

From Dioskurias / Aia (Ochamchire) over Sebastopolis / Dioskurias (Skurcha) to Sukhumi / Sebastopolis. The Letter of *the Episcopus Sanastupolitanus Inferioris Georgiae* Reconsidered

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**FROM DIOSKURIAS / AIA (OCHAMCHIRE)  
OVER SEBASTOPOLIS / DIOSKURIAS (SKURCHA)  
TO SUKHUMI / SEBASTOPOLIS: THE LETTER  
OF THE *EPISCOPUS SANASTUPOLITANUS*  
*INFERIORIS GEORGIAE* RECONSIDERED\***

ALTAY COŞKUN

*Abstract.* Traditionally, Dioskurias was equated with Sebastopolis and located at Sukhumi, although the literary and archaeological source base is rather slim and epigraphic and numismatic evidence is nearly absent. Recently, A. Coşkun (in *VDI* 80.2, 2020, 354-376; 80.3, 2020, 654-674) proposed to seek the location of Aia-Dioskurias near Ochamchire and its refoundation as Sebastopolis by Lake Skurcha. For this, he draws on the mythical and geographical traditions, which describe Aia and Dioskurias as situated in the “recess of the Black Sea.” River names and neighbouring tribes further suggest that the land- and riverscape of legendary Aia was developed from the environs of Dioskurias / Ochamchire. Ancient itineraries and *periplus*

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Unless specified otherwise, ancient texts and translations have been drawn and adapted from the Perseus Collection or ToposText, which mostly follow the Loeb edition.

literature further seem to support this reconstruction. T. Schmitt (2022, 14-44) has tried to refute the new approach. After closely comparing the arguments and counter-arguments, Coşkun's position can be further strengthened. Schmitt, however, adduces for the first time important Medieval evidence, including a letter of the *episcopus Sanastupolitanus inferioris Georgiae* (1330). But this is not sufficient to prove that Sebastopolis lies buried under Sukhumi. After exploring the context of Genoese colonial activities and king George V's fight for independence from Ilkhanid and Mongol occupation, it will be suggested instead that the Catholic bishop of Sukhumi became the titular successor of the then defunct Orthodox bishopric of nearby Sebastopolis-Skurcha.

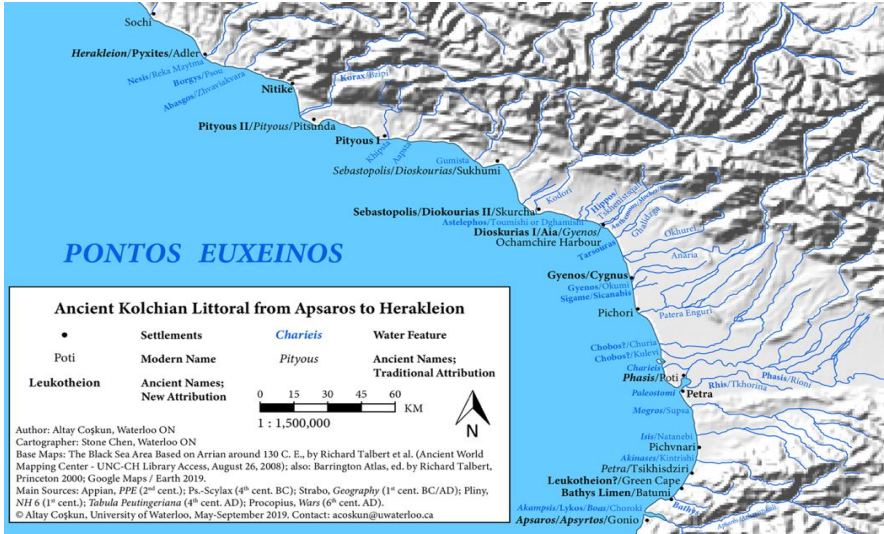
Traditional knowledge has it that Dioskurias, the leading Milesian colony on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, was established soon after 600 B.C. and, following a period of decline, was re-founded as Sebastopolis, most probably under Augustus, as the new name implies. It is, moreover, widely assumed that there was continuity of place with Sukhumi, whose name is first attested in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Recent studies by Altay Coşkun have, however, challenged this view profoundly. He suggests a new distribution of the (poorly attested) Greek settlements and river mouths in-between the estuary of the Phasis / Rioni at Poti and Herakleon / Adler. He proposes instead that Dioskurias was placed in today's Ochamchire Bay, hence in a recess location suitable for a city claiming to continue the legendary kingdom of Aia, the home of Medeia and the destination of the Argonauts. He further argues that Dioskurias-Sebastopolis was situated further west at Lake Skurcha, about halfway between Ochamchire and Sukhumi (see map).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Coşkun 2020a on Aia-Dioskurias in the recess of the Black Sea (challenging especially Braund 1994 and Lordkipanidze 1996), in the midst of an Argonautic land- and riverscape (cf. Dan 2009). And Coşkun 2020b on the ancient itineraries from Phasis / Poti to Dioskurias / Ochamchire and Sebastopolis / Skurcha, most of all Arrian *PPE* 7-11 (questioning the hodological principles proposed by Rood 2010; 2011 and Dan 2014). Cf. Coşkun 2019a on misunderstandings regarding the Phasis, arguing (in conversation with Lordkipanidze 2000 and Dan 2016) for the Phasis-Rioni-Barimela instead of the Phasis-Rheon-Rioni; further 2019b,

Map: Ancient Kolchian Littoral from Apsaros to Herakleion

<http://www.altaycoskun.com/map-black-sea-07>



2019c, 2021a, 2021b, and 2021d on the historical geography of the northern Anatolian coast, as well as 2021c and 2022a on the coast from Apsaros to Phasis, showing that the area was a blind spot among many geographers and historians resulting from a conflation of the Phasis with the Apsaros/Akampsis; and, most recently, Coşkun 2023a and 2023b on the mythical landscapes surrounding cities that claim succession to Aia, beginning with Dioskurias (the first after Aia’s transfer from the West: also Coşkun, forthcoming-a), continuing with Aia(i) in the hinterland of the Greek settlement of Phasis (especially Coşkun, forthcoming-b), and later also including Trapezus.

While scholars have begun taking note of this new approach, a closer engagement is still largely a desideratum.<sup>2</sup> A notable exception is Tassilo Schmitt,<sup>3</sup> who has dedicated a full article to defend the traditional identification of Sukhumi with Sebastopolis and Dioskurias. He emphasizes that the literary tradition always connected Aia with the river Phasis, which would disqualify Dioskurias / Sebastopolis as a candidate for the former kingdom of Aietes. If accepted, then the recess location of Ochamchire would also lose significance. Schmitt further discusses the ancient material evidence of the Sukhumi area, claiming stronger support from its Greek and Roman remains for the site's identification with Dioskurias / Sebastopolis than others have done beforehand. Moreover, he suggests a different reading of Pliny, to make the distance of some 30 miles in-between Dioskurias and Sebastopolis disappear. He also tries to lead Coşkun's interpretation of Arrian's *Periplus Ponti Euxini* into an *aporia*, claiming the futility of a systematic evaluation of ancient *periplus* literature. The first part of the present article will offer a critical re-examination of Schmitt's mostly negative points: it appears that they are meant to cast doubt on every single step of the new reconstruction, albeit without aiming for consistent and conclusive proof for Sukhumi's claim.

