Achtung!
Dies ist eine Internet-Sonderausgabe des Aufsatzes
‘The “Bun-Turks” in Ancient Georgia’
Sie sollte nicht zitiert werden. Zitate sind der Originalausgabe in
Bläsing, Uwe / Arakelova, Victoria / Weinreich, Matthias (eds.),
Studies on Iran and The Caucasus.
Presented to Prof. Garnik S. Asatrian on the
Occasion of his 60th birthday,
Leiden / Boston 2015, 25-43
zu entnehmen.

Attention!
This is a special internet edition of the article
‘The “Bun-Turks” in Ancient Georgia’
It should not be quoted as such. For quotations, please refer to the original edition in
Bläsing, Uwe / Arakelova, Victoria / Weinreich, Matthias (eds.),
Studies on Iran and The Caucasus.
Presented to Prof. Garnik S. Asatrian on the
Occasion of his 60th birthday,

Alle Rechte vorbehalten / All rights reserved:
Jost Gippert, Frankfurt 2015
The “Bun-Turks” in Ancient Georgia

Jost Gippert
Goethe Universität, Frankfurt

Abstract
The paper deals with the identification of the so-called “Bun-Turks” that are mentioned in several historical texts as a tribe which settled in Georgia in prehistoric times. On the basis of a thorough comparison of the relevant Georgian and other sources, the term is shown to have emerged from a corruption of the name of the Huns, which occurs in similar contexts, together with other designations of Turkic tribes. The available text materials further suggest that the historical basis for the mentioning of the “Bun-Turks” as settlers in Georgia was the Khazar attacks of the VIth-VIIth centuries, which were secondarily re-projected into prehistoric times.

Keywords
Bun-Turks, Huns, Qypchaq, Khazars; Kartlis Cxovreba; Mokceva Kartlisa; Alexander Romance; Šahnâme

Turkic languages are an integral part of the linguistic landscape of present-day Caucasia, both north and south of the mountain ridge. However, different from the so-called “autochthonous” Caucasian languages, i.e. the languages pertaining to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian), (North-) West Caucasian and (North-)East Caucasian families, both the southern (Oghuz) and the northern (Qypchaq) idioms of Turkic stock are generally believed to have entered the area in relatively recent times. Nevertheless there are explicit indications of ancient contacts between Caucasian and Turkic peoples in historical sources from the area itself. The present paper deals with one of these traditions, viz. that of the "Bun-Turks" mentioned in Old Georgian historiography.

Even though there is good reason to believe that Old Georgian literacy emerged about the same time as that of Old Armenian, by the beginning of the

* The main points of the present article were first presented on the conference “Anatolia – Melting Pot of Languages” in Istanbul on May 28, 2005.

© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2015
Vth c. A.D., Georgian historiography differs from that of its neighbours in that the sources that have come down to us are of a much later origin. As a matter of fact, no Georgian fellow-historians are known of authors such as Korwn, Agathanjelos, Lazor Parpec’i (all Vth c.), Elišê, Sebêos (VIIth c.), Lewond (VIIIth c.), or Movsês Xorenac’i (IXth c.). In Georgian tradition, we must wait until the Xth c. for the first noteworthy account of the history of the country to be written down; this is the anonymous text on the “Conversion of Kartli (East-Georgia)”, Mokece- vay Kartlisay, which contains, beside the legend of the conversion of King Mirian by a captive woman called Nino, a brief chronicle extending from prehistorical times to the IVth c. A.D. The “Conversion”, existing in four different versions and representing a compilation of various older sources, was later used by the bishop Leoni Mroveli (Leontius of Ruisi) who in the XIth c. authored the initial parts of Kartlis Cxovreba, the Georgian “Chronicle”, which was steadily continued until the XVIth c. Apart from these works, it is only a few hagiographic texts that may be regarded as authentic historical sources of first millenium Georgia.

Within the “Conversion of Kartli”, the people called bun-turkni, i.e. “Bun-Turks”, play a prominent rôle indeed. In the most comprehensive version of the text, that of the Šatberd codex of the late Xth c., they are mentioned as inhabitants of East Georgia right at the beginning, in connection with an enigmatical account of a king named Alexander:

---

1 The versions of Mokecevay Kartlisay (MK) are contained in one codex each of Šatberd (Xth c.) and Čelii (XIIIth c., cf. Lerner 2004a), and two manuscripts of St. Catherine’s monastery on Mt. Siani (Xth c.). The text of the Šatberd codex has been edited in Gigineili/Gui našili (1979: 320-355) and, in parallel with the Čelii codex, in Abuladze (1963: 82-163); of the two Sinai manuscripts (N48 and N50), only the latter is available via the facsimile edition in Aleksidzé (2001: 73-215). The (fragmentary) second Sinai manuscript (N48) was investigated in situ by the present author in 2010; it does not overlap with N50.

2 Cf. Gippert (2006) for a discussion of several relevant cases.

3 For Kartlis Cxovreba (KC) cf. the edition Qaučišvili (1955-9). – The question of the dating of the model used by Leoni cannot be discussed here (the VIIth c. has recently been proposed in Rapp 1999: 80 and 2006: 175).

4 These are the legends of St. Šušani (VIth c.), St. Evștati of Mxeta (VIIth c.), St. Habo of Tbilisi (VIIIth c.), and a few other ones, all edited in Abuladze 1963.
The "Bun-Turks" in Ancient Georgia

After Alexander the King (had) conquered the descendants of the children of Lot and dispelled them into the land Ḳedar (?), he saw the fierce tribes (of) the Bun-Turks who resided along the river Kur, in four cities, and their villages (were) Sarḳine-City, Ḳaspi, Urbnisi and Ozraqe.

From Leonṭi Mroveli’s adaptation of the passage it is clear that the king in question is Alexander the Great, but neither the “children of Lot” nor the “land Ḳedar” appear here:

KC. L.Mr. 17,6–8:
aman aleksandre dai ṣeqna q̣ala q̣ṛna q̣ṛvelni Ḳ̣ideni kueq̣aṇisa, ese gamovida dasavlit, da ṣevida samgrit, ʃemovida ġrdilot, gardamovlna kaṿ̄ḳasni da movida kartlad...

