Dynasty. Esayi Apumusē (Abū Mūsā 'Īsā b. Yūsuf), a Prince of Baylakan was one of them. He held territories in Uti and surrounding areas. Nerseh Ktritch was a prince of Gardman and controlled the northern outskirts on the right bank of the Kura River, which at this time was considered to be a land of Arran [Буниятов (1965); Abdaladze (1988); Мамедова (2005); Шагинян (2011)]. However, large estates of Arran, Armenia, and Georgia were under newly migrated Muslims from different Arab or Iranian provinces. All these estates were under the control of Arab administration [Жузе (1937); Тер-Гевондян (1976); Тер-Гевондян (1977); Шагинян (2011); Васса (2017a)].

The Abbasids established an administration from the very beginning of their rule when they conquered the Caucasus. The entire Caucasian domains were united in a single province, called Armīniya. The governor (*Wālī*) served as a chief executive officer in this province. The province was formed based on the Armenian lands, the first territory the Arabs managed to conquer in the Caucasus. The capital of Armenia Dvin (Dabil) was established as the administrative center of Armīniya. Subsequently, the administrative center was relocated to the capital of Arran – Barda (Partaw). Caliphs organized four minor provinces within Armīniya, thereby expanding Arab administration and military governance in the Caucasus. The principal policy of the Caliphate was to expand administration, control trade routes, convert locals to Islam, collect taxes, acquire of lands for the relocated Arab or non-Arab loyal people, and prevent the influence of the Byzantines and the Khazars [Тер-Гевондян (1977); Шагинян (2011); Tavadze (2020): 191-198; Vacca (2020): 229-234].

The Abbasids invested significant amount of resources into maintaining their authority over Armīniya. The province included the entire South Caucasus. At least the Caliph considered it as a part of his northernmost province. Thus, it was essential to maintain control of the South Caucasus to some degree. Nevertheless, numerous challenges emerged in controlling the Caucasus. The political challenges of the ninth century could be understood in the context of the realities of the eighth century. In this context, the Caliphate faced the following difficulties in its efforts to exercise effective control in the Caucasus:

1) The geographic location of the South Caucasian states particularly affected Abbasid domination. The mountainous area was impregnable for the effective control;

2) The lack of permanent military presence was a significant challenge. It was partially solved in the 9th century, but Muslims continued to rely on military forces stationed in the most important cities of the Caucasus. These forces were rarely deployed in rural areas;

3) The lack of large military campaigns, especially summer operations that were extensively held in the 8th century;

4) Religious confrontation between the Muslims and the Christians that deprived the Abbasids of a solid base of support among the locals;

5) Domestic unrests among Muslim factions, especially the issue of *al-mutaghalibs*. They were the rulers who had usurped local power without Caliphal approval;

6) Frequent dismissal of governors of Armīniya that helped to create a favorable environment for internal conflict [Tavadze (2020): 197-223].

The latter was subject to some degree of regulation in the mid-9th century, with the establishment of a limit of two or three clans permitted to hold the office of governor in Armīniya. The last was the House of al-Marwazi. They established strict control over the Armenian part of the province and arrested Bagrat II Bagratuni *Ishkhan Ishkhanats* of Armenia in 851 for the crimes that he had committed against Muslims [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 175-185; Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 118]. Humiliation due to Bagrat's arrest and the severe fiscal and disciplinary policy provoked the rebellion in the Abbasid Armīniya.

Revolt in Armīniya and Abbasid Punitive Expedition

On February, 852 the local population killed the governor of the Abbasid Armīniya [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 185-188; Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 119; al-Ṭabarī (1989): 114; Шагинян (2011): 299-302]. As a result of a mutiny in Taron, Yusuf ibn Abu Saiyd Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Marwazi was assassinated. Caliph al-Mutawwakil and his administration in Samarra decided that it was important to send a punitive expedition to the province. The Abbasids had various goals to achieve, some of which are clear from the primary sources. Their intentions were to punish all those nobles involved in the murder of Yusuf al-Marwazi, suppress the uprising, submit *al-mutaghalibs* of Armīniya, and bring the Christian rulers of Caucasus, who were considered the subjects of the Abbasid Armīniya, under control [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 190-193]. Hence, the main goal was to conquer and subdue the areas that were beyond the control of the Abbasids Caliphate or due to the loose authority of Muslim governors posed a threat to the Caliphate's authority.

Abū Mūsā Bughā al-Kabir was appointed in command of the Abbasid army and was sent to Caucasus in the spring of 852 [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 193; Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 119; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1266; Шагинян (2011): 302-303; Vacca (2017): 66-67]. Bughā was of Turkic origin, Khazar by birth, one of the most influential Turkic *ghulāms* serving under Caliphs in Samarra. This is a primary reason he was called Bughā the Turk in Georgian accounts [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142]. Bughā's Caucasian military campaign was of considerable scale. Georgian and Armenian sources provide accounts about the number of Bughā's army. According to the Georgian source, he had 120, 000 soldiers [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143], while based on the Armenian source, the Abbasids had 200, 000 [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 247]. These figures are exaggerated, but they show how large this military campaign was for the local Caucasian population. The sheer number of the troops and the scale of the campaign were cause of considerable concern for the locals, and it seemed to be the largest Caucasian military expedition organized by the Caliphate in the 9th century.

The Army of Caliphate invaded Armīniya. The initial targets were the assassins of Governor Yusuf and Muslim defectors. Many provinces were raided and pillaged in the vicinity of Lake Van. Taron, Vaspurakan, Mokk, Rshtunik, Apahunik, and other provinces inflicted heavy destruction. The 852 campaign was a significant and successful military operation. Bughā managed to capture Mūsā ibn Zurāra, a relative of Bagrat II Bagratuni of Armenia, along with his family and clan members [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 114-115]. Upon his arrival in Taron, Bughā captured the sons of Bagrat II Bagratuni, Ashot and David, and together with their kinsmen sent all of them to the Caliph [Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 119]. The Abbasid army defeated and confined Ashot Artsruni *Ishkhan* of Vaspurakan, his son Gregory, Vahan Artsruni and his son, Gagik, Mushegh, brother of Vahan and Princess Hranush and Apusahak Vahevuni, who was put to death under the order of Caliph [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 194-205]. Subsequently, Bughā chased the brother of *Ishkhan* Ashot, Gurgen Arthruni and lured him into his camp for the false promise, arrested and sent him to the Caliph just like others from Vaspurakan. As the military campaign was completed successfully by the end of the year, Bughā encamped for his winter quarters in the city of Dvin (Dabil) [Thomas Artsruni

(1985): 205]. According to al-Ṭabarī, during this campaign, his soldiers killed 30, 000 people and enslaved many [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 115-116].

