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### ASHOT II YERKAT AND THE BYZANTINES: ALLIES TO THE END OR ULTIMATELY ENEMIES?

**Key words:**

*Bagratids, Ashot II, Byzantine Empire, Foreign Policy, Armenian-Byzantine Alliance, Doubt, Policy Decision, Byzantine Siege of Dvin.*

The birth of the Alliance: the start of Ashot's reign?

Ashot II ascended to the throne of the kingdom of Armenia after his father's brutal murder at the hands of Yūsuf, the Sajid emir of Azerbaijan. He inherited a kingdom in truly dire straits: Gagik Artsruni had assumed leadership of the region of Vaspurakan and seceded from the state, while in central Armenia Sajid forces propped up a puppet of the emir, Sparapet Ashot. Faced with superior Sajid forces, even before Smbat's death Ashot resorted to guerrilla warfare and, exploiting his country's mountainous geography, attacked isolated units of the Sajid army, focusing on the conquest of fortresses: *"Ashot, like an eagle soaring through the sky, dashed forward swiftly after the ravenous foreigners who sent their raiding forces through our land. At first, in a short period, he reconquered and took possession of all the fortresses that were in his father's domain and had been taken by the ostikan. He immediately put to the sword the guards [that had been left] by the Saracens, and having fortified the strongholds with guards, bulwarks and large amounts of provisions, he went in pursuit of the enemy, wherever there were raiding Ishmaelites"*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Yovhannēs Drasxanakertēi**, *History of Armenia*, tr. **Krikor Maksoudian**, Atlanta, 1987, p. 178-179, the original reads: «իբրեւ զարծուի սաւառնաթիւ սլացեալ ընդ աւգս, այնպէս սրաւառեալ խոյանայր զկնի գիշատեալ այլազգեացն, որք ասպատակ սփռեալ տարածեալ էին ընդ երեսս երկրի մերում. եւ նախ քան զամենայն ինչ ի փոքր մի վայրկեան ժամանակի յինքն առ հասարակ գրաւեալ նուաճէր զբոլոր իսկ ամրոցս տէրութեան հաւր իւրոյ, զոր առեալ կալեալ էր ոստիկանին: եւ զորս միանգամ պահնակս անդ ի սառակինոսացն գտանէր՝ ի սուր սուսերի մաշէր. եւ պատուարաք եւ պահնակաւք եւ բազում ոռճկաւք զամուրսն ամրացուցեալ, եւ ինքն զհետ թշնամեացն կրթէր ուր եւ ասպատակք իսկ հինից խմայելականացն գտանէին» (**Հովհաննէս Ե**

This strategic choice was necessary, to raise the flagging morale of the Armenian forces through even minor victories. The small successes Ashot achieved through this tactic afforded him the opportunity to successfully assume a leading role in the Armenian coalition against the Islamic forces, as his relations with the ishkhanes of Syunik reveal<sup>2</sup>. However, despite the Armenian king's successes most of Armenia remained at the mercy of the Sajid forces. Ashot could only hope to defeat the invaders by calling on the Byzantines, who had been allies of his father, for help.

Initial diplomatic contacts between the Bagratid lord and Constantinople were established by the *Catholicos* of Armenia, Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc'i, and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas Mystikos.<sup>3</sup> These diplomatic contacts eventually led to a visit by Ashot to the Byzantine capital. According to previous research, this visit was dated to the 920s<sup>4</sup>, however, other historians have correctly dated it to 914.<sup>5</sup> The latter assertion is also supported by the Byzantine sources, which clearly state that the Armenian prince was welcomed by Zoe (who was removed from power in 919): "*It was then that the famous Asotios [Ashot], son of the 'ruler of rulers', switched allegiance. It was said of him that if he took an iron bar in his hands by each end he could bend and twist it by the strength of his hands, the force of the iron being overcome by that of his hands. The Sovereign Lady [i.e. Zoe] gave him a hospitable reception but eventually arranged for him to go back home*".<sup>6</sup>

But what benefit did Ashot draw from his contacts with the government of Empress Zoe? Initially, it must be noted that the Byzantines offered Ashot

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**Դրասխանակերտցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց** (ՄՀ, ԺԱ., հատոր, Գիրք Ա., Ժ. դար), Երևան, 2010, էջ 508).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. **Հ.Ա. Ուրմազյան**, *Սյունիքը IX-X դարերում*, Երևան, 1958, էջ 115.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed examination of the correspondence of Nicholas Mystikos with the Armenians, **Gevorg Kazaryan**, "Οι Αρμενοβυζαντινές εκκλησιαστικές σχέσεις κατά τον Ι'-ΙΑ' αι.", PhD Thesis, Athens, 2021, p. 57-72.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. **René Grousset**, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071*, Paris, 1973, p. 444-5.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. **Nicolas Adontz**, *Etudes Armeno-Byzantines*, Lisbonne, 1965, p. 265-6.