“That Alexander conquered all the edges of the land. He started from the west, and went south, entered northwards, transgressed the Caucasus (mountains) and came to Kartli...”

It is but a vague idea that the “land Ḳedar” of the “Conversion”, Ṿedarṣa mas kueq̣aṇasa, might have been replaced by the “edges of the land”, ġdeni kueq̣aṇa, in this text, and that the “children of Lot” have their counterpart in the “northward” direction, ġrdilot, of Alexander’s progression. As both the "descendants of Lot" and a land (or, rather, tribe) named “Kedar” are Biblical topoi, it may

---

1 MK.S = the text as appearing in the Šaṭberd version of the legend (here quoted by pages and lines of the edition Gigiñeishvili/Giunašvili 1979); of the other versions, none has the initial paragraphs forming the “Primary History of Georgia” (thus the term introduced by Rapp 1999: 82).
2 For the place names concerned cf. the map (by Robert H. Hewsen) in Rapp (1999: 128).
3 Here quoted by pages and lines of the edition Qauxišvili (1955).
4 Gertrud Pätsch in her German translation of the “Conversion” (1975: 290 n. 2, referring to Čikobava 1955: 1120) considers to see Modern Georgian Ṿedar– “side, edge” (“Seite, Rand” / ”მხარე, კიდე”) here, suggesting that Ṿedar- in the “Conversion” might be interpreted as “outlying” (“könnte auch in diesem Sinne als «abseits gelegen» gedeutet werden”). The stem Ṿedar- seems not be attested anywhere in Old Georgian, however, so that we should rather assume a corruption of *kide- instead. – Old Georgian kedar, the name of the “cedar tree”, can be excluded in the given context as we have an appositive construction “in the land Ḳ.” in “ḳedarṣa mas kueq̣aṇasa”, not a genitival syntagn “in the land of the cedar(s)” (“kueq̣aṇasa mas kedarsasa/kedartasa”).
5 Cf. Deut. 2,9.19 and Ps. 83,8 (82,9) for the ‘children of Lot’. Note that in the Old Georgian Bible tradition, it is not švlt- “child” but ʒe- “son” that is used in these passages. Cf. below for another suggestion as to the “children of Lot”.
6 For the ‘land Kedar’ cf. the “tents of Kedar” mentioned in Ps.
well be the text of the “Conversion” that has undergone changes here, rather than Leonti’s which must have relied upon a model quite distant from the Šaṭberd version of the legend.

Different from the “Conversion”, Leonti Mroveli continues not with “Bun-Turks” but with “Kartvelians”, i.e., Georgians, in the present context, and in a very unfavourable manner indeed:

KC. L.Mr. 17,8–11:
... da ḫovna ˒qovelni kartvelni uboroṭes ˒qovleta natesavta ˒xulīta. rametu kol-kmorobisa da siˇṣvisatws ara uˇcnda natesaoba, ˒qovelsa sulierwa ˒samdes, mḵudarsa ʿešḵamdes, vitarca mḵenći da pирuṭiquni, romelta keviswa carbọtkwa uqm ara ...

“... and he found all (the) Georgians worse than all tribes by (their) faith. For they did not care of (sanguinal) relations in marriage and matrimony, used to eat everything living and (even) dead, just like beasts and wild animals, whose customs are impossible to describe...”

However, in Leonti Mroveli’s treatise, it is not the Kartvelians alone that are ascribed these raw manners. Immediately afterwards, the author agrees with the “Conversion” again in introducing the “Bun-Turks”, too. But different from the latter text, the term is here combined with another designation of a Turkic tribe, viz. ˒qivʿaṭq-, i.e., Qypchaqs:

KC. L.Mr. 17,11–13:
da ixilna ra ese natesavni sastıkni ˒carmartni, romelta-iq ˒cuq hunturkaḍ da ˒qivʿaṭqad ucqta, msxdomareni mdinaresa mas mḵurisasa miscevit, dauḵvarda ese ʾaleksandres, rametu ara romelni natesavni ˓kmodes mas.

“And when he saw these fierce pagan tribes, whom we call Bun-Turks and Qypchaqs, who resided along the river Kur, Alexander was astonished, for no (other) tribes would do the (same).”

119 (120), 5: It is this verse that is quoted s.v. keḍari in the XVIIth c. Georgian lexicon by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1965: 367). Saba’s translation “ბნელი საჭმუნავი”, i.e. “woeful dark”, adapted by Pätsch (1975: 290 with n. 2: “das dunkle Land”), is obviously based on an etymological connection of the Biblical name of the tribe of the sons of Ishmael, ʿeqdār = qedar (Gen. 25,13 etc.) with the root ʿeqdār “to be dark, darken”. Given that both the Septuagint and the Armenian Bible leave the name of the tribe untranslated in Ps. 119,5 (Kṛṣṇa / kedarton ), there is no reason to believe that keḏa[r]- existed as a common noun meaning “dark” in Old Georgian, even though Saba’s entry seems to be supported by the “Conversion” itself which has the sentence cəvedit bnelta ʾerdiyosata mṭata mṭ kedarisata “go away into the darknesse of the North, into the mountains of Kedar” later (MK.S 341.42–345,1). This, however, only proves that the etymological connection of the name with Hebr. qdr was widespread long before Saba. – The translation “land of midnight” proposed by Rapp with reference to “Khurāsān, the great eastern province of Persia” denoting the “east” (1999: 94) has no basis whatsoever.
Who, then, are the “Bun-Turks” who are reported here to have lived along with Kartvelians and Qypchaqs in East Georgia by the time of Alexander? As a matter of fact, several explanations have been proposed for their name, which seems not to be attested as such outside of Old Georgian sources. The first proposal was made by Marie-Félicité Brosset (1849: 33) who regarded *bun-turk* as a compound denoting “Turks primitifs”. This assumption is in accordance with the use of the word *bun-* in Old Georgian, esp. of its derivative *buneba-* which is the general term for “basis” or “nature”. It is further supported by two later revisions of St. Nino’s legend\(^{10}\) which allude to *buneba-* explicitly in the given context, in a sort of *lucus a non lucendo* argumentation:

\[\text{N.A. 46,15–18:} \]
\[
\text{ixilna natesavni igi sast\i\kni \carmartani, romelta \cven ac bun-turkad da qiv\caqad ucodt, msxdomareni mdinaresa zeda m\ts\krisasa mizuevit, da kala\kni matni} \z\text{lierni da cixen priad maqarni, da cxondebodes igini qovlad ucxod ka\c\ka bunebisagan, vitarca m\cgcni da \pira\t\kuni, romelta kecvisa \carmotkumay u\cmar ars.}
\]