Bughā the Turk's subsequent strategy was to subdue *al-mutaghalib* governor of Tbilisi Ishāq b. Ismā'īl al-Shuayb, who ruled in Kartli without the authorization of the Royal Court. However, *emir* of Tbilisi Ishāq b. Ismā'īl was not alone. He had many allies in the Caucasus. His wife was a daughter of the King of Sarir [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 123], while Kakhetian Korepiskopos, Abkhazian King and Prince Guaram Mampali were his allies against the Abbasids [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142-3]. This alliance that was forged against the Caliphate involved primarily some Georgian rulers. The core reason for supporting *Emir* of Tbilisi should be the attempt of Georgian rulers to avoid the Caliphal burden. Ishāq b. Ismā'īl required no tribute from the Georgian rulers, hence he was a suitable sovereign of Muslim possessions in Kartli. A marriage with the daughter of the King of Sarir helped Ishāq to establish good relations and alliances with North Caucasian leaders.

Tbilisi, a center of Muslim positions in Georgia, was a subsequent target. Bughā intended to subjugate Tbilisi and entire Georgia accordingly. In the summer of 853 his army, greater than it was during his first-year campaign, advanced towards of Tbilisi. When spring currents allowed him to pass over the Kura River around July, the Abbasid army crossed the river and surrounded the city. The Abbasids had allies among the locals of the Caucasus.

Smbat VIII Bagratuni *Ishkhan* and *Sparapet* of Armenia and his army were in the ranks of Bughā the Turk. The Abbasids were supported by Bagrat I Kouropalates, king of the Kartvelian Kingdom. They both had their own interests and supported the Caliphate in this military campaign. Smbat VIII Bagratuni was anxious about the heavy military presence of the Abbasids and sought to maintain his authority [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 204-205], while King Bagrat I Kouropalates had his ambitions to overtake Kartli (modern Shida Kartli region) and was on the bad terms with the rulers of Tbilisi Emirate, Kakheti, and Abkhazian Kingdom. Kartli was ruled by the representatives of Kakheti Korepiskopate [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 165-167; Abashidze & Rapp (2004): 148, 150, 152], which was against the interests of Kartvelian king Bagrat. The latter intended to reclaim control of a region that had been bestowed upon him during the previous governors of Abbasid Armīniya [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142]. Such division pulled some strings for Bughā the Turk. The South Caucasian rulers from Arran had a neutral position seemingly. They were not actively involved in this campaign and the available primary sources do not allow us to be more comprehensive.

On August 5, 853 Bughā forced *Emir* of Tbilisi to surrender. He seized the city, burned it, killed and enslaved many people, and beheaded Ishāq b. Ismā'īl as measure of punishment for disobedience [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 237-239; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1266-1267; al-Ṭabarī (1989): 122-123; al-Balādhuri (1916): 332; Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142; Javakhishvili (1965): 97-99; KCK III (1989): 131-132]. Hence, as a result of Tbilisi military campaign *al-mutaghalib* governor, Ishāq b. Ismā'īl al-Shuayb, was captured and beheaded, while his residence and the center of Muslim position in Georgia, Tbilisi, was submitted; Ishāq's wife, a daughter of King of as-Sarir, was forced to become Bughā's consort, but, later, he sent her to al-Mutawwakil [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 239]. Bughā intended to stabilize the relationship between the Caliphate and the

local Caucasian rulers. King of as-Sarir was a ruler of the Avar Kingdom (Khundzakh) in Dagestan. Bughā was enthusiastic to establish friendly relations with the Caucasian rulers in terms of tributary dependence. Keeping the ties with those states, even with the help of the forced marriage, should have been the way to induce small Caucasian realms into an alliance with the Caliphate. The dissatisfaction with a second marriage that the Saririan Princess loudly expressed was caused by the lower social status of Bughā al-Kabir, a Turkic slave of his former masters. Another reason for this displeasure was a punishment of her husband despite her appeal for clemency that Bughā vigorously ignored [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 239].

Tbilisi's takeover was the beginning of the restoration process of the Abbasid domination in Georgia. As the Tbilisi Emirate was under firm control Bughā proceeded with his military expedition by invading Kartli (present-day Shida Kartli region), a central part of Georgia. Bughā sent his troops under the command of Zīrak al-Turkī. Most of Kartli was captured without strong resistance. According to the contemporary inscription in Ateni Sioni fresco painting, Kakhay and his son Tarkhuj were seized on Saturday, August 26, 853 by Zīrak [Javakhishvili (1965): 98-99; KCK III (1989): 131-132]. Kostanti-Kakhay was a prominent Georgian noble from Kakheti Korepiskopate. His life and passion are narrated by the contemporary author in a hagiographic work [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 164-172]. According to his biographer, Kostanti-Kakhay was a Kakhetian noble who lived in Zena Sopeli (i.e. Katli), a wealthy and very influential person all over Georgia. The same author calls him a leader (*cinamzguari*) and noble (*carčinebuli*) of the entire country of Georgia (*qovelsa kueqanasa kartlisasa*, in this case refers to Georgia. It is not used to refer to a separate Georgian political entity, but rather to describe a commonwealth, which includes all countries with a predominantly Georgian population) [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 165, 167]. A leader or *cinamzguari* as the author refers to Kostanti-Kakhay indicates his political position. However, the term *carčinebuli* shows his social status. Kostanti was indeed a political leader established in Kartli as a representative of Kakheti Korepiskopate. A Muslim scholar al-Ṭabarī confirms it by calling him *Ṣāhib as-Ṣanāriyyah* [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 128; Japaridze (2012): 86], which means “ruler of Tsanars”.

