

7. The Terms Defining Officials and The Social Hierarchy of Early Feudal Kartli: Insights from *The Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik* (V c.)¹

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Abstract

By analyzing hagiographical writings, it becomes clear that these texts offer significant insights into the political, social, and cultural contexts of their times. Despite their idealized and embellished narratives, hagiographies incorporate elements of historicism to enhance their credibility. This paper investigates the dual function of hagiographic literature as a source for both ecclesiastical and secular historical research. The article focuses on the Kingdom of Kartli in the second half of the fifth century. It explores the socio-political and hierarchical structures of early feudal Kartli (Eastern Georgia) as depicted in *The Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik* by Iakob Khutsesi, a primary source written in the second half of the same century. The analysis reveals the importance of various social strata and everyday details used in the text, often overlooked by traditional chronicles. It also examines the roles and titles of officials, such as the *pitiakhsh* (state official and ruler), and the etymology and social implications of terms like *aznauri* (nobleman), *spaspeti* (commander-in-chief), *ambokhi* (crowd of people), *msakhuri* (servant), and *qrma* (young servant). By synthesizing historical and ethnographic data, this research emphasizes the importance of hagiography in reconstructing the socio-political landscape of medieval Georgia. It highlights that hagiographic literature, although mainly spiritual, provides a wealth of information for understanding the historical realities of its time. The thorough examination of social hierarchies, daily life, and official titles within these texts offers a nuanced perspective on the socio-political dynamics of the period. As a result, this research enhances the broader understanding of the historical and cultural context of late antique and medieval Georgia, showcasing the essential role of hagiography in historical scholarship.

Keywords: Hagiography, Medieval Kartli, Hagiography and Historiography, Early feudal Georgia, *The martyrdom of holy queen Shushanik*

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Erken Orta Çağ Feodal Dönemi Kartl'ın Yetkililerini ve Sosyal Hiyerarşisini Tanımlayan Terimler: Kraliçe Aziz Şuşanik'in Şehitliği Eserine (5. yüzyıl) Göre³

Öz

Hagiografik metinleri tahlil sonucunda zamanının siyasi, sosyal ve kültürel hayatı hakkındaki önemli bilgilere tanık oluyoruz. İdealize edilmiş ve abartılmış anlatıma rağmen, hagiografik metinler güvenliğini artırmak için tarihi unsurları içermektedir. İşbu makalede hagiografik metinler hem dinsel hem de seküler tarihsel açıdan incelemektedir. İşbu makalede beşinci yüzyılın ikinci yarısındaki Kartl Krallığı (Doğu Gürcistan) ve aynı dönemde yazılmış olan Iakob Khutses'in "Aziz Kraliçe Şuşanik'in Şehitliği" adlı eserinde tasvir edilen erken orta çağ feodal Kartl'ın (Doğu Gürcistan) sosyo-politik ve hiyerarşik yapısı araştırılmaktadır. Tahlil sonucunda tarihçiler tarafından genel olarak göz ardı edilen metinde yer alan çeşitli sosyal tabakaların ve günlük hayat ayrıntılarının önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, pitiakhsh (devletin en üst yetkililerinden biri) gibi yetkililerin rolleri ve unvanları ile aznauri (soylu), spaspeti (başkomutan), ambokhi (cenk), msakhuri (hizmetçi) ve qırma (genç adam) gibi terimlerin etimolojisi ve sosyal anlamları incelenmektedir. İşbu araştırma tarihsel ve etnografik verileri sentezleyerek hagiografinin erken orta çağ Gürcistan'ın sosyo-politik yapısının yeniden yapılmasındaki değerini vurgulamaktadır. Hagiografik edebiyatın, esas olarak dini olmasına rağmen, zamanının tarihsel gerçekliklerini anlamak için zengin bir bilgi kaynağı sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu metinlerdeki sosyal hiyerarşilerin, günlük yaşamın ve resmi unvanların ayrıntılı incelenmesi, dönemin sosyo-politik dinamiklerine dair nüanslı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma, geç antik ve ortaçağ Gürcistan'ın tarihsel ve kültürel ortamına daha geniş bir anlayış kazandırarak, hagiografinin tarihsel araştırmalardaki vazgeçilmez rolünü göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Hagiografik metinler, *Aziz Kraliçe Şuşanik'in Şehitliği*, Erken orta çağ feodal Kartl'nin

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Introduction

The study of saints' lives and martyrdoms has made it clear that hagiographic literature serves not only as a source for the ecclesiastical history of the Middle Ages but also as a valuable and, in some cases, highly reliable source for secular historical research. Beyond the main narrative of a saint's martyrdom or deeds, the background reflects the country's history (political conditions or social structures), the author's worldview, and their attitude toward historical events (Lordkipanidze, 1966, p. 12).