“And he saw the fierce tribes of the pagans, whom we now call *Bun-Turks and Qypchaqs*, residing along the river Kur, and their strong cities and very firm strongholds, and they lived (in a way) totally deviant from the nature of men, like beasts and animals, whose customs are impossible to describe.”

\[\text{N.B. 79,26–80,3:} \]
\[
\text{da ixilna natesavni sast\i\kni \carmartni, romelta \cven a\c\at-bun-turkad uc\cest, rametu ixivebodes igini qovlad uc\c\c\ka bunebisagan, vitarca \c\cgemsi m\cgcni rayme sa\c\z\uvelni.}
\]

“And he saw the fierce pagan tribes, whom we call *A\c\at-Bun-Turks,* for they looked totally deviant from the nature of men, because they were somewhat ugly beasts.”

Brosset’s proposal was but slightly altered by Nikolai Marr who suggested a translation “коренной турокъ”, i.e., “original” or “old-established Turk”, assuming “корень, основание” (“root, basis”) to be the underlying meaning of *bun-* (Marr 1901: LXII). At the same time, Marr rejected the interpretation published by Ektime Taqa\c\svi\ili in the first edition of the “Conversion”, according to whom the word might denote Turks as “spear-bearers” (“будет означать турка-копьеносца”) (Taka\c\svi\ili 1900: 1–2 n. 2). As Marr correctly observed, *bun-* nowhere

---

\(^{10}\) N.A. (metaphrastic version by Arsen Beri): ca. XIIth c.; N.B. (anonymous metaphrastic version): ca. XIIIth c.; both quoted by pages and lines after the edition Abuladze (1971).

\(^{11}\) Note that *a\c\at-* is unexplained. Should this be a corruption of *qiv\caq-* rather than of *ac* “now” as in N.A.?
means "spear-bearer" nor even "spear" alone; in the combination bun-horolisa-
appearing, e.g., in the Šaṭberd codex within the Treatise on David and Goliath by Hippolytus (243.26; 244.33) as a quotation from II Kings (II Sam.) 21,19, it is horol-
which denotes the weapon, while bun-designates the "shaft" ("ратоище") as its "basis" or "handle" ("основание, рукоятка"). Marr was also right in underlining the coincidence with Armenian which has bown gelardan in I Kings (I Sam.) 17.7 as a perfect equivalent of bun-horolisa-. And there is hardly any room for doubt that both Armenian bown and Georgian bun-lastly reflect Middle Persian bun-with its meanings "base, foundation, bottom" as proposed by Heinrich Hübsch-
mann (1897: 123–4), Ilia Abuladze (1944: 085), and Mzia Androniḳašvili (1966: 297). Thus the assumption that the term "Bun-Turks" means something like "primeval" or "original" Turkic inhabitants of Kartli seems to be well founded. 

However, a different view suggests itself when we consider the information provided in Mokcevay Kartlisay and Kartlis Cxovreba in a broader context. As a matter of fact, Leonṭi’s text strongly reminds of a certain type of medieval legends on Alexander the Great that have come down to us in other languages, viz. Greek, Armenian, and Syriac. As a close parallel we may quote the prose version of the "Christian Legend", which is preserved in the latter language as an appendix to the Alexander Romance proper. Here, both Alexander’s travels into the Caucasus and the wild appearance of the people living there are described in a very similar way:

CL. 260.15–264.2 / 148.35–151.7:

"And Alexander looked towards the west ... then they went down to the source of the Euphrates ... and they came to the confines of the north, and entered Arme-

\[\text{\small "Subis таři", i.e. "spear shaft", is noted as the meaning of }\text{bun} \text{ in Sulkhan-Saba’s }\text{lexicon (Orbeliani 1965: 124); in a second entry, the same word is translated by }\text{saqelsakmre}, \text{ i.e. "(tool) for handicraft" (?; ib.; correspondingly in Čubinašvili 1887: 123).}\]

\[\text{\small Marr’s interpretation "original Turk" has recently been sustained by Rapp (1999: 95). According to Culaja (1979: 60 nn. 85 and 89), the term was used in referring to the pre-Hellenic period. – A different solution has recently been published by K. Lerner (2004b: 224) who proposed to see the influence of a "supposed Semitic substratum" here, deducing the term from "Hebrew, bney-Turks = 'seed, sons of the Turks". It seems, however, that the "Old Hebrew Romance" on Alexander Lerner refers to does not contain this notion, and the phonetic reshaping to be assumed in this case is not paralleled anywhere else.}\]

\[\text{\small Cf. the edition and translation in Budge (1889: 255–275 and 144–158); in the present paper, only the translation will be quoted (as CL). For an account of the Syriac manuscripts containing the Alexander Romance and a summary of the 'Legend' cf. Hunnius (1904: 9) and, more recently, Ciancaglini (2001). The XIIth c. "Book of the Bee" referred to by Rapp (1999: 98) stands farther off.} \]
nia and Âdarhaján and Inner Armenia ... and he went and encamped by the gate of the great mountain. ... Alexander said, "This mountain is higher and more terrible than all the mountains which I have seen. ... Who are the nations within this mountain upon which we are looking? ... What is their appearance, and their clothings, and their languages?" ... "They wear dressed skins; and they eat the raw flesh of everything which dies of theirs; and they drink the blood of men and animals." ... And of course, Alexander's question as to what nations he is looking at is answered as well:

CL. 263,2–5 / 150,20–24:

"Alexander said, "Who are the nations within this mountain upon which we are looking? ..." The natives of the land said, "They are the Huns." He said to them, "Who are their kings?" The old men said: "Gôg and Mâgôg and Nâwâl the kings of the sons of Japhet.""