The occupation of Kartli was a cause of serious concern for the Kakheti Korepiskopate and neighboring powers. Abkhazian king Demetre II responded with his military intervention in Kartli affairs. Abkhazians operated on the western edge of Kartli while Kakhetians were on the eastern outskirts of the same region. Bughā did not allow enemies to unite their forces and sent Zīrak al-Turkī and Bagrat I Kouropalates to halt the Abkhazian advance in the direction of the central road. The central road was located along the Kura River. Bagrat advanced from the south and Zīrak from the east passing through the Kura River. Bagrat and Zīrak presumably met each other near the banks of Kura and moved on the way to the Abkhazian encampment towards the northwest of Kartli. The Abkhazian king had no choice; he would either take a fight or flee the battlefield. Abkhazians went into the battle. It was the only chance to continue further and merge forces with Kakhetians, Tsanars and Mountaineers of Kartli. The decisive battle took place in Kuertskhobi. The Abkhazians were defeated, expelled, and forced to

withdraw in the direction of Dvaleti to the North [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143; Tsagareishvili (1968): 110-112].

As a result of this victory, Bagrat went to take positions in Kartli as this region was conferred to him by former governor of Caliph. Zīrak al-Turkī safeguarding the central road along the Kura River went back en route to Tbilisi. Near the vicinity of Mtskheta, before researching the main headquarters of the Abbasid army, Zīrak al-Turkī was ambushed by the troops of Samuel Korespiskopos. Jvariskhevi battle took place after summer, most probably in September, and turned out to be a turning point in the Abbasid struggle for the domination of Georgia. The Army of Korepiskopos of Kakheti inflicted heavy damage on Zīrak al-Turkī's detachments. Zīrak was forced to withdraw and retreated to Tbilisi [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143; Tavadze (2022): 175]. Korepiskopos Samuel appeared to be the major threat to the Abbasids.

Samuel's household domains were in Gardabani. He was a member of the Gardabanian noble house. But alongside with Gardabani, Samuel controlled Kakheti, Kukheti, Tsanareti (as-Ṣanāriyyah), Mtiuleti and, briefly, Kartli – all roughly connotes eastern Georgia. Based on primary sources, we can assume that Koreposkopoi of Kakheti never considered themselves merely as rulers of Gardabani, Kakheti or Tsanareti alone. Instead they affiliated themselves as rulers of Entire Kartli, hence claimed the legacy of Kings of Kartli [Tavadze (2022): 44-71].

In the Autumn of 853, Bughā prepared for his second offensive against Korepiskopate. The chief aim of the Abbasid commander was to seize Aragvi Valley and Dariali Fortress. According to al-Ya'qūbī, those who escaped from Bughā al-Kabir's menace wrote to Byzantines, Khazars, and Slavs requesting military assistance against the Abbasids [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267]. This account of al-Ya'qūbī is understood to be an appeal of as-Ṣanāriyyah for assistance [Новосельцев (1990): 192; Калинина (2015): 172; Vacca (2017): 86]. Based on al-Ya'qūbī testimony, help was sought after the 853 military campaign by those who had escaped punishment and captivity, but not only by as-Ṣanāriyyah. Despite these facts, presumably, the first appeal for help, as it was assumed in historiography, took place in 853. It was in the best interests of Kakhetians and Khazars to protect the road leading through Dariali on the way to Ossetia and Khazaria. The Abkhazian king, who controlled Dvaleti road, an alternative path that leads to the North Caucasus, was also interested in the involvement of Byzantines, Khazars, and Slavs on their side in this ongoing conflict. It is unclear whether Kakhetians and Abkhazians sent the emissaries or not in Khazaria. Regardless, they received no help in 853. Furthermore, Bughā advanced in Mtiuleti and encamped in Tchartali, midway from Tbilisi to Dariali Fortress. He demanded the surrender from the people of Mtiuleti. The region was the mountainous part of Korepiskopate. It was divided into small administrative units called *hevi*, and the northernmost entity was Tsanareti, better known as the land of as-Ṣanāriyyah in Arabic sources (Mostly this term is used to designate Korepiskopate). Aragvi Valley and Dariali Fortress were essential as their control could tear apart Korespiskopate and allow the Abbasids to control the important strategic road leading to the North Caucasus.

The leaders of Mtiuleti decided to open negotiations and agreed to subdue. The agreement allowed the Abbasids to establish suzerainty, use roads, and control Dariali Fortress. Bughā demanded and received three hundred hostages from the local clans

[Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. We do not know for sure whether it was a tactical move to hold the advance of the Abbasid army, or did Mtiuleti population decide it was better not to fight against numerous foes? It should have been decision of local clans; Samuel Korespiskopos, as a member of the Gardabani enclave, kept fighting against the Abbasids. The Gardabanian nobility, who were in possession of the rich winter pastures of Kukheti and Gardabani, were aware that in case of the Abbasid domination in the region they would lose their winter pastures, which, constituted a source of power in Korepiskopate. The Tsanars and the entire Mtiuleti were economically dependent on the winter pastures of Gardabani and Kukheti, the land that was controlled by the Gardabanian elite. Consequently, Samuel and his Gardabanian aristocracy were interested in the continuation of hostilities.

The success of the northern Georgian population was beneficial for pro-Byzantine Prince Guaram Mampali, enabling him to continue resistance against the Abbasids. Smbat VIII Bagratuni, seeing the devastation of his homeland, was also interested in the continuation of conflicts between Korepiskopate and Caliphate. Therefore, the instigation of Guaram and Abul Abbas Smbat played an important role in the failure of negotiations between Muslims and Mountaineers [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143].