To ensure the credibility and realism of the narrative, alongside the stereotypical, schematic, decontextualized, and idealized descriptions of hagiographic heroes and events – often using normative clichés and embellishments – historicism emerges as an essential component in the storytelling about saints (Mertel, 1909, p. 90; Delehay, 1907, p. 25; Lemerle, 1979, pp. 116-127; Hilpisch, 1931, p. 121). The author does not consider it sufficient to merely claim to be a witness to the described events or rely on the testimony of other eyewitnesses. Consequently, hagiographic texts often include representatives of various social strata and depict everyday details, rituals, and portraits typically overlooked by chronicles and analysts (Bibikov, 2021, pp. 107, 111).

Thus, literature dedicated to saints' stories (martyrdom, lives, miracles, or the acquisition and transfer of holy relics) contains diverse material for various academic fields and preserves invaluable information about the historical period to which the work belongs.

For this reason, in this article, we have compiled, as comprehensively as possible, the conclusions and information used by historians and non-historians to reconstruct the social and political landscape of the Kingdom of Kartli – a late medieval and early modern monarchy in eastern Georgia – during the second half of the fifth century.

The first, short but exhaustive overview of the work of Iakob Khutsesi (Iakob/Jacob the Priest) *The Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik* as a historical source was the essay of Ivane Javakhishvili (1876-1940) "Iakob Tsurtaveli" (Javakhishvili, 1945, p. 45-54). The Great Georgian historian used the description of everyday life presented in the work to convey the history of Georgia in the 5th century (Javakhishvili, 1960, p. 261-282). In the following period, the historiographic data and ethnographic material of the first Georgian written monument many times became the subject of interest and research.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the article is multidisciplinary and combines several approaches:

Historical analysis: The study offers a critical analysis of *The Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik*, examining not only its narrative content but also the socio-political and cultural insights it provides into the historical context of the Kingdom of Kartli.

Textual criticism and textual analysis: The researcher examines linguistic and textual elements of historical documents. This includes etymological analysis of terms like *pitiakhsh*, *aznaur-i*, *zepuri*, *ambokhi*, *msakhuri*, *krma*, *mona* tracing their origins, meanings, and usage across time and regions. She considers the context in which these terms appear to infer their meanings, connotations, and social implications.

Comparative Analysis: Findings from Georgian, Armenian, and Persian sources are compared using a

cross-referencing method. This allows for a broader understanding of titles and institutions, like *pitiakhsh*, in the context of late antique and early medieval governance. Thus, the study compares terms across languages (e.g., Old Georgian, Armenian, Iranian, and Greek) to trace their etymologies and semantic evolution. For example, it discusses connections between Georgian *mona* and Old Persian *manaya*, or ancient Greek "μνοα."

Archaeological Correlation: Archaeological findings, such as inscriptions from the Armaziskhevi site, validate and supplement historical narratives. They help corroborate the roles and statuses of figures like *pitiakhsh* in Georgian history.

Historiographical Review: This study thoroughly examines past scholarship, focusing on Georgian historians such as Ivane Javakhishvili and other international scholars, to map out how perspectives on the socio-political structure of Kartli have evolved. By synthesizing secondary literature, it incorporates earlier scholarly views to either bolster or challenge certain interpretations of key terms.

Ethnographic Contextualization: Descriptions of everyday life, rituals, and the social hierarchy in the hagiographic texts are analyzed to provide insights into the lived experiences of people in the Kingdom of Kartli.

Interdisciplinary Synthesis: The research synthesizes data from multiple disciplines – history, linguistics, archaeology, ethnography – to reconstruct the socio-political landscape of Kartli in the specified period. The authors contextualize linguistic findings within the broader socio-political and cultural framework of 5th-century Kartli. They correlate linguistic shifts and terminological uses with social stratification, economic roles, and political structures.

The methodology adopts a comprehensive approach, integrating textual, material, and historiographical evidence to draw nuanced conclusions about the historical context and societal structures of late antique Kartli. It combines detailed philological analysis, historical contextualization, and interdisciplinary methods to reconstruct the sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics of early medieval Kartli.

1. Terms of officials

a) *pitiakhsh*

First of all, *The Martyrdom* shows that *pitiakhsh* (Georgian: პიტიახში; a title of high official) plays an important role in the hierarchy of Kartli (Georgian: ქართლი) state officials and rulers (Sanadze, 2019, p. 340). Varsken the Pityakhsh is one of the main characters of the work. His father is also mentioned in the text – Arshusha the Pityakhsh.