<sup>6</sup> **Ioannes Skylitzes**, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. **Ioannes Thurn** (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 5), Berlin, 1973, p. 202 [English Translation: **John Skylitzes**, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, tr. **John Wortley**, Cambridge, 2011, p. 196]: "*ἡγόμολησε δὲ τότε καὶ Ἀσώτιος ἀνὴρ ὀνομαστός, υἱὸς ὧν τοῦ ἀρχοντος τῶν ἀρχόντων. ἐλέγετο δὲ οὗτος ράβδον σιδηρᾶν ἀμφοτέραις χερσὶ τῶν ἄκρων λαμβάνων περικλᾶν τῇ τῶν χειρῶν βίᾳ καὶ κάμπτειν, τῆς ἀντιτύπου τοῦ σιδήρου βίας ὑπεικούσης τῇ τῶν χειρῶν ἰσχύϊ. ὃν φιλοφρόνως ἡ δέσποινα δεξαμένη οἶκαδε πάλιν ὑπονοσῆσαι πεποίηκε*". See also **Theophanes Continuatus**, ed. **I. Bekker** (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae 45), Bonn, 1838, p. 3-491: 387. **Symeon Magistros**, *Chronicon*, ed. **S. Wahlgren** (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 44/1), Berlin, 2006, 303.

a military detachment to assist him in countering the Sājīd emir's aggression.<sup>7</sup> Crucially however, through his visit Ashot obtained recognition of his authority, a truly priceless concession if we bring to mind the competition for the Armenian throne during this time period. We must also keep in mind that Ashot visited the Byzantine capital as the son of an Armenian ruler and not as an Armenian ruler himself (*υἱὸς ὧν τοῦ ἄρχοντος τῶν ἀρχόντων*).<sup>8</sup> In my view, he was officially recognized as king Ashot II of Armenia by a large group of Christian nobles from the Caucasus, foremost of which was Adarnase IV of Georgia, only after his return from Constantinople (915).

At this point it must be noted that most modern historians believe Ashot was crowned king before his visit to Constantinople. Yeghizaryan, for example, dates Ashot's crowning by the Iberian king to 914, his visit to Constantinople to 915, and his return to Armenia to 916.<sup>9</sup> He arrays a number of arguments in favor of this assertion, foremost of which is the fact that the Catholicos describes Ashot's coronation as taking place after his first military successes. But is this, in fact, the case?

Initially, it must be noted that later Armenian sources describe Ashot's coronation as taking place in Constantinople. Indicatively, Vardan states that "*Ashot crowned by Leo returned to Armenia*".<sup>10</sup> However, the Byzantine sources make no mention of such an event, and therefore we cannot accept the assertion that Ashot was crowned in Constantinople. At the same time, though, an examination of the true meaning behind these accounts is necessary. Why did these historians connect the Armenian king's coronation with his visit to Constantinople?

Catholicos Yovhannēs provides the answer. Describing the letters he exchanged with Nicholas Mystikos, Yovhannēs, after referring to Ashot's coronation, states that the Byzantines were attempting to form a united Christian front against the Arabs. Mystikos' writings confirm that Constantinople had

<sup>7</sup> E.g. **Marius Canard**, "Byzantium and the Muslim world to the Middle of the Eleventh Century", *The Cambridge Medieval History*, v. 5/1, ed. **J.M. Hussey**, Cambridge, 1966, p. 717. **Aram Ter-Ghewondyan**, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, tr. **N.G. Garsoian**, Lisbon, 1976, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> **Карен Юзбашян**, *Армянские государства эпохи Багратидов и Византия в IX–XI вв.*, Москва, 1988, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> **Ա. Ս. Եղիազարյան**, «Աշոտ Երկաթի դարաշրջանը: Մաս առաջին. Հայոց թագավորության պահպանման հիմնախնդիրը», *ՎԷՄ համահայկական հանդես*, 48.1, 2014, էջ 64-65:

<sup>10</sup> **Robert W. Thomson**, "The Historical Compilation of Vardan Arewelc'i", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 43, 1989, p. 188, the original reads: «Իսկ Աշոտ պսակեալ ի Ատնէ դառնայ ի Հայս» (**Վարդան վարդապետ**, *Հաւարումն պատմութեան*, ed. **G. Alishan**, Venice, 1862, էջ 87).

already initiated the necessary diplomatic contacts with the lords of the Caucasus: “We sent another letter like this to your curopalate, and to the chief [prince] of Abasgia, whom we advised to listen to you, to forget their animosities, to seek friendship, unity and peaceful coexistence with one another as well as with the Armenian and Albanian princes, to come together unanimously and fight against the children of the ungodly enemy...”<sup>11</sup>. Yovhannēs’ response to this letter is illuminating: “Having read this, and having embraced it with the love of Christ, I was able to persuade the king of Iberia to these very same thoughts and ideas, so that he promised to pursue peace, friendship...”<sup>12</sup>

If the Iberian king had already crowned Ashot, why was it necessary for the Catholicos to convince him of the need for peace and cooperation with the Armenians? We must also keep in mind that Atrnersēh, just like Gagik Artsruni, had supported Yūsuf Sājīd in the campaign that resulted in Smbat’s death.<sup>13</sup> Scholars who assert that Ashot was crowned by Atrnersēh before the latter’s diplomatic contacts with the Byzantines must therefore explain the Iberian king’s policy reversal.

In my view, the information from Yovhannēs proves that Atrnersēh changed his stance due to Byzantine pressure. The Catholicos’ testimony in combination with the accounts of Ashot’s coronation in Constantinople demonstrate that Byzantium actively supported Ashot’s succession to the throne. Viewed in this light, Kirakos Ganjakets’i’s observation that “*after the death of Smbat Bagratuni, the Armenians were ruled by his son Ashot at the order of Emperor Romanus* [sic]” makes perfect sense.<sup>14</sup> The decision to support Ashot must have been made following the discussions with the Armenian prince during his visit to Constantinople. Unfortunately, no record or testimony of these discussions survives, however we can safely assume that the Empire decided to support Ashot as part of its plans to create a greater Christian coalition, which would assist them in their wars against the Arabs. An

<sup>11</sup> Yovhannēs Drasxanakertc’i, *History of Armenia*, p. 190 (Հովհաննէս Ե Դրասխանակերտցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, էջ 524).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 191 (էջ 524).

<sup>13</sup> *The Universal History of Step’anos Tarōnec’i*, tr. Tim Greenwood (Oxford Studies in Byzantium), Oxford, 2017, p. 217 (Ստեփանոս Տարաննէցի Աստղիկ, Պատմութիւն Տիեզերական (ՄՀ, ԺԵ. հատոր, Գիրք Բ., Ժ. դար), Անթիլիաս, 2010, էջ 744).

<sup>14</sup> Kirakos Ganjakets’i, *History of the Armenians*, tr. R. Bedrosian, New York, 1986, p. 76, the original reads: «Քանզի յետ մահուանն Սմբատայ Բագրատունոյ թագաւորէ Հայոց Աշոտ որդի նորա՝ հրամանաւ Ռոմանոսի կայսեր» (Կիրակոս Դանձակեցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, ed. K.A. Melik ‘Öhanjanyani, Erevan, 1961, էջ 84).

Armenian king who owed his ascent to power to Constantinople would be invaluable addition to such a coalition.

### The end (?) of the coalition

After his return to Armenia, Ashot increased his power to such an extent that a rather unexpected event soon transpired: between 917-8 Yūsuf Sājīd recognized him as king of Armenia. The emir of Azerbaijan shifted his policy towards the Bagratuni king, primarily due to his occupation with an ongoing conflict against the Abbasid Caliphate.<sup>15</sup> In turn, Ashot accepted the recognition of his authority by the Sājīd emir, as it was a blow to the authority of his rival, sparapet Ashot.<sup>16</sup> This policy of détente with Ashot was also pursued by Yūsuf's successor, Subuk, during the former's imprisonment in Baghdad.<sup>17</sup> In fact, according to the Catholicos Yovhannēs, it was Subuk who bestowed upon Ashot the title of Shāhanshāh, around 919.<sup>18</sup>