Schmitt further adduces Medieval evidence for Sukhumi's names. The city's earliest explicit association with Sebastopolis is a letter by Peter Gerard, the *episcopus Sanastupolitanus inferioris Georgiae*, from A.D. 1330. In the eyes of Schmitt, this serves as firm proof for the traditional view of a continuity of place. This, too, is difficult to sustain in the face of the lateness of positive evidence. The second part of this article will therefore offer an alternative interpretation, first by countering the speculation that

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<sup>2</sup> Lebedev 2021 has only included Coşkun 2019a in his bibliography, though without engagement; likewise, Manoledakis 2022 and Tsetsckhladze 2022 with Coşkun 2020a and 2020b. *Tabula Peutingeriana (TP) Online*, s.v. Sebastopolis (10A2/10A3) (ed. Diederich, Rathmann, and Schuol). [https://tp-online.ku.de/trefferanzeige\\_en.php?id=1575](https://tp-online.ku.de/trefferanzeige_en.php?id=1575) (Last Update 20/12/2022) is without reference. However, de Graauw 2023 has included all newly proposed locations into his geographical database, although his bibliographies are yet to list Coşkun's studies; see <https://www.ancientportsantiques.com/the-catalogue/bosphorus-black-sea>.

<sup>3</sup> See Schmitt 2022.

the names Sukhumi and Sebastopolis had been used side by side since the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In a next step, the historical context of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century will be explored. That time was shaped by the ambitions of Genoese colonists and the striving for independence from the Mongols by king George V the Brilliant. On this basis, it will be argued, *pace* Schmitt, that the bishop bore a title that was meant to raise his profile by claiming the prestige of the nearby yet defunct position of the *episcopus Sebastopolitanus*. The titular transfer of a bishopric in the 14<sup>th</sup> century will thus appear as the origin of the modern belief that Sukhumi continues ancient Sebastopolis.

#### PART 1: RE-EXAMINATION OF SCHMITT'S CRITICISM

##### 1. ARGONAUTIC LAND AND RIVERSCAPES AROUND DIOSKURIAS / AIA (OCHAMCHIRE)

Coşkun not only identified several elements of the Argonautic land- and riverscapes, but also showed that they have the highest concentration around Dioskurias, if located at Ochamchire. Some instances, especially the nearby river Gyenos (turned into the Kyaneos or Kyknos) and the Hippos / Tskhenistskali ("Horse River"),<sup>4</sup> appear to have been amalgamated with the Argonautic tradition for the first time in Dioskurias. The same should also be obvious from the naming of this city after the Dioskuroi, the companions of Jason, and the neighbouring mountain dwellers, the Heniochoi, after the "Charioteers" of the divine

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<sup>4</sup> Schmitt (2022, 37-38) questions that there was a direct continuity of the horse motif of the Hippos, which he equates with the Lagumpsos mentioned by Anonymus *PPE* (9v21 Diller). This is surprising in light of the (nearby?) Tskhenistskali, but also other rivers called Hippos in Argonautic landscapes: Pliny *HN* 6.4.13 and Steph. Byz., s.v. Αἶα (A 86) (ed. Billerbeck and Zubler 2010), both mentioning the Hippos and the Kyaneos (on which see Coşkun, forthcoming-a) at Aia; Strabo 11.2.17 (498C) attesting to the Hippos and Glaukos as merging into the Phasis; Ptol. *Geog.* 5.10.2 (ed. Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006) for the Hippos between Dioskurias and Aiapolis. It is further noteworthy that Schmitt 2016 explains the reference to *phasiano*i in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (106-109) as implying that the Athenians had recently learnt to appreciate a particular horse breed from Kolchis (not yet a special bird, the pheasant, as would become the later meaning of *phasianos*).

brothers. And their neighbours to the west bear the Hellenized name Achaioi, a folk-etymology chosen to connect these people with offspring of Jason's other Greek followers.<sup>5</sup> Schmitt has not engaged with this variegated evidence and is quick to reject all arguments relating to the onomastic environment of Dioskurias wholesale:

Denn überall in Kolchis hat man argonautische Namen mit Realia zu verbinden versucht. Die Verortung von Aia bei oder in Dioskourias dürfte wenig Zuspruch gefunden haben, weil dort niemals der eng mit Aia verbundene Phasis angesetzt worden ist. Vielleicht hat der fleißige Stephan ohnehin nur eine kaiserzeitliche Gelehrtschulle notiert.<sup>6</sup>

Schmitt does, however, address Coşkun's emphasis on Dioskurias' recess location, as expressed especially by Strabo:

Be this as it may, since Dioskurias is situated in such a gulf and occupies the most easterly point of the whole sea, it is called not only the recess of the Euxine, but also the "farthermost" voyage. And the proverbial verse, "To Phasis, where for ships is the farthermost run," must be interpreted thus, not as though the author of the iambic verse meant the river, much less the city of the same name situated on the river, but as meaning by a part of Kolchis the whole of it, since from the river and the city of that name there is left a straight voyage into the recess of not less than six hundred stadia.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thus Coşkun 2020a, with sources. See Coşkun 2023b and forthcoming-b for an extended argument, and Emir 2022 on the Heniochoi and Xydopoulos 2021 on the Achaioi.

<sup>6</sup> Schmitt 2022, 20-21. Cf. Lesky 1948, 47: "so ist dies wohl eine wenig belangreiche Variante zu der bekannten Lokalisierung der Argonautensage am Phasis."

<sup>7</sup> Strabo 11.2.16 (497-498C) ed. Meineke 1871 (cf. Radt 2004, 304): ἡ δ' οὖν Διοσκουριάς ἐν **κόλπῳ** τοιοῦτῳ κειμένη καὶ τὸ ἐωθινώτατον σημεῖον ἐπέχουσα τοῦ σύμπαντος πελάγους, **μυχός** τε τοῦ Εὐξεινίου λέγεται καὶ ἔσχατος πλοῦς: τὸ τε παροικιακῶς λεχθὲν "εἰς Φᾶσιν ἔνθα ναυσὶν ἔσχατος δρόμος". οὐχ οὕτω δεῖ δέξασθαι ὡς τὸν ποταμὸν λέγοντος τοῦ ποιήσαντος τὸ ἱαμβεῖον, οὐδὲ δὴ ὡς τὴν ὁμώνυμον αὐτῷ πόλιν κειμένην ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ, ἀλλ' ὡς τὴν Κολχίδα ἀπὸ μέρους, ἐπεὶ ἀπὸ γε τοῦ ποταμοῦ καὶ τῆς πόλεως οὐκ ἐλάττων ἑξακοσίων σταδίων λείπεται πλοῦς ἐπ' εὐθείας εἰς τὸν μυχόν.