There is no unified opinion in historiography about the etymology of the term *pitiakhsh* itself (Surguladze, 2017, p. 279), different opinions have been expressed (Ingoroqva, 1941, p. 302; Janashia, 1949, p. 266-267; Bogveradze, 1969, p. 56-68; Gamsakhurdia, 1970, p. 49-74; Henning, 1944; Hertzfeld, 1924, p. 115). However, it is indisputable to everyone that *pitiakhsh* has the meaning of the ruler of a territory, or country.

Georgian scholar G. Tsereteli believed that *pitiakhsh* is a word of Iranian-Armenian origin and consists of two parts: *pat* (Armenian *pet*) – head and *sharh* (*ašharh*) – country. The Iranian encyclopedia offers us a somewhat different version. However, there is also an old Persian name – bitakhš, which is presented in the Middle Persian form – *Patikhšah*, and its counterpart in Armenian is *bdekhš* – meaning

a ruler. In ancient Iran, a *pitiakhsh* was the highest-ranking official. *Pitiakhsh*-es in Armenia “appear to be ex-kings of once small states, who in the past possessed independent kingdoms, but from the time of Tigran the Great came under the hegemony of the kings of Armenia” (Адонц, 1908, p. 283). M. Sanadze, who examines the quoted passage about *pitiakhshes* while discussing, believes that this point of view of the researcher is equally applicable to the Armenian and Georgian spaces (Sanadze, 2019, p. 341).

In the royal lists of the Sasanian period, *pitiakhsh* is attested no earlier than in the second half of the III century, it follows hierarchically the list of members of the royal family and denotes the highest-ranking official of the state (Bogveradze, 1984, p. 88). Later, this institution was seen by Armenian historians of the V century (Agathangelos, Faustos Buzand) and in the *Life of Kartli* and the earliest monuments of Georgian hagiography is an important regional governor (Surguladze, 2017, p. 279).

The earliest mention of Pityakhsh in the Georgian world is preserved in the archaeological finding of Armaziskhevi, which contains the remnants of the ancient Pityakhsh residence of Kartli. On the steles with Aramaic and Aramaic-Greek inscriptions found in the tombs and other burial inventory (stamps and bowls with Greek inscriptions), the names of several generations of Kartli *pitiakhshs* have been preserved. The complex dates back to the I-III centuries, and the texts of the steles (Aramaic monolingual and Aramaic-Greek bilingual) date to the I and II centuries (Tsereteli, 1942). Taking into account the mentioned artifacts, it has been expressed that the second person after the king in the ancient Kartli kingdom – a member of the royal lineage, judge, and commander-in-chief – whom Strabo mentions in the description of Iberia, should have been *pitiakhsh*, rather than Leonti Mroveli's *spaspet* (Gamsakhurdia, 1970, pp. 72-74).

It is interesting that while deciphering Armazi's bilingual inscription, G. Tsereteli considered the word *neoteris* (new, young, small) in the Greek text to be the attribute of the term *pitiakhsh* and concluded that there must have been great and small *pitiakhshes* in ancient Kartli (Tsereteli, 1942, pp. 34-42); The existence of great and small *pitiakhshes* is substantiated by M. Sanadze too. If we follow the arguments of these points of view, the following picture emerges: after the division of Kartli into two, two Kartlis appeared... Accordingly, two kings, from the Armenian position – two *pitiakhshes*, vassals. Great Pitiakhsh – from Mtskheta (with a minimum degree of subordination); and small, Gugark's *pitiakhsh*. According to Georgian sources, it is the ruler of small Kartli, i.e., Gugark, according to Georgian sources – the King from Armaz, Pityakhsh should also be meant in the bilingua of Armaz... The small is related to Pityakhsh, or rather to the country under its control, and hence the Small [Kartli] Pitiakhsh (Sanadze, 2019, pp. 344-45). Contrary to the arguments presented, according to the reading of a part of the scientists, Neoteris refers to Zevakh and not to the status of *pitiakhsh* and hence we have “Zevakh the young/current Pityakhsh” (Kaukhchishvili, 1941, p. 171-175; Shanidze, 1941, p. 184-186; Tsereteli, 1992, p. 48).

