

## **Batumi in European Sources of the 15th Century**

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### **Abstract**

The article discusses the reports of European travelers about Batumi in the late Middle Ages. German (Bavarian) warrior and traveler Johann (Hans) Schiltberger tells about Batumi in the 20s of the 15th century, who calls Batumi the capital of Samegrelo.

An interesting fact is the attack of 200 Burgundian pirates on Batumi in 1445 under the command of the famous knight Geoffrey Toyse, a relative of Duke Philip III (1419-1467). The Europeans who came to loot were met here by Gurieli with a detachment of 600 people. The captured Toyse was released only at the request of the Emperor of Trebizond.

In the 70s of the 15th century, the Venetian merchant and Diplomat Giosafat Barbaro and the Venetian ambassador to the court of Uzun Hassan - Ambrogio Contarini attributed Batumi to a part of Samegrelo, however, the first one called the head of Samegrelo "Bendiani", the second – "Gorbola".

Based on the above-mentioned, we think that at the beginning of the 15th century, Batumi was subordinate to the leader of

Samegrelo, in the middle of the 40s, Gurieli repulsed the Burgundian pirates in Batumi, which indicates his certain legal status. In the late 1450s, Batumi was part of the Principality of Samtskhe (South Georgia), and in the 1470s it was already part of Sabediano, which was ruled by Bediani, also known as Dadian-Gurieli

**Keywords:** Batumi; Akhaltsikhe; Gurieli; Samegrelo; XV century; European travelers.

### **Introduction**

As a maritime city, Batumi has never lost its importance throughout centuries of history due to its geostrategic location. The roads leading to eastern Georgia started from here, which is clearly evidenced by the abundance of stone arch bridges and watchtowers on the trade routes passing through the valleys of Adjara and Chorokhi. - This road converged in Akhaltsikhe and then continued to Tbilisi, where it went to the Caspian Sea and Iran, and from here further to India and China (Beradze, 1981:167; Uzunadze, 2013:15).

Historically, Georgia had the closest relationship with Byzantium, both by land and by sea. Not only the coastal population of Adjara, but also the population of the mountain zone was involved in the trade exchange with the outside world. This is clearly seen in the numismatic materials of this era. After the Turks-Seljuks came to power in Eastern Asia in the 11th century, they completely blocked the land routes leading to Byzantium, and the maritime relationship between Byzantium and Georgia became even more intense. It seems that this was followed by the further rise of Batumi, because in these relations, naturally, one of the leading places was held by him. Probably, this noticeable change was meant by Pl. Ioseliani, who, based on a source unknown to us, wrote about Batumi that "trade relations with the Greeks and Anatolian merchants pushed the King of

Georgia, Bagrat IV, to create a city here in the 11th century” (Ioseliani, 1850:31- 32).

### **Methods**

The research, in addition to the sources of the studied period, is based on the data of special scientific literature. Critical analysis of sources (searching for cause-and-effect ties), historical-comparative - and synthetic methods are used in the work.

### **Discussion**

Very scarce, but interesting information about Batumi of the late Middle Ages is preserved in the records of European travelers.

Johann (Hans) Schiltberger, German (Bavarian) warrior and traveler, who spent 30 years in captivity first by the Ottomans and then by the Mongols, tells about Batumi in the 20s of the 15th century. In European and Russian historiography, the attitude towards him is very critical, and some historians do not trust his information, but we think it is still interesting, especially since he is quoted by the great Georgian historian Ivane Javakhishvili: "Hans Schiltberger names Georgia (Gursy) as the only kingdom (Königreich). Although he also mentions Apkhazeti and Samegrelo, he only calls them Land, e.g. he considers it a community and has nothing to say about their political independence. It is clear that Western Georgia ("Apkhazeti" and "Samegrelo") was politically connected with Eastern Georgia as before (Javakhishvili, III, 2012: 261).

What is more interesting for us here is that the German traveler names Batumi as the capital of Samegrelo, whose inhabitants follow the Greek religion (Путешествие, 1867:45-46, 123). Researcher S. Gogitidze follows Prof. T. Bruny (who published Schiltberger's work with comments in Odessa in 1867) and believes that "Batumi at that time did not belong to Samegrelo or Guria, as some researchers claim, but to Principality of Samtskhe (South Georgia), therefore, to Adjara duchies, included in this principality" (Gogitidze, IV, 2013:10).