We can assume that in addition to the support from Guaram and Smbat, the Georgian Mountaineers awaited the onset of the snowfall, which frequently occurs in October and persists for more than half a year. This strategic delay allowed the Georgians to gain significant advantage. The inhabitants of Mtiuleti abandoned their hostages and prepared for war. Samuel Korespiskopos and Tsanars were against to surrender the Dariali Fortress. Bughā intended to invade Ossetia, which was impossible task without taking control over the Gates of Alan, i.e. Dariali. The Abbasid army moved further into Tskhavati and encamped there [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. The Army of Bughā the Turk was as close to Dariali as it even been, with troops almost completely crossing the Aragvi Valley and prepared to move into the Tergi Valley. Dariali was situated upstream of the Tergi Valley. It was the last stronghold of Korepiskopate situated in the north.

Dariali was an important feature in disagreement, in case of the Abbasid takeover of this fortress Tsanars would have been left without their primary source of income and strategic advantage. The situation in Tskhavati became highly tense. The mistreatment and humiliation of the Abbasid messengers provoked Bughā to order his troops to launch an offensive. According to Thomas Artsruni, the Tsanars defeated the invading army nineteen or more occasions over nine days [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 241]. The damage inflicted on the army of Bughā the Turk in the Tskhavati battle was heavy, many soldiers lost lives in combat, and many horses fell victim to freezing weather as snowfall took place during the encounter. Weather conditions, loss of provision, and heavy damage that his army inflicted forced Bughā to abandon this military campaign in the same month. In November, as it was habitual, he went to pass a winter. Bughā spent his winter in Barda, the capital of the Abbasid Armīniya [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 242; Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143].

Bughā's defeat against Korespiskopate constituted a significant blow to the Abbasid governor's prestige in the Caucasus. It seems probable that the Caliph ordered the execution of Kostanti-Kakhay in public on November 10, 853 [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 170; Abashidze & Rapp (2004): 158; al-Ṭabarī (1989): 128] in

order to exact vengeance on his defeated soldiers. The harsh measures were necessary for maintaining authority and prestige among the Caucasian subjects. Some Caucasian rulers showed no signs of obedience. There was distrust and disgust of Caliphal rule in the region.

The triumphs of Korepiskopate in several engagements demonstrated the weakness of the Abbasid army. Near the end of this year, Bughā summoned Esayi Apumusē, who refused to obey fearing the consequences of his arrival in the Abbasid camp. Esayi Apumusē was a Prince of Arran who ruled over the southwestern territory of this country. Esayi Apumusē and his kinsmen were seriously encouraged to take action against the Abbasid army since the latter was defeated by Tsanars [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 241-242; Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 123]. All these resulted in war between Caliphal forces and Arranians. The Abbasid war against Esayi Apumusē continued for around a year, from November of 853 till the second half of the following year. Thomas Artsruni assumes that within this period twenty-eight battles took place and Abbasid forces were defeated in many actions and encounters [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 242-248]. Finally, conflicting parties started a negotiation. Esayi Apumusē was granted a pardon in the form of a letter sealed with the royal signature of the Caliph. Therefore, he went to the Abbasid camp and from there he was sent to the Caliph as a prisoner. According to the Georgian Royal Annals, Bughā the Turk captured the son of the priest, which indicates the surrender of Esayi Apumusē, who is referred to as the son of a priest in other primary sources as well. Only after the aforementioned events the Abbasids invaded Gardabani. [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143; Thomas Artsruni (1985): 247]. Mat'iane Kartlisa's "Gardabani" is Korepiskopate. In fact, it was Bughā's the second-year incursion in Kakheti Korepiskopate.

First Actions for the Organization of Coalition Against the Abbasids

Korepiskopete, which connotes Gardabani in the Royal Georgian Annals, resisted the Abbasid invasion for more than a year. Samuel Korepiskopos and his nobles were in close communication with the Byzantine Emperors. The regent Empress Theodora (r. 842-856) and Emperor Michael III (r. 842-867) received information about the passion of Kostanti-Kakhay shortly after his martyrdom. The Byzantine rulers sent an inspiring royal epistle encouraging all Georgians to take action against infidels in the fight for the protection of the Christian faith [Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian (1963): 170-172; Вачнадзе Н., Куция К. (1998): 154-158].

The letter of the Byzantine Emperors is preserved in "Martyrdom of Kostanti the Georgian" and it has a form of eulogy for Kostanti the Martyr. The letter mentions Kostanti only once by name and praises his courage against invisible enemies. The rest of the letter is encouragement, devotion, and a call to fight against infidels. The letter calls upon all the Georgians within the Byzantine sphere of influence to take action, draw a sword, and never allow infidels to dwell among the land of believers of Christ. The Emperors promise a reward for this endeavor on their and God's behalf. Although the royal epistle, as preserved in hagiographic work, does not contain preamble and postscript it employs a form of common propaganda to prompt Christian leaders into action in the defense of the faith of Christ. In this case the Emperors are portrayed as defenders, leaders, and patrons of a remote Christian nation, the nation that fights and

shreds the blood for the right cause. The similar letters should have been sent to every Christian Caucasian state the Byzantines believed to be on their side in the war against the Caliphate. The message was sent to Kakhetians, kinsmen of Kostanti, obviously pointing to negotiations between the Byzantine Empire and Kakheti Korepiskopate. The Kakhetians sought help which the Byzantines accepted, but exact terms are unknown.

The war in southeastern Anatolia and the Egyptian expeditions of the Byzantine army under Theodora and Michael III took place in these years [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 120, 124-129; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1264; Theophanis Continuati (2015): 236-239; Treadgold (1997): 449]. They demonstrate the devotion of the Roman nation to fight against the Abbasids, against a common enemy of Byzantines and Caucasians. If the Georgians were defending the northern borders of Christianity, the Eastern Romans were expanding to the southern frontier. The alliance between the Byzantines and the Georgians that would involve Khazars and Slavs was a dangerous liaison for the Caliphate. Therefore, Bughā's mission was not to allow the Khazars to pass through Dariali. It was possible only through the subjugation of Korespiskopate.