As for the *pitiakhshs*, governors of provinces, their existence in Georgia has been confirmed since the 80s of the IV century. The Kingdom of Kartli, divided between Rome and Iran during this period, was united under the hegemony of Iran; Mirian's son, King Bakur I, handed the *pitiakhshate* of Kartli to Sasanian Peroz (in some readings – Feroz), the former Eristavi of Rani and Bardavi and his sister's husband, whom “Conversion of Kartli” calls also the *pitiakhsh* (Surguladze, 2017, p. 280). The *pitiakhshes* of Kartli settled in the fortress city of Samshvilde (Sanadze, 2019, p. 340) and “Life of Georgians” calls them the *eristavs* of Samshvilde. In the construction inscription of Sioni of Samshvilde, it is mentioned that the cathedral was built by Pitiakhshes by relatives during the rule of Byzantine emperors Constantine V (740-775) and Leon (775-780) (Aleksidze, 1991, p. 230). The mention of

Pitiakhsh by relative makes the researchers think that *pitiakhshes* were not designated by the Persians (as G. Tsereteli assumed), but the rank was inherited from generation to generation (K. Grigolia, A. Bogveradze, S. Kakabadze).

It is significant that in the IV-VI centuries are known five persons, who are mentioned in the sources with the title of *pitiakhsh*: 1. Usha; 2. Arshusha I – in *The Martyrdom of Shushanik* and the writings of Armenian chroniclers (in the works of Lazare Farpets, Movses Khorenats); 3. Varsken, son of Arshusha – *The Martyrdom of Shushanik* and *Conversion of Kartli*; 4. Arshusha II – *The Martyrdom of St. Eustathius of Mtskheta*; 5. Arshusha III (a figure of the beginning of the VII century) – in the *Book of Epistles* (Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 51).

b) Interrelation between the terms *pitiakhsh-i* and *eristavi-i*

A part of the researchers consider *pitiakhsh* to be a term corresponding to the Georgian *eristav-i* and equate it with the king's official *eristavi* (Tsereteli, 1942, pp. 34-42; Janashia, 1949, p. 277). M. Sanadze considers the term to be a literal translation of the Persian *pitiakhsh* (Sanadze, 2003, p. 347). Some scientists, due to their high origin, even consider them superior to *eristavs* (Ingorokva, 1941, pp. 295, 267, 299, 302). According to G. Melikishvili, the *pitiakhshes* of the IV-VI centuries were, no more, no less, the viceroys of Persia in Kartli. From another point of view, in these centuries, being a *pitiakhsh* did not mean being an official of Persia; it was an honorary title of the ruling princes of Kvemo Kartli (Grigolia, 1959, p. 167; Bogveradze, 1963, p. 62). There is also a compromise opinion that it is possible that the *pitiakhshes* were at the same time the ordained *eristavs* by the King of Kartli, having the obligation to obey the king (Lordkipanidze, 1978, p. 61; Bogveradze, 1963, pp. 65-66; Bakhtadze, 2003, pp. 64-66). Etymologically, *eristavi* should mean the leader of a socially free community – people/army.

For the first time in Georgian historiography, S. Janashia put forward the opinion that *pitiakhshi* and *eristavi* are identical terms with the same content. As mentioned, other scientists shared this opinion (Grigolia, 1959, p. 166, 172; Apakidze, 1968, p. 139; Sanadze, 2003, p. 347). However, M. Bakhtadze assumes that: 1. It is quite possible that the institution of *pitiakhsh* came to us even before Christ's birth, but specific *pitiakhshes* appear in the sources only from the 1st century; 2. In the 1st-3rd centuries in the Kingdom of Kartli, there is only one *pitiakhsh*, who is a quite high official of the central government (perhaps even the second person after the king); 3. In the 4th-7th centuries, the *pitiakhsh's* title became an honorary title of the *eristavs* of Samshvilde. The first *Eristavi* of Samshvilde who received this title was Peroz, the son-in-law of King Mirian; 4. Based on the data from the sources, we can assume that *pitiakhsh* is not equal to *eristavi* in terms of content (Bakhtadze, 2003, p. 71).

M. Sanadze analyzes *The Life of Georgians* and its short version – *Conversion of Kartli* and concludes that in the so-called Persian period, approximately until the end of the VII century, it was *pitiakhsh* that was used to denote *eristavi*, a ruler dependent on the central government:

“In the *Life of the Georgians* from Juansher, we were given the term *pitiakhsh*, which was used both about the rulers of the regions of Georgia and to official *pitiakhshes* with a special mission sent by Persia. In Leonti Mroveli's edition of the *Life of Georgians*, Juansher's *pitiakhsh* is replaced by a more modern and understandable Georgian name, *Eristavi*. Accordingly, the data from the specified period indicates that *pitiakhsh* and *eristavi* are names equivalent to each other and mean the same official activity” (Sanadze, 2019, p. 347).