Coşkun connected this testimony with other references that locate Aia in a recess, obviously after the residence of king Aietes had originally been imagined as a remote island on the Ocean.<sup>8</sup> Schmitt certainly has a point against Coşkun in that the mouth of the Phasis at Poti was (and still is) effectively in a deeper recess than Dioskurias-Ochamchire, as even the coordinates of Ptolemy (or Eratosthenes) show.<sup>9</sup> But the discussion should not be decided by latitudes of maps that were not yet known when the tradition came into being. Ochamchire Bay would still yield a plausible end point of a journey to the remotest corner of the Black Sea from an Aegean viewpoint, following a route along the northern and eastern shoreline. At any rate, most weight of the argument should rest on the literary tradition. Schmitt tries to reduce this to a confusion in Strabo's text, but he is silent about other ancient voices that locate Aia in the remotest corner of the Ocean – a description that clearly influenced the perception of those who sailed to Dioskurias. None of this would sit well with Schmitt's further premise that the Phasis is inseparable from Aia. But the latter is another counterfactual assumption: the river had nothing to do with the destination of the Argonauts in the evidence prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., some of which was repeated even much later.<sup>10</sup>

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The translation has been adapted from Hamilton and Falconer 1903-1906; cf. now also Roller 2014, 481.

<sup>8</sup> Aia in a recess: Strabo 1.2.10 (21C). Aia in the Ocean: Mimnermos F 11 and 11a = Demetrios of Skepsis F 50 = Strabo 1.2.40 (46-47C), on which see Meuli 1921, 15-16, 24, 54-56, 94-97; Lesky 1948; Gantz 1993, I 340; Dräger 1996; Endsjø 1997; Ivantchik 2005, 82-85 (with further ancient references to the recess location on p. 84); Colavito 2014, 148-152; Manoledakis 2015; Lovatt 2021, 186; Coşkun, forthcoming-a; *pace* Lordkipanidze 1996; 2000, 24-25; Dräger 2001, 14-17; Braund 2005; Podossinov 2008; 2013; 2022, 758f.; Lebedev 2021. Cf. Ptol. *Geog.* 5.10.1-2, where the recess location has been moved from Dioskurias to Phasis; cf. Coşkun, forthcoming-b. See also Roller 2018, 640 on Dioskurias in a recess location, though without connecting this with Aia.

<sup>9</sup> Schmitt 2022, 28-30. And see the previous note on Ptolemy.

<sup>10</sup> Schmitt 2022, 21 (Phasis) and 28-30 (recess); cf. Lordkipanidze 2000; Dan 2016, 248. References in Homer are uncertain, not least since Aia is not mentioned but Kirke's Aiaia instead, persistently without the Phasis: *Od.* 10.137; 12.70. The Phasis



## 2. AIA ON THE PHASIS?

Schmitt's insistence on the Phasis would strengthen his position if he were right to surmise a Greek etymology for the river's name. If correct, he might explain next that the Phasis had pertained to the *urversion* of the Greek myth. Accordingly, every city with a halfway serious claim to being the successor of Aia would be located by a river of this name, whereas no Phasis has been attested anywhere between Ochamchire and Sukhumi.<sup>11</sup> However, an etymological postulation for a single hydronym cannot yield a safe argument in our case. Claims have been made in either direction, in order to prove or disprove theories, albeit without considering that names can follow more than one linguistic category, whether due to reinterpretation or homonymy; the risk is particularly high when multiple Indo-European cognate languages potentially come into play (Armenian, Persian, Median, Anatolian, Greek), while random homophony with lexemes of non-Indo-European languages (Kartvelian or other Caucasian languages) remains a further possibility.<sup>12</sup>

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and Aia are entirely disconnected in Hesiod (*Theog.* 340, 992-1002). Mimnermos and Demetrios are explicit about the Ocean, and Strabo's counterarguments appear unsubstantiated (see n. 8 above). Aia in Kolchis and by the Phasis is first attested by Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.211-212), whence the Phasis is attested frequently; e.g., Hdt. 1.2; 7.193; Ps.-Skylax *Asia* 81; Plin. *HN* 6.4.13. But note that Ptolemy (as in n. 8 above) and Stephanos (as in n. 4 above) still remain without a reference to this river. For another variation, see Dräger 2001, 14: "Als die früh (spätestens im 7. Jh.) einsetzende 'milesische' Ostkolonisation feststellte, dass der Pontos keine Ausbuchtung des Okeanos, sondern ein geschlossenes Gewässer war, mußte ein Fluß die Verbindung zwischen Pontos und Okeanos herstellen. Dazu 'erfand' man den Phasis, d.h. man nahm wohl einen ohnehin vorhandenen Fluß."

<sup>11</sup> Schmitt 2022, 21, n. 18, following West 2007 (see n. 15 below); cf. West 2005. More cautious regarding the etymology is Schmitt 2016, 206-207. Likewise, his conclusion emphasizes how little Kolchis and the Phasis were known in Athens still in the 420s B.C. He also announces the publication of a more substantial study on this river in the future (n. 7).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lebedev 2021 (not yet considered by Schmitt 2022). He argues that many names from Kolchis (e.g., Apsaros, Kuta > Kytaion, Paryadres) and from the Argonautic tradition (e.g., Aia < "metal," Amarantha) are of Kolchian-Iranian

Schmitt rightly cautions us that Lordkipanidze's identification of an epichoric root *psa-* "water" suffers from the problem that the names Apsaros and Phasis would have undergone different phonological developments.<sup>13</sup> What he does not say is that this is indeed feasible, because the two names entered the Greek literary tradition in different places and at different times. This would be a sufficient explanation for a diverse morphological development. Phasis is first attested by Hesiod around 700 B.C., whereas Apsaros is not mentioned in the extant evidence prior to Pliny the Elder (around A.D. 70).<sup>14</sup>

Schmitt's etymological analysis is leaning on Martin West, who identified the noun Phasis as a Greek *nomen agentis*, although the reader is not told how the Oxford scholar reached his hypothesis. West's – likewise problematic – analysis of the prehistory of the Argonautic myth involved Phasis and Aia as fantastic products of Greek storytellers, whereas Okeanos appeared to him borrowed from a Near Eastern tradition, to account for its riverine nature, which contrasts with what the Greeks later conceived as Ocean. In this context, West made assumptions about prehistoric linguistic developments, without even considering non-Greek origins, to achieve a male *nomen agentis* ending on *-sis*. It did not help his case that he offered a translation ("River of Radiance from which the sun rose") that is not even compatible with his own category. We all know that the standard *nomen agentis* would end on *-tor* or

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origin; Phasis is accepted as epichoric and (with Dan 2016) as the name of several rivers in the region, though originally it was claimed for the Apsaros (before it was later transferred to the Phasis-Rioni). Moreover, he suggests that Mycenaean sailors explored those and other places as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, whence these names entered the Greek legendary tradition. More on the assumed Greek etymology below, with n. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Schmitt 2022, 21, *pace* Lordkipanidze 2000, 12, who is followed by Coşkun 2019a, 81-82.