Bughā the Turk after he besieged and then captured Esayi Apumusē organized a large military expedition against Korespiskopate. Hence, in the summer of 854 they invaded Korespiskopate. The summer was the only season when the conquest of Dariali and Ossetia was possible without much damage, the intention Bughā had from the very beginning of his Georgian military campaign. The country was razed to the ground [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. The former governor and ruler of al-Bāb Muḥammad ibn Khālid ibn Yazīd ibn Mazyad al-Shaybānī also participated in this warfare [Minorsky (1958): 25]. It was around this period when Bughā attacked the House of Sewordī in the province of Sewordik. Solomon Sewordī was captured and executed by the order of Bughā. His passion is described by Thomas Artsruni together with a martyrdom of Kostanti-Kakhay, [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 251-252], but Kostanti-Kakhay was martyred separately in the city of Samarra by the order of Caliph al-Mutawwakil.

The ruler of the House of Sewordī was Stephanos Kon, who was captured in a village named Tus and later sent to Samarra [Yovhannes Draxanakertc'i (1987): 123; Step'anos Tarōnec'i (2017): 175]. This land was probably the southeastern edge of Gardabani, hence the campaign started with the devastation of Sewordik and continued with desolation of the lands of Gardabani, Kukheti, Kakheti, and Mtiuleti, which were on the way to Dariali. As the season was wisely chosen the Abbasids reached the Aragvi valley, seized the Daliali Fortress, entered Ossetia, and brought over 100 families from the North Caucasus [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143].

Bughā was particularly interested in the realization of the Ossetian Campaign. Ossetia was a passage towards Khazaria, a place of origin of the Abbasid commander. Taking into consideration the fact that Khazaria was his ancestral homeland, Bughā was interested in the establishment of Abbasid control on the land of Khazars. His original intention was to open the path en route to Khazaria. The maximum that Bughā and his associates had in mind was the conquest of Khazaria. Münejjim-bashī in his "History of Sharvān and al-Bāb" reports that Bughā fought against Alans and Khazars and imposed *jizya* on those people [Minorsky (1958): 25]. No other narrative sources mention the imposition of pull-tax revealed by Münejjim-bashī. According to "Mat'iane Kartlisa", Bughā managed to relocate one hundred households of Ossetians and three hundred

households of Khazars. The latter were brought over as a result of a military campaign from Derbent, while the Ossetians were invaded and forcefully migrated passing through Dariali [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143].

The primary sources indicate that in the summer of 854 a military operation was organized in two directions. The first army, under the direct control of Bughā, entered Ossetia (Münejjim-bashī refers to this region as “Alān”) from Dariali Fortress. The second army under the command of Muḥammad b. Khālid b. Yazīd b. Mazyad al-Shaybānī invaded the northwestern Caspian positions of Khazaria from Derbent [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143; Minorsky (1958): 25]. Both of these operations were effective, but the expedition in Khazaria was more successful as evidenced by the number of households that were forcefully relocated from there and settled in Shamkir. The Ossetians were settled in Dmanisi. Hence, the *jizya* was imposed on those migrants who had resettled in the cities of Armīniya. A small number of resettled people in the South Caucasian domains of the Caliphate and Bughā's intention to invade Ossetia once again next summer [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143] demonstrate a lack of satisfaction he had for his 854 North Caucasian campaign. This would explain the silence of the Arabic sources, which do not report much on the actions that took place during this military operation. The gains were insignificant and repulsed soon after.

Bughā and his army had returned in Tbilisi already by the beginning of Autumn. Esayi Apumusē had already arrived in Bughā's camp in the autumn of 854. He was treated well in the military headquarters of the Abbasids. The relatively successful military campaign in the North Caucasus and the fair treatment of Esayi Apumusē convinced many Armenian and Arranian leaders to be present in Bughā's camp. According to Thomas Artsruni, Bughā treacherously ordered the arrest of Armenian and Arranian princes and their family members and sent them to Samarra [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 254].

The Abbasid commander spent the last winter of the Caucasian military operation in Barda [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 255]. It was his second winter in the capital of the Caliphal province of Armīniya. In the course of his 854 military campaign, Bughā accomplished much success. He broke the resistance of Arranian princes, defeated and seized key fortresses of Korepiskopate, and brought much of the Armenian and the Arranian rulers into custody. All these achievements were overshadowed by the imminent threat coming from the Byzantine-Khazar-Slav coalition.

Byzantine-Khazar-Slav Coalition Against the Abbasids in 855 and Aftermath

Primary sources indicate that by 855 numerous Christian Armenian and Arranian rulers were captured. Tovma Artsruni, John Catholicos (Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi), Step'anos Tarōnec'i (Asoghik), Vardan Areveltsi and al-Ṭabarī provide a long list of sovereigns taken as hostages as a result of Bughā's expedition. The list of those who were taken as hostages is as follows: *Sparapet* of Armenia Abū al-'Abās Wāthī Smbat VIII Bagratuni, Gregory lord of Mamikoniani House, Sahl son of Sumbat ruler of Shaki, Mu'awiyāh son of Sahl who was chief of Christian *Baṭrīqs* of Armīniya, Atrnerseh Great Prince of Arran son of Salh, Esayi Apumusē Prince of Baylakan and Arran together with his father and son, Gregory lord of Syunik, Vasak *Ishkhan* of Vayots-Dzor, Philip *Ishkhan* of Syunik, Nerseh *Ishkhan* of Gardman and Ktrič *Ishkhan* of

Gardman mentioned by others author, but not by Thomas, could be the same Nerseh, Stephanos Kon *Ishkhan* of Sewordik, Atrnerseh Prince of Khachen, and many nobles from Vaspurakan including members of the ruling Artsruni Dynasty [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 254-255; Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 123-124; Step'anos Tarōnec'i (2017): 174-177; Thomson (1989): 183-184; Movsēs Dasxurançi (1961): 218-219, 226; al-Ṭabarī (1989): 124; Шагинян (2011): 308-309]. Some of those nobles were sent to Samarra prior to the 854 military campaign, but majority of them were either captured or deceived as a result of the last military operation preceding and occurring during the last winter that Bughā spent in Barda.