In the *Martyrdom*, of course, we also find other terms denoting officials. Iakob Khutsesi speaks about the queen of Kvemo Kartli: “Daughter of Vardan, *spaypet* (high-ranking military official) of the Armenians” (ch. I).

c) *spaspeti*

Above mentioned *spaspeti* (*spahpat*, Georgian: სპასპეტო) is connected with the Middle Persian *spa* (*spāh*), which means a horseman (Orbeliani, 1991, II, p. 108) or an army (Andronikashvili, 1966, I, 370), and *pet* – commander; accordingly, *spahpat* is a commander-in-chief (Orbeliani, 1991, II, p. 108). M. Andronikashvili also adds that the term *spaspeti* could not have entered Kartli before the IV century (Andronikashvili, 1966, p. 371). According to some opinions, the content of *spaspeti* is the same as *spasalari* (Georgian: სპასალარი), although *The Life of Kartli* distinguishes them from each other. According to Leonti Mroveli, *spaspet* was the highest-ranking military official in Kartli during the time of Pharnavaz (end of the IV century BC – first half of the III century BC), the second person after the king and “governed over all the *eristavs*” (Strabo, 1957, p. 129-130; Surguladze, 2017, p. 302). His administrative territory was the strategically most important region: “from Tiflis and Aragvi to Panvarad, which is Shida Kartli” (Juansher, 1955, p. 143). *Spaspet* of Vakhtang Gorgasli in the second half of the V century was also “the holder of Shida Kartli and the holder of all *eristavs*” (Surguladze, 2017, p. 302). The position of *spaspet*, according to *The Life of the Kings*, was created during the reign of King Pharnavaz. In the IV-VI centuries, he was the second person after the king, the king's father-tutor and educator, the owner of Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli – a landlocked administrative region in eastern Georgia) and the commander-in-chief of the troops of the local official – *eristavs*' (Kaukhchishvili, 1955, p. 24).

In late antique and early feudal Kartli, *spaspets* belonged to the highest aristocracy of Kartli by social origin. They were connected to the royal family by natural or artificial kinship (“father-tutor”), and they were also assigned the duty of tutoring the prince. Vakhtang Gorgasal's father, King Mirdat, gave his son Vakhtang to *Spaspet* Saurmag to raise, as it was a rule that the children of a king should be brought up in the house of nobles (Surguladze, 2017, p. 302).

d) *aznauri*

The common name of the ruling class in the V-VII centuries, *aznaur-i* (nobleman; Georgian: აზნაური) is mentioned in *The Martyrdom of Shushanik* for several times. “The great-great *aznaurs* and zepur mothers, *aznaurs* and ignobles from the country of Kartli” are going to see the Queen Shushanik (ch. XVII); “All bishops and *aznaurs* (nobles) together should ask her for one thing” (ch. XVII).

According to M. Andronikashvili, the origin of the word *aznauri* should be the Old Iranian root *azna*, which was formed with the Georgian adjective-forming *-ur* suffix: *azna-ur-i*. Because the meaning of the Iranian root is known to be famous, in her opinion, the meaning of the Georgian word would also be known, excelling, and distinguished. As for the other meaning of *aznauri*, free, it must belong to the later period. In Persian, *azat* also meant noble and later acquired the meaning of free (Andronikashvili, 1966, p. 20-21). I. Abuladze's dictionary shows that in Old Georgian, the word *azna* was indeed used in the meaning of noble and prince (Abuladze, 1973). Old Iranian *azna* was directly assimilated into Georgian in the same form, and the presence of the word *uazno* (Georgian: უაზნო) as an opposite concept indicates that the first was indeed *azna*. Through the *-ur* suffix, *Azna-ur-i* appeared as a signifier of a proper quality. I. Javakhishvili and M. Andronikashvili considered it possible to associate *azna* with

the Iranian word *zana*, which meant a family name, a tribe, and a race (Bogveradze, 1979, pp. 168-176).

M. Sanadze, speaking about the social and political structure of the society in Georgia, especially focuses on the point of view regarding the origin of the nobility in *The Life of Georgians*: Leonti Mroveli presents the *aznaurs* (nobility) as the direct descendants of those thousand Roman horsemen that Alexander the Great left to Azon, appointed as the governor (patrikios) of Kartli... In Georgian sources (among them in folklore), another etymology of *aznauri* can be seen: it is not related to the Roman military unit but to Azo itself – the Azoians, who originated from Azo... It is indisputable, writes the scientist, that the name *aznauri* comes from the Iranian word *azgn*, which means a surname; therefore, it refers to a person with an *azgnauri* surname, a person having a family name, such as the Achaemenians who dominated Georgia and the military elite that followed them (Sanadze, 2019, p. 270-272).