This parallel suggests off-hand that the name of the “Bun-Turks” might have emerged from a corruption of the name of the “Huns”, which would presuppose a confusion of h- and b- if Syriac ῥωμ = hunayē as occurring in the given passage (263,4) was the model. The same would hold true if bun- should reflect Greek οὗνν- still spoken hun- with initial aspiration; this assumption is valid even though none of the existing Greek versions of the legend seems to use this name. The closest parallel we find among these versions is surely that of recension λ of the Alexander Romance ascribed to (Pseudo-)Kallisthenes (cf. the edition in Thiel 1959). This text does agree with the Syriac legend in denoting the “tribes of the North” as descendants of Japhet, thus suggesting that the enigmatical "children of Lot" we found in the Georgian “Conversion” might have emerged from a corruption of "children of Japhet" (*iapetis švilni*).

Ps.-Kall. Rec. λ, III,29 (31,10–33,7 ed.Thiel)

'Εξελϑὼν δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ... ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ πορευθῆναι ἐπὶ τὰ βόρεια µέρη. ἔδει δὲ ἐκεῖ ἔθνη πονηρὰ ἐσϑίοντας σάρκας ἀνθρώπων καὶ πίνοντας αἷµα ζώων [καὶ θηρίων] ὡσπερ ὕδωρ. ἱδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐϕοβήϑη αὐτούς · ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ τοῦ Ἰαφὲν ἁπόγονοι ... τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐκ ἔϑαπτον, ἀλλ’ ἠςϑίον αὐτοὺς. ...

"But Alexander went off ... and it seemed good to him to travel into the northern lands. There he found worthless people eating human flesh and drinking the

---

5 The same notion is also found in the parallel passage of two redactions of the Apocalypse by (Pseudo-) Methodius (edited in Thiel 1959: 72–75): here we read: ἔνδα καὶ ἔόρακεν ένθη ἁκάθαρτα καὶ ὑπεστή δ ἐκὶ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰαφὲν ἁπόγονοι / ἔνδα καὶ ἔόρακεν ένθη ἁκάθαρτα καὶ έἶδεν ἐκὶ ἐκ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰαφὲν ἁπόγονος (72, 5–7/ 73, 5–6).
blood of living beings [and animals] like water. When Alexander saw them, he was affrighted, for they were descendants of Japhet ... they did not bury the dead but ate them."

In ending up the account of Alexander's journey to the North, the same text introduces the ethnonym of the "Turks", too, thus indicating a possible source for the second part of the quasi-compound bun-turk- of the Georgian tradition:

Ps.-Kall. Rec. λ, III.29 (57,4–6 ed.Thiel):

"Having cleansed the lands of the North from the defilements of those people, he built a wall against the north, 70 cubits high and 20 cubits wide, and passed through the Turks and the Armenians."

The identification of bun- with the name of the Huns still hits on two problems. First, the replacement of h- by b- can by no means be motivated phonetically, and we must assume some sort of paleographic confusion instead. This assumption is equally hard to prove but not improbable. If the replacement took place within Georgian, we must presuppose that the script involved was the ancient majuscule script, Asomtavruli, as only in this script the letters <b> and <h> are similar enough to be confusable; cp. the two letters in VIIIth c. Asomtavruli (ᆨ vs. ሊ), XIth c. minuscule script (Nuskhuri: 蔷 vs. ᴣ), and Modern Mkhedruli script (ბ vs. ო). It must be admitted in any way that a common prototype of the "Conversion of Kartli" and Leonti Mroveli’s account was written in Asomtavruli majuscules, given that similar confusions must be assumed for other passages of the "Conversion", too.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{16}\) A. Vovin (personal communication of 2005) drew my attention to the Greek ethnonym φρυν-, which occurs in Strabo’s Geography (11,11,15) and denotes a people in the neighbourhood of the Chinese (ὗπερ-) and Bactria; this might represent an older variant of the name of Huns (< *hwunγ) and underlie Georgian bun-. The sound substitution involved (*fr > b) would be unparalleled, however, even though Old Georgian does possess examples of Middle Iranian fr- being substituted by br- (e.g., "frazēn "wise" > brzen-i, cf. Gippert 1993: 223–4 and 267–8) as well as hr- being substituted by pr- (e.g., prom- "Rome" vs. hrom- "id.", via *fr-; cf. Blake 1923: 84–7; Peeters 1926: 76–7).

\(^{17}\) A conflation of the designations Hun (Honi) and Turk (Türk)i) was also considered hesitantly by Rapp (2003: 149 n. 185) but rejected on paleographic grounds.

\(^{18}\) Cf. Gippert 2006: 14–6 for an example. Note that the Sinai manuscript N48 (cf. note 1 above) is peculiar for the fact that it contains various lines written in Asomtavruli letters in an otherwise Nuska-Khutsuri based context (cf. Gippert 2010, n. 23), thus proving that older versions of the "Conversion" written in Asomtavruli letters may well have existed.
The second problem consists in the fact that the name of the Huns does occur in Old Georgian sources in a different form, viz. hon-\. As a matter of fact, this form is met with in the “Conversion” itself, side by side with bun-turk-, in the continuation of the passage treated above:

MK.S. 320,7–16:

dauḳwrda aleksandres da cna, rametu ieboselta natesavni iṕnes: iqovlsa qorcielsa ḳamdes da samare mati ara iqo, mḵudarsa šešḷamdes. da ver eqlo brzolay mati mepesa da carviḍa. mašin movides natesavni mbrzolni, kaldevetaqan gamo-
sxmuñi, honni, da jetsves bun-turkta uplisagan kueqanay xarkiṭa. da dasxes iqini zanavs. ... da šemdgomad raodenisa-me žamisa movida aleksandre, mepê iqovlsxà kueqanisay, da dalecna smáni ese kalakni da cíxeni, da honta dasca maxwli.