<sup>14</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 340 and Plin. *HN* 6.4.13 (Absarro). Coşkun 2019a and 2022 has shown that this is not just due to the fragmentary transmission of ancient geographical literature, but also resulting from a pervasive tradition that conflates the Phasis with other rivers in the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea region (as in notes 8-10 above).

-tes, whereas standard Greek morphology uses the suffix -sis to create a feminine *nomen actionis*. If Phasis were interpreted this way, its possible meaning would be “(the act of) shining or speaking,” but then there would be the problem of reconciling the female gender with the Greek expectation of a male, bull-horned river god. Yet, any such attempt would be futile, given that the only known divinity affiliated with the river is ἡ Φασιανὴ θεός. According to the description of her cult statue by Arrian, she was a Greek adaptation of a local mother goddess sharing features with the Athenian Parthenos and the Anatolian Great Mother Kybele, while maintaining her close link with the river.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the claim of a Greek origin of the name Phasis implies that Greek explorers imposed their names on geographical features in the Black Sea at least one century before they began settling the area and, further, that these earliest denominations persisted over the next generations before Greeks established themselves in those areas permanently. In other words, Schmitt is asking us to believe that early Greek explorers gave a Greek name to a river in a far-away country that defies Greek morphology, while other usages of the river name – as the Phasis-Araxes-Aras (and perhaps the Phasis-Apsaros) in Armenia as well as possibly the Phasis-Tanais-Don and the Phasis-Hypanis-Kuban are limited to non-Greek speaking areas.<sup>16</sup> We should not be allergic to speculation when firm information is limited and the careful examination of various contexts (linguistic, cultural, geographical, historical) seems to be pointing into a certain direction; yet the vocal claim of a Greek etymology of Phasis (as opposed to a Greek reinterpretation) is simply circular and unsubstantiated.

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<sup>15</sup> West 2007, 193-195, detracting from his at least partly convincing analysis of the mythical tradition in West 2005; see Coşkun, forthcoming-a for a full discussion; cf. Ivantchik 2005 and Dan 2009 for further alternative interpretations. For Phasiane, see Arr. *PPE* 9.1-2, with Tsetsckhladze 1998, 11; Lordkipanidze 2000, 90-96; Licheli 2007, 1090; Belfiore 2009, 171-172, n. 180; Braund 2010, 434-435; Coşkun 2021c, 221-222.

<sup>16</sup> See the documentation and (controversial) discussions by Dan 2016; Coşkun 2019a; Lebedev 2021.

### 3. THE VALUE OF THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

Schmitt also revisits the archaeological and epigraphic evidence of Sukhumi, with many useful observations on the different types of remains. With his identification of Sukhumi as Dioskurias-Sebastopolis, he is certainly in good company with many Georgian and international scholars. And he is right to point out the rare concentration of traces of Greek and Roman civilization in the Sukhumi area, if compared with anywhere else along the coastline of the eastern Black Sea. However, some more caution is still in place, given the circumstance of a much stronger sedimentation along the coast of the Kolchian plain than around Sukhumi.<sup>17</sup> But even if we admit cumulative random evidence, what we have is far from proving that Sebastopolis and Dioskurias were located under or near Sukhumi. One of the most comprehensive archaeological studies of ancient Kolchis by Ulrich Sens is quite explicit about this limitation. It is noteworthy that Sens tries to shift the weight of the argument to the ancient literary sources, probably assuming that those who had adduced them beforehand had vetted them critically.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Schmitt does not present later Roman or Byzantine remains, which would have given more support to the claim of a continuous Caucasian-Greek-Roman-Byzantine-Abkhazian settlement.<sup>19</sup> The assumption of a

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<sup>17</sup> Schmitt 2022, 30-36, in agreement with, e.g., Tsetschladze 1998, 15 (and see next note for further references). *Pace* Coşkun 2020a, 357-363; add 2020b, 655-658 on the sedimentation at the mouth of the Phasis and elsewhere (cf. Licheli 2016; Laermanns et al. 2018 and Papuci-Władyka 2018), and Coşkun 2022 on the south-west Kolchian coast. However, Braund 2021 is a good reminder of the fact that the scarcity of epigraphic and numismatic production especially in the eastern Black Sea area is not just the result of inadequate archaeological excavations, but also of a different culture.

<sup>18</sup> Sens 2009, 57-99, esp. 62: “Die Kenntnisse bleiben insgesamt also spärlich, doch erscheint eine Lokalisierung der griechischen Kolonie Dioskurias und der späteren römischen Garnisonsstadt Sebastopolis im Bereich der Bucht von Suchumi, wie gesehen, anhand der schriftlichen Quellen durchaus als wahrscheinlich.“ Nothing that might have the potential of changing the general picture has been added afterwards; cf. Tsetschladze 2013, 293-296; 2018; 2022b.

<sup>19</sup> Schmitt 2022, 30-36. There is nothing to object to understanding Eşera as a wealthy community engaged in trading with Greeks in the Classical period. He admits (with

Roman fort and city is largely based on two now-lost Roman epigraphic fragments from a non-defined century. As a result, we do not know whether there was a Roman fortress at some point. The onus of proof should rest with those who claim a Roman city in Sukhumi. And ideally, such evidence should be in chronological proximity to the naval campaign of Arrian in A.D. 132, who seems to have ended his travel at the most remote Roman port of his time.<sup>20</sup> Before such proof comes to the fore, we should put more trust in a hodological analysis that suggests the Skurcha area as the end point of Arrian's journey.

#### 4. PLINY'S KOLCHIAN ACCOUNT

Schmitt engages more closely with Pliny's account, to dispel the claim that the *Natural History* requires two different locations for Sebastopolis and Dioskurias. Coşkun follows the standard reading of § 16 as established by Mayhoff (based on the variant readings *A*, *CA*, and *CLA* before *Dioscuriade*): *C a Dioscuriade oppidum Heracleum, a Sebastopoli LXX* "100 (miles) from Dioskurias (lies) the town Herakleon, from Sebastopolis 70." Schmitt, in turn, requires a much stronger intrusion into the transmitted text, to make the conflict with his premise (that Sebastopolis equates Dioskurias) disappear. He suggests that every section of the itinerary (except for digressions) should end uniformly with an ablative of separation indicating the previous station and a numeral specifying the distance in Roman miles. He thus emends into *cla<ra> Dioscuriade*, an ablative absolute which he reattributes to the preceding digression. As a result, the section would end with the "regular" concluding total distance, here from Sebastopolis to Herakleon: *A quibus ortam Heniochorum gentem fere constat cla<ra> Dioscuriade. oppidum Heracleum distat a Sebastopoli LXX*. Schmitt translates: "Dass das Volk der Heniocher von ihnen (sc. den Wagenlenkern der Dioskuren – A.C.) abstammt, ist beinahe sicher, wobei der <mit dem Namen verbundene> Ruhm <immerhin> bei Dioskourias glänzt."<sup>21</sup>

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Coşkun 2020a, 358-359, n. 10) that the previous conclusions drawn from amphora stamps would be without ancient parallel but insists on the traditional explanation.