According to the original and translated monuments of the old Georgian language, it is difficult to say which meaning of *aznauri* is primary and which is secondary because both meanings seem to be established in the language. In the oldest editions of the biblical books, *aznauri* (a noble) and *aznaureba* (nobility) are usually found with the meaning of free and freedom, while in the original Georgian writings of the early feudal era, they are used only with the meaning of excellent, distinguished, noble. It is so in the *Martyrdom* too. As for the “*didi aznauri*” (Georgian: დიდი აზნაური; great noble), in addition to the rank superiority over the peasants, his official position also distinguished him from the ordinary *aznaurs*. It is to mark the distinctiveness of a certain aspect from the social fellows that he is referred to as great, the same as noble (Kilanava, 2009, p. 151).

e. *zepuri*

In general, the highest stratum of the aristocracy of Kartli was the *sepetsul-i* (child of the royal family; Georgian: სეფეწული). Some researchers (V. Topuria, Arn. Chikobava) consider the terms *sephe* (სეფე) and *mephe* (მეფე) (king) to be words of the same root. Earlier, it was associated with the Armenian *sepuh* and the Iranian *vāspuhr* (*vispuhr*). However, the match of the latter in Georgian seems to be another word – *zepur-i* (ზეპური). In the old Georgian translation of the Bible, we find the expression *eri sazepuro*; it is said that God chose Israel as *eri sazepuro* (a nation for *zepuris*), to be the highest among all the peoples living on earth (“*Mtskheta Bible*”, Second Judges, ch. 7, §6; cf. *ibid.* ch. 26, §18, etc.). In the *Martyrdom of Shushanik*, *zepuri* is used for those women who held the highest position in society. *Zepurni dedani* (Georgian: ზეპურნი დედანი) is often defined in scientific literature as *sephe qalebi* (სეფე ქალები), wives of great nobles.

The Georgian writer, diplomat, and author of the first explanatory vocabulary of the Georgian language, Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, has not defined *zepuri*. The form is only named and accompanied by a reference: see *sazepuro*, the shearer of the bread of heaven; and for illustration, material from the Book of Exodus is used (Orbeliani, 1949, p. 551). Nor do I. Abuladze explains *zepuri* separately and writes about *sazepuro*: own, his/her own (Abuladze, 1973, p. 165, 357) and considers that *zepuri* came into Georgian from Iranian through Armenian (Abuladze, 1938, p. 93). In Kilanava’s opinion, *zepuri* is a Georgian word with a simple base (*zep-ur-i*) that expresses the possession of excessive wealth in Samegrelo (Kilanava, 2009, p. 153-154). S. Kakabadze imagined the formal analysis of this same word as *zep-uri* but considered *-uri* to mean “son, child” (Kakabadze, 1927, p. 80).

Thus, *The Martyrdom of Shushanik* indicates the two main strata of Kartli society in the second half of the 5th century: *aznaur-s* (nobles) and *uazno-s* (ignoble). In a broad sense, all those who did not belong

to the nobility were considered *uazno* (ignoble). From the *uaznoebi*, the servants, *ambokh-i* (crowd, a large number of people), to whom the term *eri* (nation, people) is also addressed, and *mona-mkhevals* (მონა-მხვევლები, slave-laborers) appear in the text (Bogveradze, 1979, pp. 201-202).

2. Lower class of Georgian society

a) *ambokhi*

Another word connected to the social picture is *ambokhi* (Georgian: ამბობი; crowd, great amount of people). It is borrowed from Armenian oral speech, which is found in *Sapitiakhshso* (Pitiakhshate) and later in old Georgian literature. It usually denotes the nation, abundance, and anxiety. On her way to the prison, Queen Shushanik was followed by “the *ambokhi* of many mothers and fathers...” to express their support. “Shushanik looked back at the *eri* (nation, people) and said to them” (ch. IX). However, according to A. Bogveradze’s opinion does not prove the complete identity of *eri* and *ambokhi* because *eri* (nation) can only be used here in the sense of the multitude of people and not in the social context that *ambokhi* undoubtedly had. One way or another, it is a fact that in the 5th century, *eri* could be used to correspond with *ambokhi*, which indicates its decline (Bogveradze, 1979, pp. 202-204). At the same time, *eri*, as an ancient social term, has preserved the sign of derivation from the clan system: it refers to both the people and the army. The people and the army were one only in the pre-class society age. In the early Middle Ages, *eri* was still used to denote the people but not to signify the entire population, only that of the core laboring community that still had some civil rights. Later, the once-sovereign *eri* seems to have declined. The indicator of the far-reaching process of its disintegration is its designation as a petty nation (Bogveradze, 1979, p. 202).