In the 40s of the 15th century, Guriel appears as the owner of Batumi. In 1442, Philip III the Good (1419-1467), duke of Burgundy, sent a fleet of several ships to Constantinople under the command of the Knight and his own Relative Geoffrey Toyse to help the Byzantines. In the spring of 1445, a part of the ships went to Trabzon. From here, according to one chronicle, a ship (galley) of the Burgundians under the command of Toyse, to the shame of the Emperor of Trebizond, went to the shore of Georgia, because he heard that there was a large ship loaded with valuable goods... But the Greeks of Trebizond informed the locals (meaning Georgians), who armed themselves, ambushed the attackers and when Geoffrey approached the ambushers, they attacked, killed many of his comrades, and he himself was taken prisoner. In this regard, the second European chronicle mentions that when the Burgundians attacked Batumi, "Patron" Guriel came there with a 600-man squad... Geoffrey de Toyse was captured and spent a month in captivity. According to the same chronicle, the Burgundian pirate was released by the Georgians at the request of the Emperor of Trebizond under the condition that the Burgundian galleys would not declare war on the mentioned country (Beradze, 1983:8; Beradze, 2009:20).

According to I. Javakhishvili, "even in the first years of the 15th century, Apkhazeti and Samegrelo did not become one principality, but Apkhazeti and Samegrelo were separate administrative units. Tskhumi (Sokhumi) was considered the main city of Apkhazeti at that time, while the main city of Samegrelo was Batumi, and this circumstance makes it clear that the chief of Samegrelo at that time was the head of Guria and Adjara. After that, a change took place: by 1459, Guria was removed from Samegrelo and formed a separate principality, while Apkhazeti and Samegrelo became one principality and its administration passed to Bediani" (Javakhishvili, IV, 2012:204). As for Batumi, at the moment it is part of Samtskhe (South Georgia). According to M. Brosset, the letter to the Duke of Burgundy about his

participation in the anti-Ottoman coalition by the chief of Samtskhe – Kvarkvare was sent from Batumi (Brosset, 1851:409).

However, in the 70s of the 15th century, Batumi appears again as part of Samegrelo. Giosafat Barbaro, a Venetian merchant and diplomat who was in Georgia at that time, while describing Samegrelo, notes: "The ruler of this country is called Bendiani. He has two fortresses near the mentioned sea, one is called Vati and the other is called Sevastopoli" (Mamistvalishvili, 1981: 55). The first publisher of this source, as well as the majority of scholars, considered Vathi to be Batumi (Chkonia, 1894:45). "This country is all rocky and scanty. The boxwood grows here in abundance, which is why the honey here is bitter. Apart from ghomi (*Setaria italica*), they do not grow any other agricultural plants here. Salt is brought from Kafi, they weave a little canvas of hemp or nettle, but of inferior quality" (ibid.). I. Barbaro also went for a walk in Batumi with his Genoese companion, who behaved very recklessly, but for some reason, "no one was offended by his action, and no one said no to him." From his narration, it can be seen that the Italians felt at home here, which indicates a close bond with them. It turns out that there were many of them in Batumi, prevailed especially the Genoese, who were engaged in trade (Uzunadze, 2013: 28), however, they did not have their own self-government here.

At the same time, the fame of Batumi in Europe increased, which was reflected in official documents, travelers' notes and maps of that period with various forms: Vathi, Vatani, Bothan, and others.

In 1474, the Venetian ambassador at the court of Uzun Hassan - Ambrogio Contarini, was in Batumi, who also left us information about Georgia, including Batumi: "Batoum is a fortress and a small town of the prince of Samegrelo, whose name is Gorbola". This chief also has another small town near the Black Sea, named Caltichea, where they sell silk, canvas and a little honey" (Chkonia, 1894:49). It is interesting that Contarini met a Catholic Bernardine monk in Batumi. The opinion has been expressed that maybe Italians from Batumi and

European Catholics living or working here had a house of God's service, or a church, in their neighborhood (Uzunadze, 2013: 28).