According to a number of historians,<sup>19</sup> Ashot's détente with the Arabs infuriated the Byzantines, thus spurring them to count him among the enemies of the empire. This assertion is lent credence by the following testimony of Step'anos Tarōnec'i: *"In the second year of his reign [i.e. Romanus I] this man assembled a large force and sent the demeslikos [i.e. domestikos] to the city of Dvin, which belonged to amir Spuk'. He had placed his ally Ashot šahanšah in the city. The Greek forces came and besieged Dvin, but when they*

<sup>15</sup> On this conflict, see indicatively **Ibn Miskawayh**, *Tajārib al-Umam*, ed. **Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan**, vol. 5, Beirut, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> **Nina Garsoïan**, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia", *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, v.1. *The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. **Richard G. Hovannisian**, New York, 2004, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> On the ceding of the emirate to Subuk, **Ibn Zāfir**, *Akhbār al-duwal al-munqaṭi'ah*, v.1, ed. **ʿIsām Mustafā Hazāyimah** et al., Irbid, 1999, p.116.

<sup>18</sup> **Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i**, *History of Armenia*, p. 212 (Հովհաննէս Ե Դրասխանակերտցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, էջ 551). See also **Վ. Վարդանյան**, Վասպուրականի Արծրունյաց թագավորությունը 908-1021 թթ., Երևան, 1969, էջ 94.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. **Ա. Տեր-Ղևոնդյան**, «Դվին փառափ ժամանակագրությունը 9-11-րդ դարերում», ՀՍՍՐ ԳԱ Տեղեկագիր հասարակական գիտությունների, 1957, 10, էջ 89-90: **Հ. Մ. Բարթիկյան**, «Կոստանդնուպոլսի պատրիարք Նիկողայոս Միստիկոսի 101-րդ և 139-րդ թղթերը, ուղղված Հովհաննէս Դրասխանակերտցուն և Սմբատ Ա թագավորին», ՊԲՀ, 4, 1966, էջ 253-4. **Bernadette Martin-Hisard**, "Constantinople et les archontes caucasiens dans le Livre des cérémonies, II, 48", *Travaux et Mémoires*, 13, 2000, p. 410, 417. **Timothy Greenwood**, "Patterns of Contact and Communication: Constantinople and Armenia, 860-976", *Armenian Constantinople*, ed. **Richard G. Hovannisian-Simon Payaslian**, Costa Mesa, 2010, p. 81-82.

were not able to take possession they returned from there”.<sup>20</sup> Romanus I ascended to the Imperial throne in December 920, although he had already been in power from March 919. This explains why some historians date the aforementioned operation against Dvin to 921, while others date it to 922. Regardless, it is noteworthy that this reference seems to be irrefutable evidence in favor of the deterioration of Armenian-Byzantine relations. However, certain facts necessitate a critical re-assessment of Tarōnec’i’s account:

1) Ashot’s détente with the Arabs during this period would not have inevitably provoked the ire of the Byzantine government. As we observed previously, the central objective of Byzantine foreign policy in the East was the formation of a coalition of the Christian lords of the Caucasus against the Caliphate. How, then, could both assertions be true? The answer can be found in the Bulgarian threat the empire was facing during this period.<sup>21</sup> Faced with the aggression of the Bulgarians, whose Tsar Simeon wished to expand his territory at the Byzantines’ expense, Zoe’s administration hastily concluded peace treaties with the Arabs: “*The empress Zoe could not tolerate Simeon’s continual onslaughts. Wishing to put an end to them, she decided together with the Senate that it would be advantageous to conclude a treaty with the Saracens and bring all the forces in the east over to the west, and to wage war with the combined eastern and western armies against the Bulgars and utterly eliminate them*”.<sup>22</sup> Zoe’s successor Romanus I also pursued the same

<sup>20</sup> *The Universal History of Step’anos Tarōnec’i*, tr. **Tim Greenwood**, p.221-222, the original reads: «Սա յերկորդ ամի թագաւորութեան իւրոյ գումարեաց զար բազում եւ դեմեալիկոս առաքեաց ի Դուին փաղափ, յորում էր Սպի ամիրայ որ զԱշտուն շահանշահ օգնական իւր արկ ի փաղակն: Եւ եկեալ զօրն Յունաց՝ պաշարեցին զԴուին. եւ ոչ կարացեալ ստնանել զարձան անդրէն» (**Ստեփանոս Տարունեցի Աստղիկ**, *Պատմութիւն Տիեզերական*, էջ 744).