“And Alexander was astonished and realised that they were descendants of the Jebusites: they used to eat all (kinds of) meat and had no cemeteries, (because) they used to eat the dead. And the king could not fight against them and went away. Then came martial tribes, an offspring of the Chaldees, Hons, and they asked the ruler of the Bun-Turks for tributed land. And they settled in Zanavi. ... And after some time, Alexander, the king of all the land, came (again) and destroyed these three cities and fortresses and defeated the Hons with the sword.”

This notion seems to imply that the hon-ni and the bun-turkni cannot be the same people. Leonṭi Mroveli’s account is not helpful in this context at first glance as it mentions only the “tribes of the Chaldees”:

KC. L.Mr. 17,14–16:

aramed mas Šamsa ver urlencode; rametu povolta cixeni magarni da kalakni ųlieni. kualad gamovides sxuani natesavni kaldevelnì, da daeśennes iqini-ca kartlì. šemdgomad amissa ganaqerda aleksandre da ḳaśpi̇ra ḳoveli kueqana, da ajmovida kueqanasa kartlisasa. da povna cixe-kalakni ese ųlieni ŝua-kartlì: ... urbnisi, ḳaspi ... sarqine, da zanavi, Ṍubani uriala ...”

“But at that time, he was not able (to fight against them), because he detected (their) firm fortresses and strong cities. (And) again, other Chaldean tribes came, and they, too, settled in Kartli. After this, Alexander gained strength and conquered all the land, and he came to the land of Kartli. And he found these strong fortified cities in Inner-Kartli: ... Urbnisi, ḳaspi ... Sarqine, and Zanavi, the quarter of the Jews ...”

We must note, however, that Leonṭi’s text contains another type of information that might be decisive here. Based on his equation of Zanavi with a “quarter of the Jews”, Ektime Taqiaşvili proposed to read ho 辏i as an abbreviated form of “ჰურია ნნი”, ica. esper in the Conversion (Takaişvili 1900: 5 n. 1). As the Georgian Jews are generally believed to be of Babylonian provenance, this
explanation seems to have a good deal in its favour, even though it does not account for the double n, the plural nominative of huria: "Jew" being huriani throughout.

On the other hand, this explanation will not work for the dative plural form honta appearing at the end of the passage, as the corresponding form of huria would be hurialecta, with no n at all. What is more, there can be no doubt that Old Georgian did possess a stem hon- denoting the "Huns". This is attested, e.g., in the legend of St. Šušaniқ,\(^\text{20}\) allegedly an authentic report of the late Vth or early VIth century written by a contemporary of the Saint, and generally assumed to be the oldest extant non-translated literary text in Old Georgian. Here, the people named hon- are the adversaries of the vicegerent (piţiaxş, vitaxa) of Kartli:

Šuš. VII: 19,2-5:

da man mrkua me: "ucqia, xuces, me brzolad çarval honta zeda. da čemi samkauli mas ara dauşeo, odes igi ara čemi coli ars – ipoos vinne, romelman gankapos igi."... 
da vitar moqcia agysebisa orşabati da movida piţiaxşí brzolisa misgan hontaysa, ešmači txrida gulsa misa.

"And he (the vitaxa) told me: 'Do you know, priest, I am going to fight against the Huns, And don't leave her my jewellery as long as she isn't my wife – someone will be found who will wear it out.'... And as Easter Monday came and the vitaxa returned from the fight against the Huns, the devil was stirring (lit. digging) his heart up."

There can be no doubt that the "Huns" here referred to are the same as those mentioned, under the same name, hon-, in Armenian historiographic texts such as Agathangelos' History of the Armenians:\(^\text{21}\)

Agath. 19: 16,6–10:

... sksanēr Xosrov t'agaworn Hayoc' gownd kazmel ... gowmarel zzōrs Alowanic' ew Vrac', ew banal zdrowns Alanač' ew zCray pahakin, hanel zzōrs Honac', aspatak dnel i kolmans Parsic', aršawel i kolmans Asorestani, minićew i drows Tishonic

"... Xosrov, the king of the Armenians, began to assemble an army, ... to take together the troops of the Albanians and the Georgians, and to open the gates of the Alans and the guard of Čor (Derbent),\(^\text{22}\) to extract the troops of the Huns,

---

\(^\text{19}\) Cf. Bielmeier (1990: 32) who connects the name Zanavi with the Hebrew place name ūnāh (Zanah) appearing in the Old Testament (Jos. 15,34 etc.).

\(^\text{20}\) Here quoted by pages and lines of the edition in Abuladze 1963.

\(^\text{21}\) Here quoted by paragraph numbers, pages and lines after the edition Tēr-Mkrtčean/Kana- yeancı (1909).

\(^\text{22}\) Note that the historical setting of St. Šušaniқ’s legend agrees with that of Agathangelos’ History in mentioning Derbent under the name Čor: xolo piţiaxşí čord çaremarta da şoşik, şmay misi,
make an attack into the regions of the Persians, to invade the regions of Assyria up to the gates of Ktesiphon."