<sup>20</sup> Schmitt 2022, 35, referencing Russian literature and *AE* 1905, 175.

<sup>21</sup> Plin. *HN* 6.4.14-6.5.15, 16 (ed. Rackham 1942) and *TP* X-XI, with Coşkun 2020a, 356, 360, 363, 371, 373 (Pliny) and 2020b *passim* (analysis of Arrian's *periplus*) versus

Even German mother-tongue readers should be puzzled about the meaning of this sentence. It is hard to see how the Latin ablative absolute could have been understood this way (“whereby the glory <connected with the name> shines <at least> near Dioskurias”) by Pliny’s readers.<sup>22</sup> And what is more, even with Schmitt’s emendation, no one would have understood that Sebastopolis and Dioskurias were meant to be seen as identical. The problem of Schmitt’s reconstruction starts with his misleading premise that every section of Pliny’s itinerary account means spatial progress. But he fails to see occasional duplication of information and other kinds of inconsistency in the geographical account. Obviously, the preceding *Inde ... castellum Sebastopolis, a Phaside C* provides us with the distance from the Phasis to Sebastopolis (100 miles). But if Schmitt’s premise were correct, then the subsequent section *Gens Sannigarum ... C a Dioscuriade oppidum Heracle<sup>um</sup> distat, a Sebastopoli LXX* would describe the beginning of the next segment after Sebastopolis towards Herakleon. Instead, Pliny provides complementary details he found in other sources on the aforementioned way to Sebastopolis, including Kyknos and Dioskurias (with the digression on the city’s erstwhile fame and present desolation). The end of this paragraph preserves two alternative distances to Herakleon, since Pliny’s Roman source(s) provided it from Sebastopolis, whereas his Hellenistic source(s) could not yet know Roman Sebastopolis and measured from Greek Dioskurias. As the distances do not match up, Pliny, for sure, did not think that the two cities were on the same site.

##### 5. ARRIAN’S *PERIPLUS* OF THE EUXINE SEA

Schmitt’s reassessment of Arrian’s *periplus* starts more promisingly. At least initially, he seems to be agreeing with Coşkun that Arrian deserves to be taken seriously. This is an important statement considering the strong modern trend that denies ancient geographical authors in gen-

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Schmitt 2022, 21-28, who claims to offer a *lectio difficilior*, but provides instead a *coniectura difficilior*, which is a very different thing. Cf. Wheeler 2022, 802-803, who argues for a distinction of Dioskurias and Sebastopolis on the basis of Ptol. *Geog.* 5.6.7.

<sup>22</sup> To be the devil’s advocate, Schmitt would have been better served by the supplement *cla<rente> Dioscuriade* (“while Dioskurias was still prospering”).

eral and the scholar-governor Arrian in particular an interest in factual accuracy. But unfortunately, Schmitt quickly leaves the path of open-minded inquiry by reproaching Coşkun for randomly changing the tradition to make the numbers fit the desired reconstruction. It is surprising that Schmitt withholds from his readers the contradictions within Arrian's account and between other sources, Strabo, Pliny, and the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, all extensively discussed by Coşkun. Such misrepresentation does not help any scholarly argument.<sup>23</sup>

After listing some further seeming weaknesses in Coşkun's reconstruction,<sup>24</sup> Schmitt approaches the pinnacle of his argument, surmising that Coşkun presents Arrian as failing to take note of the most important archaeological site while sailing by it:

Nach Coşkuns Rekonstruktion passiert Arrian die Gegend von Suchum ohne jede Bemerkung. Auf seiner Karte wäre sie ein weißer Fleck. Dort aber trifft der wichtigste westliche Kaukasus-Übergang auf das Schwarze Meer ... Es ist kaum vorstellbar, dass Arrian drüber kein Wort verloren hätte.<sup>25</sup>

This is yet another serious misrepresentation. According to Coşkun, the Roman governor did not pass by Sukhumi since his inspection tour had started in Trapezus and ended in Sebastopolis-Skurcha. What follows as of *PPE* 18 is generally admitted as being based on a literary tradition, possibly from Hellenistic times when there were no Roman garrisons in the area. We should certainly not exclude the possibility that there might have been a small Roman outpost at Sukhumi (on which

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<sup>23</sup> Schmitt 2020, 37: "dass man 'etwa 210 Stadien' ohne weiteres auf 180 kürzt, um dem eigenen Schema zu genügen," with reference to Coşkun 2020b, 653, but rather see p. 663 for Arrian's "at the utmost" 210 stades, with a discussion of the uncertainties in Arrian's text.

<sup>24</sup> Schmitt (2020, 37) is perhaps right to point out that Coşkun (2020b, 663) does not have a good explanation for why Arrian fails to mention the Enguri, although Coşkun makes a case for strong changes of the mouths and beds of the rivers over time, while also documenting other substantial omissions in Arrian. Schmitt (2020, 38) wants to rule out even the possibility that the river Charies might have been a side arm of the Phasis delta without Arrian noticing it; why not, if he had previously harboured in Phasis city in the lagoon of Lake Paleostomi? And see n. 4 above on the Hippos.

<sup>25</sup> Schmitt 2020, 38.

see also Part 2 below). But most likely, there was none in the time of Arrian's governorship, because information on this would have been available either in the written sources he took with him on board in Trapezus or among the documentation available in Sebastopolis. Evidence to the contrary is yet to be produced.

## 6. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

If readers choose to remain undecided between the two approaches that have been discussed here they may infer from this first part the following: a sailor instructed with Arrian's *PPE* and Coşkun's comments would easily reach first Ochamchire and then Skurcha, whether or not assumptions on the places' names and pasts are ultimately correct; a voyager depending on Schmitt's comments would know from the onset that Sukhumi equals Sebastopolis equals Dioskurias, yet lack the information to reach any of these destinations.

However, the two arguments are not on a level ground, since Schmitt repeatedly misrepresents Coşkun's argument.<sup>26</sup> Particularly telling is the inconsistent application of methodology, when the Phasis' Greek etymology is demanded under disregard of linguistic rules and geographical implications, whereas the Hippos-Tskhenistskali is denied a continuity of the horse motif although the Greek and Georgian names are homonymous and Hippos is frequently attested in other Argonautic landscapes.<sup>27</sup> Similar concerns could be raised in regard to the establishment of Pliny's Latin text or the analysis of Arrian's account. Let us assume that the Medieval evidence appeared so compelling to Schmitt, an otherwise brilliant scholar, that it removed all doubts from the equation of Sukhumi with Sebastopolis.