S. Janashia notes that in the second half of the 5th century, the main rank categories of the population of Kartli were the *aznaur-s* (gentry), *tsvrili eri* (petty people; Georgian: წვრილი ერი), peasants, and slaves. Serf peasants also existed in small numbers, but the sources did not mention them. Instead, *mona-mkheval-s* (slave laborers) are often mentioned (Janashia, 1949, p. 273). About them, I. Javakhishvili writes that in the 5th to 7th centuries, they were at the lowest level of social life and ignoble groups. Not only nobles but also representatives of low ranks (for example, artisans) had *mona-mkheval-s* (Javakhishvili, 1982, pp. 174-176). According to A. Sarjveladze's observation, in the works of Leonti Mroveli and Juansher, in both original and translated hagiographical literature, *mona-mkheval-i* (slave-servant) can be seen with two meanings: when used in a general context, it refers to a subordinate person or vassal; in the narrower sense, it refers to a bought person without rights. Its second meaning is used less often.

b) *msakhuri*

About the term *mona* (Georgian: მონა; slave), G. Melikishvili notes that it refers to a person without rights who is obedient without limits. The scholar lists the meanings of the word in the Georgian translations of the Bible – *shinamosamsaxure* (Georgian: შინამოსამსახურე; domestic servant), who is a free man and pays state obligations. A non-free slave can also be sold. In the oldest original monuments, this word is found with a meaning of *msakhuri* (servant). In later Bible translations, it is replaced by *msakhuri* or *qrma* (Georgian: ყრმა; child or adolescent). In the early feudal era, *monas* (slaves) performed the function of domestic servants. During the research of the etymology of the word, the Old Persian *manaya* is often mentioned, which means a slave, who was used in agricultural activities (foreign captives). An interesting term for the etymology of *mona* is the ancient Greek *μνοα* – subjugated

population (Melikishvili, 1999, pp. 609-611).

According to K. Chkhatarashvili, in the early feudal era, mona is the same as a servant and is responsible for personal service and participation in war campaigns (Chkhatarashvili, 1979, p. 47). S. Kakabadze connects mona with the Old Persian *mania*. According to him, the corresponding local term for mania should be *shinaur-i* (domestic) and *sakh-uri* (*m-sakh-uri*) (servant). According to the researcher, *monoba* (slavery) in Kartli was the same as *servitium* in Western Europe, i.e., vassality, and mona is a vassal. In Iberia of the 5th century, there was a class of slaves and servants (Georgian: მონა-მსახური; *mona-msaxuri*), which was already differentiated. Msakhuri (servant) is the name of the privileged circle of this class, while mona is the circle of non-privileged common people and peasants (Kakabadze, 1924, pp. 88-112).

G. Akopashvili singles three groups of servants: 1. Servants employed in a relatively high administrative-economic position; 2. Members of the military unit; 3. Low, mainly agricultural and household service personnel (domestic servants). He also connects the origin of the word msakhuri (servant) with *sakhli* (house): *sakhli* (house), *msakhuri* (of house), *mosamsakhure* (servant) (Akopashvili, 1981, p. 139-140). K. Kakhadze has noted that, unlike free producers *eris kats-es*, *msakhur-s* (servants) were in a feudal relationship and constituted an important part of the army. They became dependents by receiving a plot of land from the king or feudal lord (Kakhadze, 1982, p. 18-19).

From M. Sanadze's point of view, in the V-X centuries, *msakhuri* is used to denote all kinds of personal subordination, and everyone who performs any service for someone is a servant. However, we also find mona as a synonym for *msakhuri*. Unlike a slave who is not free, a servant is always a free person. The term acquired social meaning in the XI-XII centuries when the *aznauri-s*, having no peasants, moved into the peasantry, i.e., they lost their freedom. However, their service has the function of that of gentry: accompanying, participating in a war campaign, eating bread (Sanadze, 1979, p. 53).