<sup>21</sup> On this Byzantine-Bulgarian war, e.g.: **Robert Browning**, *Byzantium and Bulgaria. A Comparative Study across the Early Medieval Frontier*, London, 1975, p. 57-67. **Paul Stephenson**, *Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans 900-1204*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 18-23. **Dennis P. Hupchick**, *The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars for Early Medieval Balkan Hegemony. Silver-lined Skulls and Blinded Armies*, Wilkes-Barre, 2017, p. 153-210.

<sup>22</sup> **Ioannes Skylitzes**, *Synopsis Historiarum*, p. 202 [English Translation: **John Skylitzes**, *A synopsis of Byzantine History 811-1057*, p. 197]: «Μὴ φέρουσα δὲ Ζωὴ ἡ βασιλὶς τὰς τοῦ Συμεῶν συνεχεῖς ἐπιδρομὰς καὶ βουλομένη ταύτας ἀνακόψαι, δέον ἐγνώκει μετὰ τῆς συγκλήτου εἶναι σπεύσασθαι τοῖς Σαρακηνοῖς, καὶ πάντα τὸν ἐν τῇ ἔφ στρατὸν διαπερᾶσαι πρὸς τὴν ἐσπέραν, καὶ ἐνωθέντων τῶν τε ἐφῶν καὶ τῶν δυτικῶν στρατευμάτων πόλεμον συστήσασθαι κατὰ τῶν Βουλγάρων, καὶ τελῶς ἀφανίσαι αὐτούς». See also **Theophanes Continuatus**, p. 388. **Symeon Magistros**, *Chronicon*, p. 304. **Ioannes Zonaras**, *Epitomae Historiarum*, ed. **Theodorus Büttner-Wobst**, (*Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*), Bonn, 1897, p. 463.



policy against the Arabs until the Bulgarian threat had been effectively dealt with. Given that the Bagratid king was an ally of Constantinople, it is clear that his détente with the Sājids during this period was in keeping with Byzantine policy in the East, and could hardly have brought about the end of the Byzantine-Armenian alliance. A far more likely scenario is that the Armenian king took into account the fact that the Byzantines stated in no uncertain terms that they would refrain from aggression against their Muslim neighbors before making such a dramatic shift in his foreign policy.

2) Due to Bulgarian aggression, the Byzantines could not campaign in the East. Simeon invaded Thrace in 921, penetrating as far as the outskirts of Constantinople. The Byzantines suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Bulgarians the following year at Pegae, where “*the bulk of the army was captured or killed*”.<sup>23</sup> Under these circumstances, with the imperial capital itself threatened, it is difficult to accept that the Byzantines would have considered Ashot’s supposed policy shift of such vital importance to their interests as to send part of their forces into Armenia.

3) Even if we do not take into account the aforementioned issues and accept that the Byzantines did indeed decide to campaign against Ashot, there are certain operational issues that need addressing: for one, why did the Byzantines target Dvin, a Muslim-held city that lay outside their borders and posed no threat to them? One would expect them to attack the Bagratids’ western holdings, which were closer to their own borders. In contrast to Dvin, the conquest of the western Bagratid regions would have been a severe blow to their supposed enemy.

However, there is ample reason to cast doubt on the reliability of Asoghik’s account, a fact that modern historians have pointed out. Vasiliev, for example, asserts that the operation took place in 922, not against Ashot II but in support of the Bagratuni struggle against the Arabs.<sup>24</sup> But this assertion fails to take into account the fact that in 922 the Byzantines did not have the capacity to support their Armenian ally. Runciman, by contrast, asserts that the campaign took place in 915, during the military operation to restore Ashot

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<sup>23</sup> **Steven Runciman**, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his reign. A study of tenth-century Byzantium*, Cambridge, 1929, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> **Alexander A. Vasiliev**, *Byzance et les Arabes. Tome II: Les relations politiques de Byzance et des Arabes à l’époque de la Dynastie Macédonienne (Les empereurs Basile I, Léon le Sage et Constantin VII Porphyrogénète 867-959. Première partie, tr. Marius Canard*, Bruxelles, 1968, p. 249-250.