Schmitt has indeed enriched the discussion with hitherto unconsidered sources from Medieval Georgia. One of these presents the Catholic

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<sup>26</sup> There is also occasional polemics, e.g., Schmitt 2022, 39: "Die scharfsinnige, oft nicht leicht entwirrbare Kumulation von Hypothesen hat ihn zu einer Rekonstruktion geführt, die weit davon entfernt ist, was man noch auf den Boden der Überlieferung gründen kann." May the reader decide which argument engages more convincingly with the ancient sources.

<sup>27</sup> See n. 4 (Hippos) and section 2 (Phasis) above.



bishop of Sukhumi as *episcopus Sanastupolitanus inferioris Georgiae*, and thus seems to give the strongest support to the traditional view. This document is the first explicit claim of Sukhumi's identity with Sebastopolis.<sup>28</sup> But as the renewed exploration of the evidence will show, the episcopal title does not require us to accept Schmitt's conclusion. It will rather provide us with the opportunity to learn about an ideological construct of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and eventually help us understand how the modern belief of Sukhumi equalling Sebastopolis came about.

## PART 2: THE MEDIEVAL EVIDENCE FOR SUKHUMI AS SEBASTOPOLIS

To allow for a better understanding of the evidence and arguments presented by Schmitt, it will help the readers to start with a summary of his reconstruction. Drawing on Kartvelian evidence, he suggests that Sebastopolis began to be called C'xumi (or let us simply say "Sukhumi") in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.; the original name was used side by side with the new one initially, but after the city's destruction in 736 and its refoundation by the Bagratid dynasty around 800, "Sebastopolis" gradually became out of use. It only reappears in the communication of the *episcopus Sanastupolitanus*<sup>29</sup> *inferioris Georgianae* with the clergy of England in 1330, whence the two names were used alongside each other, again.<sup>30</sup>

### 1. BIOGRAPHICAL AND HAGIOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE FOR SUKHUMI / SEBASTOPOLIS

The oldest attestation of "Sukhumi" is in a reference to the destruction of the city in 736 as transmitted in the *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* (§ 236), composed around 800.<sup>31</sup> Probably not much later, the legend developed

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<sup>28</sup> Coşkun 2020a, 358, n. 8, following Sens 2009, 62, n. 222, assumed that the tradition could only be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> Schmitt (2022, 18) writes "Sapastopolitanus," which he explains as a typo (email from 27 August 2023). The spelling of Kunstmann 1855, as in nn. 38-39 below, is followed here.

<sup>30</sup> Schmitt 2022, 17-19.

<sup>31</sup> Schmitt 2022, 18, with n. 12, referencing among others Thomson 1996, 242: (sc. Marwān II) "destroyed the city C'xumi of Ap'šilet'I." Schmitt gives no indication as to whether the archaeological evidence supports the assumption of dis-

that the apostle Andrew evangelized the Black Sea area together with Simon the Zealot. According to Schmitt, this tradition began to include ‘Great Sebastopolis’ in their itinerary perhaps in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, as we find it in the *Martyrium Sancti Apostoli Andreae*.<sup>32</sup> Since this reference does not yet prove the relation between Sebastopolis and Sukhumi, Schmitt extends his investigation to the *Life of the Kings of the Kartvelians* by Leonti Mroveli (8<sup>th</sup> or rather 11<sup>th</sup> century). In its younger manuscripts (beginning with the *Codex Matenadaran 3070* from 1669/1674) we can read an augmented version of the Andrew tradition: “They came into the land of Abkhazia and went to the city Sevaste, which is recently called Sukhumi.”<sup>33</sup> Schmitt admits that the oldest (and only) Medieval manuscript of this book, the *Codex Matenadaran 1902* (from around 1200) is yet without this added equation. He insists, however, that the lack of further Medieval manuscripts forbids the *argumentum e silentio*.

One should pause here and note the complete absence of positive evidence for Sukhumi being the continuation of Roman Sebastopolis or Greek Dioskurias through antiquity as well as early- and high-Medieval times. And the first name for which Schmitt claims a tradition going back to the high Middle Ages is *Sevaste*, which is well known to continue the Greek name *Sebasteia* or *Sebaste*, not *Sebastopolis*. Both names honoured Augustus

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ruption, continuity, or relocation. Since the question is not genuine to the present argument, it can be left to be explored by others.

<sup>32</sup> Thus Schmitt 2022, 17, with *Martyrium Sancti Apostoli Andreae* § 4 (Bonnet 1894, 356), which specifies the saint’s itinerary as Bithynia, Thrace, Scythia, “Great Sebastopolis,” the rivers Apsaros and Phasis, as well as the Aithiopians. The subsequent § 5 returns to Sinope. The oldest manuscript, the *Codex Caesareus Petroburgensis 96*, dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century (Bonnet 1894, 353).

<sup>33</sup> Schmitt 2022, 17-18 (referencing Rapp 2014, 172-174 and Thomson 1996, XIII): “Später hat man die Nachricht über Andreas aktualisiert. So ist im ‘Leben der Könige der K’art’velen’ (ცხოვრება ქართველთა მეფეთა / C’xovreba k’art’vel’ a mepe’el’a) folgende Notiz über Andreas und Simon überliefert: შევიდეს ქუეყანას აფხაზეთისას და სევასტე ქალაქად მივიდეს, რომელსა აწ ეწოდება ცხუმი.” Translation of K’C’ 42 in n. 10: “Sie betraten das Land Abchasien und gingen in die Stadt Sevaste, die jetzt C’xumi heißt.”

and could even be given to a pair of nearby settlements, as we know from north-eastern Anatolia (e.g., Sivas and Sulusaray respectively).<sup>34</sup>

Another problem pertains to “Great Sebastopolis” (Σεβαστοπόλει τῆ μεγάλη). The editor Bonnet does not provide a date of the original version of the *Martyrium*, and Schmitt simply takes the oldest MS from the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century as being in close proximity to the date of composition. But why would anyone use the adjective complement “Great” around this time? Would it refer to the early-Bagrattid royal residence of the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century – although this seems to have been (re-) founded under the name Sukhumi? Or should the splendor of the city be purported for the High Roman Empire? Or else did the expression rather mean to denote a larger area, a district such as the province of a governor or (arch)bishop in the Later Roman period?

Irrespective of the distinction Sevaste / Sebastopolis, Schmitt insists that the adverbial of time “recently” (“neuerdings,” ὄψ) in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript of the *Life of the Kings of the Kartvelians* proves a date for the name change in proximity to the spread of the Andrew tradition. This would take us back to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> More likely, however, the adverbial was motivated by the author of the addition, not by the composer of the early-Medieval tradition. Yet this younger writer likely envisioned the name change in the lifetime of the half-legendary apostle, which is in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The logical inference should thus be that the author of the addition claimed that a Greek name predated the one in the presently spoken native language. The 17<sup>th</sup>-century conclusion is hence of no further use for our historical quest.