According to al-Ya'qūbī, only those who managed to escape from the wrath of the Caliphate sought assistance from the rulers of Byzantines, Khazars, and Slavs [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267]. The author does not specify the names of those who requested support from foreign powers. Most Armenian and Arranian Princes should be excluded from the list, as they did not escape penance. Certainly, these were a group of Princes who, judging from the Caliphate's perspective, violated *amān* and acted against peace and order. It is well documented that Korepiskopate had communication concerning mutual military cooperation with the rulers of the Byzantine Empire already from 853. The same realm required assistance from the Khazars in the summer of 854. Therefore, Samuel Korespiskopos of Kakheti was among those who looked for help from the rulers of Byzantium, Khazaria, and, probably, Slavs as well. The Slavs (*Ṣaqāliba*) had contact with the Caucasus primarily through Dariali Pass, thus Kakhetian-Slavic relations were realistic. It is noteworthy to mention that a large number of Slavs were forcibly relocated from Khazaria to Kakheti a century before by Umayyads. However, the majority of them left Georgia with the assistance of the local population [Tavadze (2020): 116-118]. It is reasonable to assume that some of those Slavs remained and at least some contact was preserved between the Slavs and the people of Kakheti. Slavic ruler (*Ṣāhib*) was Prince of the eastern Slavic tribe [Бейлис В. М. (1986): 142; Калинина Т.М. (2015): 172]. Consequently, it can be assumed that, the Kakhetian leaders had close relations with Byzantines, Khazars and, Slavs altogether. Samuel's involvement in arranging and encouraging this coalition is therefore convincing. In order to gain further insight into the matter, it is necessary to ascertain who wrote to the rulers of the Byzantines, the Khazars, and the Slavs for the fulfillment of this coalition. Two more sovereigns who actively fought against the Caliphate and escaped the Abbasid confinement were: 1) Demetre II, King of Abkhazia; 2) Guaram Mampali, Prince of the Kartvelian Kingdom.

Demetre II was the principal ally and supporter of Korepiskopate in the fight against the Abbasid Caliphate. His brother Theodosi II (r. 798-825), who is erroneously referred by the author of "Mat'iane Kartlisa" as Abkhazian ruler confronting Bughā the Turk [Tsagareishvili E. (1968): 110-112], was shrewd supporter of Ashot I Kouropalates, father of Prince Guaram, in the fight against Korepiskopate [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142]. However, the times have changed. The Abkhazian King and House of Guaram subsequently provided support to the Kakhetians in their conflict with the Caliphate. "History of Sharvān and al-Bāb" relates about the Abkhazian and the Kartvelian military collaboration. According to Mūnejjim-bashī, Bughā fought many battles against Georgians (Kartvelian Kingdom) and Abkhazians (Abkhazian Kingdom), and was

victorious, with numerous killed, and taking a lot of captives and treasure [Minorsky (1958): 25].

These battles took place after Bughā spent his winter in Dvin, which spanned the period from spring 853 to summer 854. This was prior to his engagement with the Alans and the Khazars. The battle of Kuertskhobi between the Abkhazians and the Abbasids took place in August (or September at the latest) of 853. During the same year, Prince Guaram encouraged Mountaineers of eastern Georgia to fight against the Abbasid army. All these events, as attested in the Georgian Royal Annals, confirm the account of “History of Sharvān and al-Bāb” about the collaboration of Abkhazians and Kartvelians against the Caliphate. The Abkhazians were led by Demetre II and the Kartvelians by anti-Abbasid Kartvelian, Guaram Mampali. Both rulers supported Korepiskopate in the war against the Abbasids, which was mainly caused by the danger of the Caliphate's expansion towards southern and western parts of Georgia. Mūnejjim-bashī or his source, do not mention as-Ṣanāriyyah as the principal enemy of the Abbasids during Bughā's campaign. The author avoids mentioning the failure of the Caliphate in the fight against as-Ṣanāriyyah. The intention is to show the successful suppression of rebellion by Bughā al-Kabir and Muḥammad ibn Khālīd al-Shaybānī.

Prince Guaram Mampali's anti-Abbasid and pro-Byzantine policy is well illustrated in “Mat'iane Kartlisa”. The Royal Georgian Annal indicates that Guaram frequently fought with the Saracens (Abbasids). On occasions Guaram was victorious, while on other occasions, the Saracens emerged successful. However, upon achieving the major triumph against the Muslims, Guaram proceeded to send prisoners of war in Byzantium [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. This kind of attitude displays Guaram's alliance with the Byzantines and the cooperation that he had with them. For example, the Abkhazians were more closely connected with Khazars. The Abkhazian Kingdom was established by Leo II, father of Demetre II, with help of the Qaghan of Khazars [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 142], hence the Khazarian Qaghanate and the Abkhazian Kingdom were in alliance for more than half century. The alliance of the Georgian Bagrationi Dynasty and the Byzantines, as well as Abkhazian-Khazar cooperation, indicates possible active participation of Guaram and Demetre in the organization of the Byzantine-Khazar-Slav coalition against the Abbasids.

Bughā negotiations with the Khazars, recorded in “Mat'iane Kartlisa”, confirm that the Abbasid commander actively sought to prevent the formation of such an alliance. These negotiations took place after his North Caucasian military campaign [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. Bughā was worried by the rumors of a large alliance that had been projected to include Byzantines, Khazars, Slavs, Abkhazians, Kakhetians, and Kartvelians. As it was customary for the Abbasid commander, he informed the Caliph about it. Al-Ya'qūbī records that Bughā sent a special letter and informed al-Mutawakkil about the dangers of the coalition [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267]. Volf Beylis proposes that Bughā was asking for help from the Caliph [Бейлис (1986): 141], which suggests his intentions to increase the number of Caliphal forces under his disposal. Another intention was to undertake one more expedition in Ossetia, probably targeting the land of Khazars from the central parts of the North Caucasus. All these are the proposed intentions of Bughā al-Kabir.

However, what is the evidence for the realization of the Byzantine-Khazar-Slav coalition?