II to power.<sup>25</sup> In such a case, however, the reference to Subuk makes no sense. Both Subuk and Naşral-Subukī began to play a role in events in Armenia after the capture of the Sājīd emir.<sup>26</sup>

So how are we to interpret Tarōnec'i's account? I believe Runciman has the right of it in asserting that the Armenian historian misdated the Byzantine campaign. In my view though, the campaign took place later, and not earlier, than Asoghik states. As for its exact date, the answer may be found in the work of the Arab historian Ibn al-Athīr, who notes: "*In this year (i.e. 315/927-928) the Domestikos set out at the head of a great Byzantine host against the city of Dabīl (Dvin). Nasr al-Subukī was in that city, protecting it in force. The Domestikos brought with him battering rams and catapults in addition to hand-held bombs filled with enough flammable material to incinerate a dozen men...The Domestikos was seated atop a lofty throne, observing the city and his army, and ordered battle to be joined under his supervision. The inhabitants of the city resisted him. (The Byzantines) under his command reached the city walls and opened large holes in them. (Thus) they entered the city and its inhabitants together with the army that was garrisoned there faced them in brutal combat. The Muslims ultimately prevailed, driving the Byzantines from (that city) and inflicting upon them more than ten thousand casualties....*"<sup>27</sup>

Ibn al-Athīr's and Step'anos Tarōnec'i's accounts are markedly similar<sup>28</sup>. Both mention the failure of the Byzantine siege, and in both the commander of the Byzantine forces is a Domestikos. The exact identity of this Domestikos is related by a third source that describes the operation against Dvin, the *De administrando Imperio* of Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. In it, he notes: "*And in the reign of the lord Romanos, the emperor, the magister John Kourkouas, marching against the city of Tibi [i.e. Dvin],*

<sup>25</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus*, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Κωνσταντίνος Τακίρτάκογλου, *Η Αρμενία μεταξύ Βυζαντίου και Χαλιφάτου* (885-929), Athens 2018, p. 301.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rīkh*, v. 7, ed. Abdullah al-Qāḍi and Muḥammad al-Daqqāq, Beirut, 2006, p. 35-36:

"وفيها سار الدمستق في جيش عظيم من الروم إلى مدينة ديبيل. وفيها نصر السبيكي في عسكر يحميها وكان مع الدمستق دبابات ومناجيك ومعه مزارق تزرق بالنار عدة اثنى عشر رجلا... وكان الدمستق يجلس على كرسي عال يشرف على البلد وعلى عسكره فأمرهم بالقتال على ما يراه فصبر له أهل البلد - وهو ملازم القتال - حتى وصلوا إلى سور المدينة فنقبوا فيها نقوبا كثيرة ودخلوا المدينة فقاتلهم أهلها ومن فيها من العسكر قتالا شديدا، فانتصر المسلمون وأخرجوا الروم منها، وقتلوا منهم نحو عشرة آلاف رجل."

<sup>28</sup> Ա. Ս. Եղիազարյան, «Աշոտ Երկաթի դարաշրջանը: Մաս երկրորդ. Հայոց թագավորության վերահաստատումը», *ՎԷՄ համահայկական հանդես*, 49.1, 2015, էջ 54:



utterly devastated in his passage the whole country of Phasiane, since it was in the possession of the Saracens".<sup>29</sup> According to this testimony the Byzantines were campaigning against the Arabs, not the Armenians. He also implies the Byzantine failure, describing the pillaging of the wider region of Karin as the result of the siege of Dvin.

In light of this information, I believe it is evident that all three accounts describe the same Byzantine siege of Dvin, which, based on the Arab testimony, must be dated to 928<sup>30</sup>. At this point it bears noting that Simeon died in 927, and it was only from that year onwards that the Byzantines could afford to be more pro-active in the East.<sup>31</sup> It is thus evident that an operation against Dvin can be dated more handily to 928 rather than 922.

The most crucial issue is the reason for which the Byzantines ultimately elected to campaign against a city so far removed from the Byzantine-Arab frontier. In other words, what was John Kourkouas' objective in Armenia? did Ashot II fight on behalf of *Nasr al-Subukī*?<sup>32</sup>

Before examining this issue, we must first discuss the developments in the Bagratid kingdom. The peace between Ashot and the Sājids was not to last; in 922 Yūsuf was freed from the Abbasids and returned to Azerbaijan stronger than before.<sup>33</sup> Hostilities between the Bagratids and the Sājids soon re-commenced.<sup>34</sup> Nasr al-Subukī (whom we saw in Ibn al-Athīr's testimony) spearheaded this renewed aggression from his operational center at Dvin. Nasr returned to Azerbaijan in 924, leaving Bashir behind as his substitute. Ashot successfully resisted and beat back the latter's attacks. The Sajid emir

<sup>29</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, tr. Romilly J.H. Jenkins (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 1), Washington, 1967, p. 208: «Ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ κυροῦ Ρωμανοῦ, τοῦ βασιλέως ὁ μάλιστα τῶν Ἰωάννης ὁ Κουρκοῦας ἀπερχόμενος κατὰ τοῦ κάστρου Τιβίου, εἰς τὴν διόδον αὐτοῦ ἠφάνισεν τὴν πᾶσαν χώραν τῆς Φασιανῆς, ὡς ὑπὸ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν κρατουμένην».