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<sup>34</sup> See Ptol. *Geog.* 5.6.9 (Σεβαστόπολις ἑτέρα) and 5.6.10 (Σεβάστεια) for Roman Cappadocia, with map Asia 1, as represented by Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006, II, 847. On Karana / Herakleopolis / Sebastopolis / Sulusaray, see, e.g., Olshausen and Biller 1984, 139-140; Marek 1993, 54-57. For a reconstruction of the different Sebastopoleis in the area, see Coşkun 2022, 255-257.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt 2022, 19. He is certainly right (pp. 19-20) to question the approach by Orbeli (1911, 202-208), according to whom Sukhumi translates the theme of “twins” as inherent in Dioskurias, but the unequal nature of Kastor and Pollux prevented them from being addressed as twins; Dioskuroi translates as “boys of Zeus.”

Moreover, apart from all the evidence that has been adduced for Dioskuri-as-Aia at Ochamchire and Sebastopolis-Dioskuri-as at Skurcha, which Schmitt rejects, he does not address Coşkun's conclusion from the 6<sup>th</sup>-century literary evidence that seems to imply the destruction or at least abandonment of Sebastopolis (at Skurcha) by the A.D. 540s.<sup>36</sup> There is similar evidence for Pityus. Drawing on ancient itineraries, Coşkun proposed an earlier settlement of this name (Pityus I) at the mouth of the Khipsta river, whereas modern Pitsunda is situated close by the mouth of the Korax / Bzipi river. The latter seems to be the result of a resettlement in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Pityus II).<sup>37</sup> For both Sebastopolis and Pityus, the Persian Wars under Justinian resulted in likewise dramatic developments.

Coşkun's previous conclusions may still be right, although we should now consider further possibilities. There may have been a Roman garrison and a (mixed) settlement at Sukhumi since the time of Augustus; it could have been named Sebaste(ia) and served at some point as an out-post of the major fortress of Sebastopolis / Skurcha. It is further possible that this place received refugees from Sebastopolis in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which may or may not have resulted in a name change from Sebaste(ia) to Sebastopolis. All of these are at least theoretical options compatible with the sources so far adduced.

## 2. THE LETTER BY THE *EPISCOPUS SANASTUPOLITANUS INFERIORIS GEORGIANAE* OF 1330

However, the most important piece of evidence for Sukhumi as (the successor to) Sebastopolis is yet to be presented. On 13 October 1330,<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Justinian *Novellae* 28 pr.; Procop. *Goth.* 2.29.3.18-20; 8.4.1.4 (ed. Dewing and Kaldellis 2014), with Coşkun 2022, 256.

<sup>37</sup> For Pityus, see Procop. *Goth.* 8.4.1.4-6; also *Aed.* 3.7.8-9. An earlier destruction of Pityus (resulting in a possible relocation) is attested by Pliny (*HN* 6.5.16), who might thus point to a different location than Arrian (*PPE* 10.3-4; 17.1-18.1). Cf. Coşkun 2020a, 371-372.

<sup>38</sup> This is the date of the subscription as below. Kunstmann (1855, 748) erroneously speaks of 1333, but this may be the year when Marino Sanudo's copy was produced. 1330 is also the year given in the comment in the inventory list (?) by the contemporary Raynald (see p. 750, n. 80: *demandata enim est Sevastopolensis*

the Catholic bishop of Sukhumi is attested as writing a letter to the clergy of England, in which he calls himself *episcopus Sanastupolitanus inferioris Georgianaë*. The letter opens as follows:<sup>39</sup>

Reverendis in Christo patribus, domino archiepiscopo Cantuariensi ex divina gratia in toto regno Angliæ primati ceterisque archiepiscopis et episcopis ejusdem regni, confrater Petrus divina permissione episcopus Sanastupolitanus inferioris Georgianaë se ipsum in domino et tempore pacis abundantiaë et prosperitatis una cum fratribus christianis, qui prae angustiis et tormentis per Saracenos cogantur dimittere fidem christianam.

Then follows a digression of the sufferings inflicted by the Saracens, worsened by the hostility among the Catholics and exacerbated by the much more powerful "Greek schismatics" (i.e. Orthodox). Peter styles himself as poor and powerless yet supported by the unnamed local ruler (*Princeps huius terrae*), who treated the Catholics favourably and was willing to accept the authority and faith of the Roman Catholic Church in case of military support. The letter ends thus:

*Et facile, quod in vobis est, ut flagellum Mahometanorum et Saracenorum de mundo penitus extirpetur. Quod possibile hic est catholicis, si Karolum magnum bene fuerint imitati.*

*Datum in civitate Sanastapolitana in regno inferioris Georginaë in festo s. Eduardi regis Anglorum anno domini MCCCXXX.*

Both variants *Sanastapol-* / *Sanastupol-* obviously connect the city's name with ancient Sebastopolis, and since the awkward spelling is incompatible with a direct transliteration from a Greek source, Schmitt is

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*ecclesia Petro Geraldo episcopo designato*). There is, unfortunately, no way of knowing what induced Raynald to denote Peter as "designated" bishop. Did he have further information to indicate that Peter wrote the letter even before his official investiture? This would further support the tight chronology suggested for 1330 in the main text.

<sup>39</sup> Schmitt 2022, 18, referencing Kunstmann 1855, 121 for the letter. In an email (27 August 2023), Schmitt kindly advised that there are different paginations for the fascicles of the *Abhandlungen der Bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. In the issue available through *Google Books* (as in the bibliography), the letter is printed on pp. 817-819, with an additional pagination of 103 (for the entire letter).

certainly right to suspect a local tradition for the name.<sup>40</sup> Like Kunstmann, the *editor princeps* of the letter, Schmitt points to the presence of a Catholic community in the area as a result of the Genoese trading post established in Sukhumi around 1280. Schmitt suggests that the Italians encouraged the reintroduction of the city's old name based on information derived from the more remote past.<sup>41</sup> It is indeed plausible to assume that the contact of the Caucasian population of Sukhumi with Genoese traders and, through them, with the Western Latin world at large induced a self-representation through reference to the Classical world – an obvious choice in the time of the Renaissance.

However, the historical context is relatively well-known, so that we can go further with our contextualization. The correspondence of bishop Peter falls into the rule of king George V the Brilliant (c. 1299/1317-1346), whom the Georgians still remember as the actual founder of their nation. He must be the *Princeps huius terrae* mentioned by Peter. Residing in Tiflis / Tbilisi, he had been a loyal vassal to the Persian Ilkhanid Shah Abu Said. He revolted soon after his protector Chupan, the leading courtier, and his son Mahmud, the commander of the Mongol troops in Georgia, had been executed in 1327.<sup>42</sup> The literary and numismatic evidence is uncertain as to whether George effectively broke free in the years 1329-1334 or just managed to reduce the tax burden,

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<sup>40</sup> Schmitt 2022, 18: "zusammen mit der Erläuterung des Stadtnamens als tralatizischem Gut weiter tradiert worden sein." Kaufmann (1855, 749) uses the obscure form *Senascopolis*, but nevertheless identifies the city with ancient Sebastopolis, adding unspecified reference to Prokopios (on whom, see n. 36 above).