Unfortunately, the XIIIth c. Armenian translation of the Georgian Chronicle, Patmowtʿiwn Vracʿ, does not contain any information on the "Bun-Turks" or "Huns" in the passage corresponding to Leonti Mroveli’s treatise on Alexander's journey, its text being abridged in the present context as elsewhere:

PV 24.1–25.3:35
Yaynn ʿamanaki ambarjaw mecn Alekʿsandr... Sa ekn yarewmtic' ari hwiśiśw, ew šįjėal ond arewels, emowt i cmakayin erkirm. ew ēanc' ond Kovkasow leaṁn yażəkarhn Vrac'. ew hiac'aw ond zazir keans noc'a: Ew zi etes amroc's bazowms, ew ačxateac'  zzaaws iwr amiss vec' yaṁnówln znosa' zCownda, zXert'wis, ZOwnjrxè, karoćew'ala ond karin Ladasoy, zT'owlars i veroy getoyn Speroy, or asi Ėroox, zOwrlnis, zKash, Őwp'lisc'ixè, or asi Tarń-berd, zMc'xet'a – zt'alk'n' or Sarkina koč'ec'aw, zĆixęd, or ė berd mec, ew Zawanoy t'ab Hrēic'... "At that time, the Great Alexander arose... He came from the west to the north, and having travelled through the east, he entered the land of the shadow.24 And he went from Mt. Caucasus into the land of the Georgians. And he was astonished about their disgustful life. And as he saw many strongholds (there) and he was busy for six months with his troops (trying) to conquer them, (viz.) Cunda, Xertvisi, Ogrqe which was built at the rock of Ladasi, Tugarisi above the river Śperi, which is (also) called Ėrooxi, Urbnisi, Ėaspi, Upliscixe which means Fortress of the Lord, Mcxeta – (its) quarters which are called Sarkine, Cixedli, which means Big Fortress, and Zavan (= Zanavi!), the quarter of the Jews ...

In another passage, however, the Patmowtʿiwn Vracʿ does use the term hοn-. This passage is concerned with King David the Builder (Davit Ağmašenebeli) and his wife Guaranduxṭ, and the period in question is the XIth–XIIth century A.D.:

PV 244.3–9:
Ew kin nora Gorandowxt dowstr Ėr Kiwę'alać'glsaworin, aysink'n Honac' A'Trakay.
Ew noc'a awgnwot'eambn hnazandeac' zt'agaworsn Awset'oy. ew ėr patands i noc'anę, ew arar xatalot'iwn i mej Awsac' ew Honac'.

ara daxuda, odes salmę ese ikmnna cmidisa šušaniks zeda "But the vitaca had moved off to Ėor, and Šožik, his brother, was not present when this affair happened to St. Šušanič" (ch. X: 22.11-12). For other peculiarities of the Old Georgian legend agreeing with features of Old Armenian cf. Gippert 1991: 82-84.

35 Cf. the edition in Abuladze (1953), here quoted by page and lines (as PV).
34 cmakayin erkir is a literal translation of *kweiqana- ėrdiloysa-, lit. 'land of the shadow', the term underlying Georgian ėrdiloet'-i "North".
"And his wife Gorandowxt was the daughter of the head of the Kipchaks, i.e., the Huns, At' rakay. And with their help, he subdued the kings of Ossetia. And he took hostages from them, and he made peace between the Ossetes and the Huns."

Equating the hons with the kiwč'als, i.e., the Qypchaqs, the Armenian text differs considerably from its Georgian model, the chapter on Davit A'gmašenbeli of Kartlis Cxovreba, which uses only the term ʒivč'ali here:

KC. D.A. 336,4–18:


"He had married the blessed and very beautiful queen Guaranduxť, a child of the leader of the Qypchaqs, Atrak the son of Saragan ... Therefore he sent out faithful men and invited the Qypchaqs and his father-in-law. They entered Ossetia, and the kings of Ossetia and all their leaders approached them and stood like servants in front of them. And they took hostages from both the Ossetes and the Qypchaqs, and in this way he easily reunited them. And he made happiness and peace between them like brothers."

On the other hand, it is just this equation which is reminiscent of the "Bun-Turks" and "Qypchaqs" being named side by side in Leonți Mroveli's account of Alexander, and it is highly probable that the two passages are linked to each other, given that King David is explicitly compared with the Greek emperor right before:

KC. D.A. 335,16–336,1:

də məgavsad aleksandressa kma ... əməstwscə aman moereman aleksandre ʒaniz-razax siurca gonebisata, rametu ʃxaeb ara ʃo ʃone, dauciloda ketilad ʒivč'aqtə natesavisa simrabl ... 

"And he acted similarly to Alexander ... and therefore this second Alexander considered with the width of (his) wit that there was no other means, (for) he knew the size of the tribe of the Qypchaqs well ..."

In this way, even the later text tradition supports the assumption that the term bun-turk- of the "Conversion of Kartli" and its adaptations emerged from a contamination of the ethnonyms of "Huns" and "Turks" appearing in a legend on

---

Alexander that must have been its source. This assumption implies the mis-
reading or misspelling of the former term in an Asomtavruli manuscript source
of the “Conversion” and its spread into all later text variants (as secondary attes-
tations); all this may well have been facilitated by popular etymology associating
bun- with notions of “nature”, “ground”, or “origin(ality)”. At the same time, the
term hon- in the Šatberd-version of Mokcevay Kartlisay may be regarded as being
re-introduced into the legend on the basis of a parallel source, possibly as an (in-
terlinear) gloss. As to the coexistence of hon- and *hun-, we should keep in mind
that the latter stem was partly homonymous with that of hune- “horse”, which
might have led to confusion; cf. the text on the destruction of Jerusalem in 614
A.D. ascribed to a certain Antiokhos Strategos, where the form honebi appears
instead of huneebi “horses” in an allusion to the submersion of the Pharao’s
troops in the exodus of the Israelites’ (Ex. 14, 18–28):

Ant.Strat. Exp.1er. V,18:

da merme, odes ʒer učnda ġmerta damqobay mati, eṭlebi iği da honebi mati dai-
ṣna da sparazenebay ajcērvilta matta daintka.

“And then, when it seemed appropriate to God to destroy them, their chariots
and horses were dissolved and the equipment of their armed (forces) was swal-
lowed.”