<sup>30</sup> See also Արման Ս. եղիազարյան, «Աշոտ երկաթի դարաշրջանը: Մաս երկրորդ. Հայոց թագավորության վերահաստատումը», էջ 53-54.

<sup>31</sup> Κωνσταντίνος Τακτιράκογλου, *Η Αρμενία μεταξύ Βυζαντίου και Χαλιφάτου (885-929)*, p. 408.

<sup>32</sup> On this assertion, Արման Ս. եղիազարյան, «Աշոտ երկաթի դարաշրջանը: Մաս երկրորդ. Հայոց թագավորության վերահաստատումը», էջ 53-55.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, p. 218 (Հովհաննէս Ե Դրասխանակերտցի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, էջ 558). Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, vol. 5, p. 47. Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Ta'rikh*, v. 7, p. 10. al-Hamadānī, *Takmila Ta'rikh al-Ṭabarī*, v.1, ed. A. Yūsuf Kan 'ān, Beirut, 1961, p. 29.

<sup>34</sup> Indicatively regarding the conflicts in this period, Հմայակ Հարությունյան, *Հայաստանը IX-XI դարերում*, Երևան, 1959, p. 79ff.

himself was taken captive in 927 during his conflict with the Qaramita rebels, and was subsequently executed in Iraq. In the aftermath of Yūsuf's death and until his own passing in 929, Ashot dedicated his efforts to ridding his domains of the last remnants of Sājīd forces still occupying them.

Under these strategic conditions the Byzantine operation, far from being directed against Ashot, was far more likely to have been carried out in support of his operations against the Muslims in his country, with a strike at the heart of their center of operations<sup>35</sup>. It is only in this light that an assault on Dvin makes sense; indeed, such a numerically significant Byzantine force (inferred from Ibn al-Athīr's account regarding the Byzantine losses) could not have operated so far from the Byzantine frontier without the logistical support of the Bagratid king. Also crucial is the fact that John Kourkouas' next objective was the Kaysite emirate, which had been a constant thorn in the Bagratids' side.<sup>36</sup>

Viewed in this light, the Byzantine operation against Dvin, far from signifying the end of the alliance between the Byzantines and the Bagratids, instead demonstrates that it persisted at least until the end of Ashot II's reign.

#### ԿՈՆՍՏԱՆՏԻՆՈՍ ՏԱԿԻՐՏԱԿՕԴԼՈՒ

### ԱՇՈՏ Բ ԵՐԿԱԹԸ ԵՎ ԲՅՈՒԶԱՆԴԱՑԻՆԵՐԸ. ԴԱՇՆԱԿԻՑՆԵՐ ՄԻՆՉԵՎ ՎԵՐՉ, ԹԵ՛ Ի ՎԵՐՉՈ ՌՇՆԱՄԻՆԵՐ

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Բագրատունիներ, Աշոտ Բ, Բյուզանդական կայսրություն, արտաքին քաղաքականություն, հայ-բյուզանդական դաշինք, երկմտանք, քաղաքական որոշում, Դվինի բյուզանդական պաշարում:

Սույն ուսումնասիրությունը նվիրված է Բագրատունյաց թագավոր Աշոտ Բ-ի և բյուզանդացիների միջև ժ. դ. սկզբում հաստատված դաշինքին: Այս ժամանակահատվածում Բյուզանդական կայսրությունն զգալի դեր խաղաց Աշոտի իշխանության ամրապնդման գործում՝ նրա հոր՝ Սմբատ Ա Բագրատունու եղբրական մահվանը հետևած քաոսային պայմաններում: Կայսերական ազդեցության շնորհիվ

<sup>35</sup> **Marius Canard**, *Histoire de la Dynastie des H'amdanides de Jazîra et de Syrie*, Paris, 1953, p. 739.

<sup>36</sup> On these conflicts, e.g. **Alexander A. Vasiliev**, *Byzance et les Arabes*, p.258-266.