Unfortunately, the sources are very scant on this issue [Бейлис (1986): 141; Новосельцев (1990): 192; Калинина (2015): 172]. Douglas Morton Dunlop thinks that there was no intervention from the Byzantine-Khazar-Slav coalition [Dunlop (1967): 194]. Anatoly Novoseltsev notes that the account of al-Ya'qūbī is not confirmed by other evidence, but employs “History of Sharvān and al-Bāb” by Mūnejjim-bashī about these events [Новосельцев (1990): 192]. The chronicle preserved in the work of Mūnejjim-bashī provides clear evidence of Muḥammad ibn Khālid's defensive war against infidels bordering Derbent and its fortifications [Minorsky (1958): 25]. Those infidel neighbors were certainly Khazars and their allies. There is indirect evidence in the Georgian Royal Annals that the Khazars were involved in the Ossetian affairs. Bughā's intention to wage another campaign in Ossetia could be explained only by the threat that was coming from there. Moreover, based on contemporary author Catholicos Yovhannes (John) Drasxanakertc'i, during the reigns of Armenian kings Ashot I and Smbat I the Dariali Fortress was considered part of Tsanaria, which was conquered by Armenians in summer 893 [Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i (1987): 128-129, 139; Tavadze (2022): 222-224]. There is no indication that Dariali was liberated by Tsanars or anyone else following Bughā's Caucasian campaign. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Fortress was recovered while Bughā was in the Caucasus. Furthermore, Gardabani, which was the southernmost province of Korepiskopate, remained outside the Abbasid control in the 860s, with Muslims attempting to subdue it with short-term success [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143; Tavadze (2022): 193-199].

Political reality excludes any possibility that Bughā maintained domination over Gardabani or, more generally, the entire Korepiskopate after his departure. Everything that Bughā achieved in Korepiskopate during the 854 military campaign was vanished in the following year, shortly after he departed from the Caucasus. It is likely that Korepiskopate achieved these successes with the assistance of the Khazars. The latter reestablished their control in Ossetia. The Khazar-Caucasian alliance was less successful on the Derbent frontline. Muḥammad ibn Khālid's successful defensive stance and the protection of the Bāb al-abwāb region played an important role in his subsequent appointment as governor of Armīniya [Minorsky (1958): 25; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267; Tavadze (2022): 179-181].

The removal of Bughā in 855, following his recall from his three-year military campaign in Caucasus, prompts a number of questions. What were the circumstances that led to his recall in Samarra? A number of potential explanations can be put forth. According to the Georgian Royal Annals, Bughā the Turk was advised to leave by the Caliph after al-Mutawwakil learned that Bughā was negotiating with his Khazarian kinsmen [Mat'iane Kartlisa (2014): 143]. In the course of these negotiations, Bughā had several objectives: firstly, to avoid the Khazar-led coalition in the Caucasus; secondly, to supply information concerning the political atmosphere in the court of Khazar Qaghan; and thirdly, to encourage the settlement of more Khazar families in the Caucasus. The author of the Georgian Royal Annals emphasises the importance of ethnic solidarity, a sentiment that was met with suspicion by al-Mutawwakil. The Georgian author attributes Bughā's dismissal to his pro-Khazar sentiments. Bughā achieved less in Ossetia carrying

with only one hundred families, whereas Muḥammad ibn Khālīd was far more successful taking three times more households from Khazar lands. Furthermore, there were a lot of complaints about Bughā regarding his brutal actions. These complaints were passed by Armenian and Arranian nobles, also from Princess of Sarir, widow of Ishāq ibn Ismāʿīl [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 216-217, 239, 248, 273-274]. It is notable that there were others even among the Muslims who denounced Bughā with the Caliph. Many followers of Islam were mistreated (e.g. Mūsā ibn Zurārah and his family) by the commander of the Abbasid army. These circumstances played a role in the recall of Bughā from the Caucasus to Samarra.

Bughā desperately needed the public demonstration of his victories, hence bringing the Caucasian rulers was probably the biggest display of Caliphal power in the 9th century. He boasted a lot about the marvelous deeds that he had accomplished. Bughā secured his position at the royal court of Caliph, the Turkic guard favored him. His achievement gained him respect [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 273-274]. It is noteworthy to mention that Bughā was dismissed from his position of Armīniyan governorship only after he arrived in Samarra. Hence, he was first recalled and then he was dismissed from the office. However, the fact that Bughā's dismissal was not caused due to his failures is evidenced by the circumstances of the next governor's appointment in AH 242 (14/05/856-3/05/857), which was agreed with Bughā according to "History of Sharvān and al-Bāb" [Minorsky (1958): 25]. Muḥammad ibn Khālīd was first recalled to Samarra, probably during winter 855-856 and then he was appointed as governor of Armīniya. This appointment was partly the result of Bughā's recommendation and for his military success in the Caucasian campaign, especially for the defense of Derbent and its defensive walls. It was his second appointment in this position. The first appointment proved unsuccessful, resulting in his dismissal after a brief tenure [Minorsky (1958): 24; Tavadze (2022): 171-173]. However, his second appointment was more successful and lasted longer. His second service as a governor of Arab Caucasia is shortly described in "History of Sharvān and al-Bāb" and "History" by al-Ya'qūbī.

Muḥammad ibn Khālīd was appointed in HA 242 (14/05/856-03/05/857). The primary source does not specify a month [Minorsky (1958): 25], but based on the practice, as a rule, new governors were appointed in spring or summer. In this instance, Muḥammad ibn Khālīd was restored to his former position in around May or June of 856 due to exertions by Bughā al-Kabir. This was the favorable period for the launch of a military campaign. Chronicle specifies the regions that he received: Azerbaijan (Pers. *Ādurbādagān*), Armīniya, and Arran [Minorsky (1958): 25]. These are in fact two major provinces (Azerbaijan and Armīniya), which sometimes had a single governor. Muḥammad ibn Khālīd was accompanied by new military units during his arrival. It was customary practice in the Abbasid-controlled Caucasus, each governor used to bring fresh forces into the region. However, Muḥammad had a different mission rather than Bughā. According to al-Ya'qūbī, when Muḥammad ibn Khālīd arrived in his assigned province – Armīniya – the troublemakers stopped their actions and the new governor renewed their *amān* [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267]. The end of the conflict was a result of *amān* or guarantees of safe-conduct that was given by Muḥammad ibn Khālīd to troublemakers. The latter were as-Ṣanāriyyah and their counterparts, as described by al-Ya'qūbī. The most probably, as-Ṣanāriyyah, i.e. Korepiskopate, agreed on Muḥammad's

proposed *amān* and they ceased the conflict [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1267]. The guarantees of safe-conduct extended on Armenian and Arranian rulers as well.