<sup>41</sup> Schmitt 2022, 18, with reference to Khvalkov 2018, 115-116, who makes passing mention of Savastopoli [*sic*] (see n. 49 below) = Sukhumi as the centre of Genoese presence in Abkhazia. Schmitt thus slightly changes his previous line of argument in that he now seems to be accepting the aforementioned *Codex Matenadaran 1902* (from around 1200) as a *terminus post quem* for the re-introduction of the ancient name. But note that Khvalkov shows little interest in the historical background of Savastopoli and his passing remarks do not add up: a settlement known since 736 B.C., called Savastopoli (and Sukhumi only in modern times) (p. 115), still settled by Byzantine Greeks in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 206, cf. 224).

<sup>42</sup> See Suny 1988, 44; Lan 1955; Alasania 2016.

before he is once more attested as a vassal of the Ilkhanid dynasty as of 1335.

At all events, it is clear that he conquered Western Georgia by taking the royal city of Kutaisi in or around 1330.<sup>43</sup> This is not only the year in which the aforementioned episcopal letter was written, but also when Peter Gerald was appointed as the second Catholic bishop of Sukhumi. The Genoese merchants had already established contacts with the Western church in 1318, resulting in the appointment of Bernard Morre as the first Catholic bishop of Sukhumi. This was at a time when Sukhumi was still ruled by the Western-Georgian king of Kutaisi. Morre was probably a Dominican priest, as most clerics established in the wider area around the time were. Not much later, the Roman Catholic Pope in Avignon also contacted George in Tiflis / Tbilisi, as is documented through two letters from 1321 and 1322, yet a concrete result was only achieved in 1329, with the appointment of the Dominican John of Florence as the first Catholic bishop of Tiflis / Tbilisi.<sup>44</sup>

Little is known about Bernard Morre (or Moore?) and his successor Peter Gerald, but it is no abject speculation that at least the successor, if not both of them, hailed from England and represented a further European connection of Sukhumi.<sup>45</sup> This would have been facilitated through the Genoese colonial power, which controlled the whole Black

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<sup>43</sup> See Lang 1955 (with useful timetable on p. 91) and Alasania 2016.

<sup>44</sup> See Lang 1955, 82 on John and Alasania 2016, 974 on all three bishops, both, however, without the present political interpretation. Some aspects of the Catholic presence in Georgia are also discussed by Kunstmann (1855, 748, 751-752), who, however, regards Peter as the first Catholic bishop of Sukhumi.

<sup>45</sup> The letter of 1330 does not address Peter's origin, and his predecessor is not even mentioned. Both names would appear compatible with English descent, especially if Morre were a relative of Thomas (de la) Mo(o)re, an English knight as well as a follower of king Edward II (who abdicated in 1327) and a patron of Geoffrey Baker. An English origin would explain the direction of his plea for help and further shed light on the noteworthy date of the letter, the day of Saint Edward I the Confessor, the former king of England who died in 1066. If we press the note of Raynald that Peter was still the designated bishop while writing the letter (quoted in n. 37 above), we may wonder whether Peter was chosen for his office due to his connections with England.

Sea in this period, with Caffa / Theodosia on the Crimea as their regional centre.<sup>46</sup>

The admission of Catholicism and the appointment of Dominicans from Italy and perhaps also England imply that George was strategically orienting his kingdom to the west, to build alliances in his fight for independence, styled in a crusade rhetoric, as illustrated by Peter's letter. It is no coincidence that its only extant copy is included in a collection of letters by Marino Sanudo, a wealthy Venetian (c. 1260-c. 1334) who was in close contact with leading Catholic clerics, including Roman Popes and the Cardinal of Genoa. He travelled frequently through the Mediterranean and the Near East, sometimes in an effort to gather support for crusades against the Turks. While this explains his interest in Peter's letter, he must have owed his copy to Iachinus (Jojakim) of Cremona, the messenger mentioned in Peter's letter, on whose service Marino himself also drew repeatedly.<sup>47</sup>

There is another interesting coincidence. As a result of the tensions between the Turks and the Christians, the famous bishopric of Smyrna in Western Asia Minor ceased to exist in 1328. The title of this defunct see was then bestowed on John of Florence, when he was appointed in Tiflis / Tbilisi in 1329.<sup>48</sup> This shows an interest of the Pope, the bishop, or the king in enhancing the prestige of this new see, since it had the potential of claiming supremacy over all the territories George was ruling then or was yet to conquer. We should consider a similar mechanism for the title of the bishop in Sukhumi as for John of Florence: the bestowal of a titular bishopric, a practice still known in the Catholic Church today. We should, of course, not exclude the possibility that the title "bishop of the Sebastopolitans" had been borne by Peter's Catholic

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<sup>46</sup> See Khvalkov 2018, 56-85 and 394-406 on the Genoese. Further references are in n. 42.

<sup>47</sup> Kunstmann 1855, 697-704 (Marino's life) and 748 (messenger).

<sup>48</sup> See Alasania 2016, 974 for references. Kunstmann 1855, 751-752 speculates that the new Georgian bishoprics following the *bull*a of Pope John XXII in 1318 were depending on the metropolitan of Soltania / Solemaniya, now in Zanjan province in northern Iran. If that should have been the plan around this time, then the political change under George V after 1327 and the titles (see below) of the new bishops clearly speak for a shift of authority.



predecessor or even by one of the Orthodox bishops who might have been in touch with Constantinople, but until positive evidence for this comes to light, this should be considered a less likely hypothesis. At any rate, it appears obvious that Peter's title was negotiated with king George and the Pope.

#### CONCLUSION

To conclude, even the Medieval evidence presented by Schmitt and discussed at further length on the previous pages does not compel us to project the name Sebastopolis back onto the ancient settlement of Sukhumi. Hesitation is strongly advised no less given the lack of evidence for a continued settlement from the archaic period. Most probably, the Abkhazian city of Sukhumi became also known as Sebastopolis as a direct result of George V's political, military, and ecclesiastical ambitions. It is obvious that this king's rule was pivotal for the city's future, and that the henceforth<sup>49</sup> explicit connection with Roman Sebastopolis has no implication for the ancient city's location and history.

Yet there is another possibility. If we give more credence to the attested name Sebaste(ia) and consider Sukhumi's location not too far from the garrisoned harbour of Sebastopolis, then it remains possible to hypothesize – speculative as it would be – that the name of Sebastopolis migrated together with most of its inhabitants and soldiers in the 540s when the Augustan city was evacuated in the context of the Persian War.

It is to be hoped that further research will shed more light on the history of mythical Aia, Greek Dioskurias, Roman Sebastopolis, and Medieval Sukhumi.

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<sup>49</sup> Schmitt only mentions the *Codex Matenadaran 1902* (as in n. 41 above). Kunstmann (1855, 749) further mentions a Catalan map from 1375 placing *Savastopolli [sic]* on the north-east coast of the Black Sea. It would exceed the scope of the present paper to investigate further Medieval hagiographies from Georgia for attestations of Sukhumi / Sebastopolis. Some examples are listed in Wikipedia, s.v. Sukhumi, nn. 8-10 (27 August 2023).

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