էր, որ Բագրատունի արքայագոյնը կարողացավ իր շուրջը համախմբել դաշնակիցներին. սկզբնաղբյուրների վկայութեամբ՝ բյուզանդական դիվանագիտութիւնը, հետամուտ լինելով համաքրիստոնեական հակաարաբական կոալիցիայի ձևավորմանը, ճնշում գործադրեց Կովկասի տերերի վրա՝ աջակցելու Աշոտ Երկաթին: Սակայն որոշ պատմաբանների կարծիքով՝ հայ-բյուզանդական դաշնակցութիւնը դադարեցավ է, երբ Աշոտը բարելավել է իր հարաբերութիւնները արաբների հետ: Այս ենթադրութեան օգտին կարող է խոսել Ստեփանոս Տարոնեցու մի վկայութիւնը, ըստ որի՝ 922 թ. Դվինի՝ բյուզանդական զորքերի կողմից պաշարման ժամանակ քաղաքը պաշտպանել է Յուսուֆ Սաջյանի զորավար Սբուկը՝ Աշոտի հետ միասին: Այդուհանդերձ, որոշ փաստեր մեզ թույլ են տալիս կասկածի տակ առնել Ստեփանոսի այս տեղեկութեան արժանահավատութիւնը: Այսպես, թե՛ բյուզանդական, թե՛ արաբական աղբյուրների համաձայն՝ բյուզանդացիները Դվին են արշավել ոչ թե 922, այլ 928 թ., քանզի միայն այս ժամանակահատվածում էր, որ նրանք վերջապես կարողացան հաղթահարել բուլղարական սպառնալիքը և ի վիճակի էին իրենց ուշադրութիւնը սեռելու արևելյան խնդիրների վրա: Եվ հենց այս ժամանակահատվածում էր, որ Յուսուֆի մահվանից հետո Աշոտ Երկաթն սկսել էր Հայաստանում Սաջյանների վերահսկողութեան տակ գտնվող վերջին տարածքների ազատագրման գործընթացը: Այսպիսի ռազմավարական պայմաններում բյուզանդացիների արշավանքները Դվինի, բայց նաև Վանա լճի հյուսիսային շրջանների ուղղութեամբ նպատակ ունեին Աշոտին աջակցելը, և ոչ թե նրա դեմ պատերազմելը: Միով բանիվ, Հովհաննես Կուրկուասի երևալը Դվինի պարիսպների տակ թույլ է տալիս եզրահանգել, որ հայ-բյուզանդական դաշինքն ուժի մեջ է մնացել Աշոտի կառավարման ողջ ընթացքում:

## КОНСТАНТИНОС ТАКИРТАКОГЛУ

### АШОТ II ЕРКАТ И ВИЗАНТИЯ: СОЮЗНИКИ ДО КОНЦА ИЛИ В КОНЕЧНОМ СЧЕТЕ ВРАГИ?

#### Ключевые слова:

Багратиды, Ашот II, Византийская империя, внешняя политика, армяно-византийский союз, сомнение, политическое решение, осада Двина византийцами.

Настоящее исследование посвящено союзу царя Багратидов Ашота II с византийцами. Империя сыграла решающую роль в стабилизации власти Ашота II после хаоса, причиной которого стало убийство его отца Смбата. Благодаря имперскому влиянию князь Багратидов смог привлечь и сплотить союзников.

Источники указывают на то, что византийская дипломатия, преследуя цель создания панхристианской антиарабской коалиции, оказывала давление на кавказских владык, чтобы те поддержали Ашота. Второй вопрос, рассматриваемый в настоящем исследовании, - это предполагаемый конец союза, который, по мнению некоторых историков, был расторгнут, когда Ашот улучшил свои отношения с арабами. Это утверждение подтверждается рассказом Степаноса Таронца о византийской осаде Двина, согласно которому его защищал наместник Юсуфа Саджида Субук вместе с Ашотом II (922 г.). Однако некоторые факты ставят под сомнение достоверность этой версии. Чтобы понять, что стоит за рассказом Таронца, мы должны изучить византийские и арабские источники. Согласно им, византийцы вели кампанию против Двина в 928 году, а не в 922 году, так как только в этот период им наконец удалось справиться с болгарской угрозой и они могли позволить себе обратить свое внимание на Восток. Именно в этот период Ашот II после смерти Юсуфа Саджида начал процесс повторного завоевания последних контролируемых Саджидами территорий в Армении. В свете этих стратегических условий византийские операции против Двина и к северу от озера Ван проводились в поддержку Ашота, а не против него. Короче говоря, появление Иоанна Куркуаса за пределами Двина демонстрирует, что армяно-византийский союз сохранялся на протяжении всего правления Ашота.