The peaceful resolution of the conflict was not the result of Muḥammad ibn Khālid's policy, but rather the consequence of an agreement between the Abbasids and the Byzantines. The Byzantine Empress Theodora sent her emissaries and started negotiation for peace and prisoner exchange. According to al-Ya'qūbī, Empress Theodora sent small gifts in the process of diplomatic exchange, while Caliph al-Muttawakil was more generous and sent back a lot more presents [al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1268]. The Arab historian underlines that the Abbasid ruler was more wealthy while the Byzantine Empress was more interested in peace talks and prisoner exchange. The negotiations for peace and the exchange of prisoners commenced on November 19, 855 [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 138-139; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1268]. The negotiations lasted for several months and the prisoner exchange between the representatives of Empress Theodora and Caliph al-Muttawakil took place the following year. In February and March of 856 both parties reached an agreement, and the exchange of prisoners took place [al-Ṭabarī (1989): 138-140; al-Ya'qūbī (2018): 1268]. It served as a short-term culmination of the conflict between the Byzantines and the Abbasids.

The Byzantines, during the reign of Theodora, engaged in a significant conflict with the Caliphate, particularly in 853-854, when they conducted raids along the Egyptian coastline and later on the Abbasid emirate of Tarsus [Treadgold (1997): 449-450]. During the same period, the Byzantines and their allies were fighting against the Abbasids and their associates in Western Armīniya [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 258-259], at the northern borders of Byzantium and the Caliphate. Consequently, the Byzantines had been engaged in the conflict against the Abbasids since the Georgians petitioned the Imperial Court of Constantinople for assistance. The sea raids on Egypt were not a direct response from Byzantine leaders to assist the Caucasians. Nevertheless, the Georgian appeal undoubtedly played a positive role in reinforcing the anti-Abbasid policy in Constantinople. The Byzantines' involvement in the anti-Abbasid coalition was not limited to the Caucasian frontline. They largely operated primarily outside the Caucasus, with the Eastern Mediterranean region being the main target. In the Caucasus, they dispatched a limited number of forces. Nevertheless, primary sources indicate the Byzantines' participation in anti-Abbasid actions. Finally, they agreed with the Caliphate and allowed captives to return home. The same policy was employed by Muḥammad ibn Khālid during his second appointment. Consequently, his decisions should have been approved at the Royal Court in Samarra.

The negotiations between the Khazars and the Caliphate commenced prior to the Byzantine-Abbasid peace talks. Bughā was already in communication with the Khazars following his military campaign of 854. Unfortunately, the available evidence concerning the Abbasid-Khazar diplomatic exchange is limited. Bughā initiated this negotiation during his final year in the Caucasus. However, the process was interrupted upon his recall to Samarra. Bughā left Ibrahim as his deputy until new governor, Muḥammad ibn Khālid, arrived in the Caucasus next year [Thomas Artsruni (1985): 255; Шагинян А. (2011): 309-310; Tavadze (2022): 179-181]. We know little about Ibrahim's policy prior the new governor was appointed. However, it should be deduced that he abandoned Bughā's plans concerning Ossetia and the migration of Khazars. Therefore, no farther

Abbasid military campaigns were held in Ossetia and Khazaria. The rule of Ibrahim was short and weak, as he *de facto* held office for only a few months despite being Bughā al-Kabir's first choice. The new governor, Muḥammad ibn Khālid al-Shaybānī delivered *amān* to all troublemakers in the Caucasus, according to al-Yakubi. Hence, the Khazars are also included in this accord. The Abbasids relinquished lands beyond al-Bab to Khazars and they withdrew from Korepiskopate including Gardabani, the southernmost province under Samuel's control. Consequently, these measures reestablished peace and order in the Caucasus at least for some period of time.

Muhammad's rule was rather peaceful. He established the city of Ganja and was preoccupied with building activities. Later, at the end of the 850s, after his retirement, he received Ganja as a domain and paid substantial sum of money for it [Minorsky (1958): 25-26]. Ganja was more like a reward for his accomplishment in the reestablishment of peace and order in the Caucasus.

CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of primary sources leads to the conclusion that the anti-Abbasid coalition was organized by the Khazar Qaghanate with the assistance of the Slavs against the Caliphate. The Byzantines were active in the eastern Mediterranean region and the western Caucasus. In response to concerns about Bughā's close ties with the Khazars, the Caliph ordered the withdrawal of Bughā al-Kabir from the Caucasus in 855. Bughā was of Khazar origin and his resettlement of the Khazars and the Ossetians from the North Caucasus in the cities of Dmanisi and Khunani, as well as the close relationship that he kept with the Khazars, were sufficient motives for al-Mutawwakil to recall him back to Samarra. There were some other reasons as well, moreover Bughā's military operations were not always successful.

In 855, during Khazar-Byzantine-Slav involvement in the Caucasian affairs, the Abbasids adopted a defensive stance. Derbend was successfully protected, preventing the Khazars and their allies from penetrating southwards in the direction of Arran. In the Georgian frontline, the Khazars, probably with the support of the locals, were more successful and recaptured Dariali Fortress from the Abbasids, expelling the Caliphal forces from Ossetia and surrounding North Caucasian areas. It seems probable that the Christian *Baṭrīqs* seeking assistance from the coalition mentioned by al-Ya'qūbī were Samuel Korespiskopos of Kakheti, Demetre King of Abkhazia, and Prince Guaram Mampali. The surviving family members of the Arranian and the Armenian rulers could be considered, as they were suppressed during Bughā's expedition in the Caucasus. The Khazar-Byzantine-Slav coalition was short-lived, coming to an end soon after the Khazars had achieved their primary objectives and consolidated their dominions in the North Caucasus.

The new governor of Caliphal Armīniya Muḥammad ibn Khālid al-Shaybānī concluded the peace with the survived Caucasian rulers and granted them *amān*, which guaranteed their amnesty, safe-conduct, and protection at least for some period of time.

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