It seems that, taking into account the mentioned references, I. Javakhishvili, speaking about the area and boundaries of the territory of Bagrat VI (1466-1478), King of Georgia, writes: "the territory from the Black Sea coast to the Tsshnitskali River was under the rule of Bediani and included Apkhazeti, Minrelia, Guria and Adjara. To the north it was bordered by the Caucasus mountain ridge, to the south by the Chorokhi river... Batoumi, at that time a small fortress-city, belonged to Sabediano (Javakhishvili, IV, 2012:214).

It should be noted here that the question of whether Batumi of this period was part of the Principality of Samegrelo does not seem to be fully resolved. Contarini, turning back from Tabriz, mentions the dominion of Gorgora, the prince of Akhaltsikhe (Calcican) and the Batumi side. The similarity of the names – Gerbola // Gorgora is obvious. Accordingly, considering that this name corresponds to the Georgian Kvarkvare, there is a doubt that the Italian travelers confused Samtskhe and Samegrelo, which is why Batumi was attributed to the latter. Even Platon Yoseliani noted that "travelers are deeply mistaken when they consider Batumi to be the city of Samegrelo and Gorbola to be its owner. It is known from the history that at that time Batumi was owned by Kvarkvare – Atabeg of Akhaltsikhe, whose name was - distorted by the Italians to Gorbola // Gorgora" (Ioseliani, 1850:32). Other authors share this opinion (Gogitidze, III, 2013:9-10). Of course, there is logic in this, especially since in the mentioned period, the Atabeg of Samtskhe is Kvarkvare II (1451-1498). But, in such a case, it turns out that the power of the prince of Samtskhe extended to "Caltichea" of Contarini as well<sup>35</sup>, which is hard to believe. It should be noted that the name "Caltichea" bears almost as much resemblance

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<sup>35</sup> On the maps of 1561 by Giacomo Gastaldi and 1689 by Giacomo Cantelli, in the area of Samegrelo principality, north of Sokhumi, the point "Caltacha" is mentioned near the mouth of riv. Mokvistkali (Chikobava, 2006:153-154).

to “Caltacha” as it does to “Calcican”. Thus, it is not excluded that Contarini meant Akhaltsikhe in both cases. However, there is one contradiction that also rules out this assumption: “Caltichea” of Contarini is a city on the Black Sea. At a glance, it seems that this is also easily explained: Contarini has not been to this city, he heard that Kvarkvare is the owner of Akhaltsikhe, and he thought that, like Batumi, it must be on the Black Sea. But what should we do with the fact that a few years before the arrival of the Italian travelers to Georgia, in 1463, the chief of Samtskhe, Kvarkvare, handed over Adjara to Gurieli? N. Berdzenishvili offers us an interesting solution here. He thinks that the word “Gorbola” is a transcription of “Gurieli”, and “Caltichea” is a distorted “Kajtsikhe” (Castle of the devil). In the scientist's opinion: “The head of Samegrelo of that period – Shamadavala also owned Guria, i.e. was also Gurieli. That's why he calls himself “Dadian-Gurieli”. If in Samegrelo he is called Dadiani or Bediani, in Guria his name was Gurieli” (Berdzenishvili, V, 1971:113). N. Berdzenishvili paid attention also to I. Barbaro's report, where the southern border of Samegrelo is the Phasis (riv. Rioni), and Bedieli, - who owns Batumi and Sebastopoli, is mentioned as the prince of Samegrelo. “Then how will the riv. Phasis be the border of Samegrelo?” – asks the scientist and answers himself: Giosafat Barbaro knows that Samegrelo or Sabediano is one thing and the Dadian-Gurieli's land of his period is another“(Berdzenishvili, V, 1971:114).

### **Conclusion**

Based on all of the above, on the comparison of sources we can make certain conclusions: at the beginning of the 15th century, Batumi obeys the ruler of Samegrelo, in the mid-40s, Burgundian pirates in Batumi repels Gurieli, which indicates his certain legal status. In the late 1450s, Batumi was part of Samtskhe, and in the 1470s, it was already part of Sabediano, which was ruled by Bediani, also known as Dadian-Gurieli.

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