It depends on the reliability of the alleged sources then, i.e, the Alexander
Romance and its derivate, whether the existence of “Hunnic Turks” in Southern
Caucasia can be assumed for the time of the Macedonian emperor. As a matter
of fact, it is anything but certain that we have reliable historical information
here. Instead it is highly probable that the items concerning the “Huns” were in-
tegrated into the Alexander tradition not earlier than the year 515 A.D., possibly
even about a hundred years later, in 628 A.D., when there were actual “Hunnic”
or, rather, Khazar attacks in the Caucasus. At least for the Syriac “Christian Leg-
end” there are clear indications of its having been compiled by that period. The
connection of “Huns” with Alexander’s conquest thus remains a mere anachro-
nism, and it is by far not the only anachronism we find in the “Conversion of
Kartli” or Leonṭi Mroveli’s chronicle. And indeed, there is at least one more
coincidence that must be dealt with in this context.

26 Thus according to both editions: Gariṭte 1960: 13, 24–26; Marr 1909: 11, 3–5.
27 Cf. Hunnius (1904: 31) in dispute with Nöldeke (1890); Ciancaglini (2001: 138) accepts the latter
date.
Different from the "Conversion", Leonti begins his account of the history of Georgia not with Alexander but in much earlier times. After speculations about the descendance of the Caucasian peoples from Targamos, i.e. the Biblical patriarch Togarmah, a grandson of Japhet (Gen. 10,2–3; I Chr. 1,5–6), he deals in extensive about prehellenic times, and it is within this context that he first introduces the "Turks":

KC. L.Mr. 14,13-14:

da śemdgomad amissa raodentame čeliçađa ucalo ikmna kekapos, mepe sparsta, rametu içço brzola turkta.

"And several years after that Keḳaposé, the Persian king, became busy, for he began to struggle against the 'Turks'."

In the passage in question Leonti is declaredly referring to a source he used, viz. a text styled “The Life of Persia" which must be some prototype of Firdausī's Šāhnaše, and the “Turks" mentioned must be the “Turanians" of the Iranian tradition (Culaja 1979: 58 n. 79):

KC. L.Mr. 14,21-23:

šemdgomad amissa mciredta ċelta qualad gamogzava amanve kekapos ʒis-çuli misi, ʒe ʃioš bednierisa, romeli moikla turkets, vitarca ceri ərs eignsa sparsta czovrebisasa.

"A few years after that, the same Keḳaposé sent away his grandson, the son of ʃioš the Lucky, who was killed in the Turks' country, as it is written in the book of the Life of the Persians.”

It is obvious that the persons named here are the Iranian heroes Kai Kawūs, his son Sīyāwpū/Sīyāwax̆ (Abuladze 1916: 3 n. 2), and his grandson Firōd, all figuring in Firdausī's Šāhnâme as Iranian kings who were involved in struggles with the Turanians under Afrāsyāb. The reason why this episode is quoted in Leonti Mroveli's chronicle is that it contains the report about another son of

---

29 For the death of Firōd cf. Šn. 13, 843 [830/426] ff. (references to verses of the Šāhnâme are here given in accordance with the system used in Wolff 1935; corresponding verse numbers of the editions Bertel's 1960-1971 and Khaleghi-Motlagh 1988-2009 are added in square brackets). – The epithet bednier “lucky” should refer to Firōd rather than to his father Sāvūs as he is named farrux Firōd e.g. in Šn. 13, 913 [892/486].

30 In its chapter on Alexander, the Šāhnâme does contain the episode on Yāğğū and Māğğū = Gog and Magog (20, 1459 [1421] ff.), but in a much divergent form and without mentioning the name of the ‘Huns’.

31 Cp. str. 792-2 of the Middle Georgian metrical adaptation of the Šāhnâme (ed. Abuladze 1916: 210) where kekoz = kekapos = Kai Kawūs and aprasiob = Afrāsyāb are mentioned side by side in connection with the birth of rostom = Rostam.
The "Bun-Turks" in Ancient Georgia

Kekapos/Kai Kawûs, viz. Paraboroṭ = Fariburz, who was sent out by his father into a struggle against the Caucasian peoples, Armenians, Georgians, and "all the descendants of Targamos":

KC. L.Mr. 14,14-20:
śemdgomad amissa raodentame çelicadta gamogžavna kekapos, sparsta mepe-man, ze misi, romelsa erku paraboroṭ, spita didita somexta da kartvelta da ğovleta targonosianta zeda. xolo șekrbes ese ğovebi targonosianni, miegebnes da daçeves adarbadagan, da iates paraboroṭ, da mosres șpa misi.

"Some years after that Keḳaṗos, the king of the Persians, sent his son, who was called Paraboroṭ, with a big army against the Armenians and Georgians and all the descendants of Targamos. But all these descendants of Targamos gathered, moved off to Azerbaijan and ravaged it, and they drove Paraboroṭ away and defeated his army."

This episode may well refer to the defeat of the Iranians under Farīburz by the Turanians reported in the Šāhnāme (13, 1343 [1314/905] ff.). In a similar way, the Georgian text alludes to another grandson of Kai Kawûs struggling against the "Turks" = Turanians, viz. Kaixosro = Kai Xosrow; here, the "Turks" are even reported to have entered Mcxeta, the capital of Georgia:

KC. L.Mr. 15,5-17:

"And some years after that, Kaixosro the king became busy, and he began to struggle against the Turks, seeking (revenge for) the blood of their (!) father. And the Armenians and Georgians grasped the opportunity (lit. found the time), rebelled against the Persians and defeated the generals of the Persians and freed themselves. But at the same time came the Turks (who had been) defeated by the

---

29 The Georgian form of the name is likely to have been influenced by another name frequent in the Šāhnāme, Farâmarz, as in the Persian manuscript tradition itself.
same Kaixosro, crossed the Sea of Gurgan (i.e., the Caspian Sea), went up the Kur and came to Mcxeta, 28 families (lit. houses). They negotiated with the mayor (lit. housefather) of Mcxeta (and) promised to help him against the Persians. And the mayor of Mcxeta informed all Georgians (telling them that) they should want to become friends with those Turks, because he was afraid of the Persians, and because of the help (they had offered) they made friends with those Turkic refugees, and they distributed them over all the cities. But most of them came and found one place in Mcxeta, in its western side, deeply enclosed in the rocks, and they asked the mayor of Mcxeta for that place. He gave it to them and they built it up, encircled it with a strong wall, and that place was called Sarkine.*

This report – though not identifiable as such within the Šāhnāme – strongly reminds us not only of the settlement of “Chaldean Huns” thematised in Mokcevay Kartlisay, but also, in mentioning Mcxeta and Sarkine, of the “Bun-Turks” and their dwelling places along the Kur river. The identification of “Huns” and “Turks” as presupposed by the latter designation may thus reflect two projections of the same historical event, the Khazar attacks of the VIth–VIIth centuries, into two different periods of prehistory. This view is corroborated by the fact that in Kartlis Cxovreba, the chapter in question is entitled gamoslva xazarta, i.e., the “Coming of the Khazars”. And indeed, Leonti Mroveli’s chronicle deals with Khazars and their attacks in both its “pre-Alexandrian” and “Alexandrian” parts:

KC. L.Mr. 11,1 ff.: “The coming of the Khazars”

mas žamsa šina ganžierdes xazarni da dauqes brzolad natesavta lekisata da kaškasista ... amissa šemdgomad xazarta ičines mepe ... da gamovles žqws-ḵari, romelsa aĉ hhwan darubandi. ... da šemusnes qovelni kalakni araɾaɾisani da ma-sisiani da črdilosani da dauɾčes cīxe-kalakni tuxarisi, samšwde da mtueris-cıce, romel ars xunani, šida-kartli da egrisi. da isçaves xazarta orni-ve ese gzani, romel ars žqws-ḵari darubandi da araɾqws-ḵari, romel ars dariala. ...

“At that time, the Khazars gained strength and began to fight against the descendants of Leḵ and Kaḵkasios ... after that the Khazars chose a king ... and passed through the sea-gate which is now called Daruband ... and they destroyed all cities of the Ararat and Masis and of the North, and (only) the fortified cities of Tuxarisi, Samşwde and the fortress of Mṭueri, which is Xunani, Inner-Kartli and

*Most probably, the episode in question is adapted from the story of the defeat of Afrāsyāb by Kai Xosrow (Šn. 13g); the crossing of the “sea of Gurgan” may reflect the crossing of the river Ġey-ḫūn by Afrāsyāb’s troops (13g, 345 [330/336] ff.).

**Note that it was M. F. Brosset (1849: 33 n. 3) who first equated the “Bounthourki” with the “Touraniens”.

40
Egrisi persisted. And the Khazars usurped both these ways, viz. the sea-gate (of) Daruband and the Aragvi-gate, which is Darialan(n)...

KC. L.Mr. 19.2–10:
da čarvīda aleksandre, xolo aman azon moarográfna zjudeni kalaksa mcxetas sapužviturt ... da daiqira kartlsa zeda egrisi-ca, da mozarḳe interop osni, lekni da xazarni.

"And Alexander went off. But that Azon destroyed the walls in the city of Mcxeta with its foundation ... and after Kartli, he took over Egrisi, and he laid Ossetes, Lezgians and Khazars under tribute."

It is another autochthonous hagiographical text, the VIIIth c. legend of St. Habo of Tbilisi, which provides final evidence of the Khazar attacks of the first millennium A.D. being the background of the Georgian “Bun-Turks”, as it uses the same epithets for the former as those assigned to the latter in the Alexander Romance:

Habo 2: 58,1-11:
da iqo dqeta mat šina kualad ganrisxebay qelmṣipeta mat sarkinoztay nersē eristvisa zeda da ivtōda igi ... da ganvlo man ḳari igi ovsetisay, romelsa darialan erkumis. da mat tana-ve iqo sanatrelī-ca ese monay kristēsi habo. xolo nersē ... ševida kweqanasa mas ērdiloyasasa, sada igi ars sadguri da sabanaḳē ẓeta magogistay, romel arian xazarni, ḳac velur, saśinel pīrita, mćcis buneba, sixelis mćamel, romelta įʒuli ara akus, garna įmerti xolo šemokmedi ician.

"And in those days, the rulers of the Saracens became angry again about Nersē, the leader (of Kartli), and he fled ... and transgressed the gate of Ossetia, which is called Darialan. And the blessed servant of Christ, Habo, was with him. But Nerse ... entered the land of the north, which (lit. where) is the abode and dwelling place of the sons of Magog, who are the Khazars: wild men, terribly looking, (with) the nature of beasts, blood eaters, who have no faith except for knowing a God-Creator ..."

We may conclude that the information on pre-Christian times provided in the “Conversion of Georgia” and in Leonṭi Mroveli’s chronicle has no historical value as such. Nonetheless, with the equation of Huns, Turks-Turanians, Khazars and, lastly, Qypchaqs, the medieval Georgian sources do give us remarkable insights into the late first millennium perception of ethnic strata of Turkic stock in and around Caucasia.
Jost Gippert

BIBLIOGRAPHY

— (1944), Kartuli da somxari literaturuli irtiertoba IX–X ss.-i, Tbilisi.
— (ed.) (1953), Kartlis voxrebi xveli somxari targebi, Tbilisi.


Brosset, M.-F. (1849), Histoire de la Géorgie depuis l’antiquité jusqu’au XIXe siècle, St. Pétersbourg.


Čubinašvili, D. (1887), Kartul-rusuli leksićoni, S.-Peterburg.

Chulaja, G. V. (ed.) (1979), Mroveli Leonti: Żin’s kartlijskix carej, Moskva.


Gigineiavili, B. / E. Giunaavili (1979), Šatberdis krebuli X xáwunisa, gamosacemad (maomzades..., Tbilisi.


Hunnius, C. (1904), Das syrische Alexanderlied, Göttingen.


Marr, N. (ed.) (1901), Ippolit, Tolkovanje pêsni pêsej, Grazijskij tekst..., S.-Peterburg.
Nöldeke, Th. (1890), *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans*, Denkschrift, Vienna.