According to A. Sarjveladze, in the early feudal age, there were two distinct circles of servants: *shinamosamsaxure-s* (domestic servants) and members of the military-administrative apparatus. The lowest circle of servants consisted of men and women who grew up in the owner's household and lacked personal independence. Abo is a servant – an ointment maker, groom – two of the persons in *The Life of Ioane and Ephtvime Athoneli*, and a messenger – the servant of Gabriel Dapanchuli, who brings the letter to Grigol Khandzeli; *malemsrbol-i* (a messenger), a monk mentioned in *The Life of Serapion of Zarzma*, who during his layman's life was a “runner on long roads.” *Msakhur-i* arrests persons unwanted by the government, guards them and also serves as an executioner. The guard of the imprisoned queen in the *Martyrdom of Shushanik* is entrusted to *msakhur-i* (servant) who grew up at the court of Pityakhsh (Sarjveladze, 1988, 96-98).

Therefore, during the period of the creation of *The Martyrdom of Shushanik*, *msakhur-i* refers to everyone who performs any service for any kind of remuneration: a) official or police service; b) performs various tasks and is employed in the economy.

c) *qрма*

In the story described by Iakob Khutsesi, there is another episode related to the discussed topic: Shushanik shares with the pastor her intention to return the jewelry to Varsken. The priest advises her not to hurry. “And when we were about to do this, one *qрма* (child; ყრმა) came and said: “Is Iakob

there?" I told him, "What do you want?" He said, "The Pityakhsh calls him" (ch. VII). In this excerpt, we are interested in the word *qrma*, which is often interpreted as a young servant, which is of principal importance for considering the public situation of Kartli in the V century, because *qrma* is elevated to the rank of a social term and forms the basis for a conclusion of far-reaching historical significance.

I. Javakhishvili points out that *qrma* or *qma* is a word of Georgian origin and is not commonly used as a social term in ancient times; "In the group of the *uazno-s* (ignobles) or non-free," there is no mention of *qrma-s* (children) anywhere in the monuments of the V-VIII centuries. The word *qrma* (child) meant only a child in those times. We find *qrma* as a social term much later, approximately in the VIII-IX centuries (Javakhishvili, 1905, p. 73; Javakhishvili, 1982, p. 175).

K. Kekelidze initially considered *qrma* as a social term because Varsken would not assign such an important job to a child (Kekelidze, 1935, pp. 128-129); B. Kilanava adds that the scientist has changed his view. As proof of this, he refers to Kekelidze's Russian translation, in which *qrma* is translated as *отрок* (kid, boy) (Kekelidze, 1973, p. 96). V. Dondua also translated this word in the same way (Dondua, 1978, p. 36). But "Отрок" is not a social term (Kilanava, 2009, p.149). In the new translation of the *Martyrdom* published in 2012, the translator Deacon Ioseb Zeteishvili continues to use the term *отрок* but notes in a footnote: "In the original there is *qrma* (a child), which, like the Slavic *отрок*, has a double meaning – "adolescent" and "servant" (Zeteishvili, 2012, p. 40).

B. Kilanava thinks that even if we understand *qrma* as a social term in the passage under consideration, we have no reason to consider him – this *qrma* – as a young person. This one word cannot express two kinds of content – social and age – at the same time. Either it should mean one thing, such as a servant or a subordinate (who can be young or aged), or the other – a child or a teenager (Kilanava, 2009, p. 144-150).

In Georgian historical writings, hagiographical monuments, and translated works of the early feudal period, the term *qrma* often denotes a child regardless of gender. Later, by analogy with Greek, the gender is also distinguished; alongside *qrma*, *qrmidi* appears, although the expression of gender with affixes and constituent-word characters could not be established in the Georgian language (Mrevlishvili, Chikvaidze, 2008, pp. 149-167). We find examples of the use of *qrma* in the meaning of a child or a young person in the texts *The Martyrdom of Eustathius Mtskheteli* and *Conversion of Kartli* (Abuladze, 1964, pp. 40, 104, 151), in the writings of Leonti Mroveli (Kaukhchishvili, 1955, p. 18), and the *Book of the Kings* of the Mtskheta Manuscript (Sarjveladze, 1982, pp. 35, 202; Sarjveladze, 1988/1, p. 90). According to Ak. Chikobava's observation, in Juansher's writing, 'qrma' is mostly mentioned as an infant or young person, and only in one place does it refer to a vassal (Chikobava, 2019, p. 48).

In the opinion of N. Berdzenishvili, *qma-s* (serfs) were free farmers (Berdzenishvili, 1974, pp. 76-80). G. Jamburia suggests that "qma" acquired a social connotation early on, and this is the case where it means a slave, a servant, a houseworker, or a subordinate person in a social sense (Jamburia, 1979). According to A. Bogveradze, at the end of the early feudal period, *erisaganni* (those from "eri," people) became serfs of their *upal-s* (lords) (then patron-ta of owners). In general, not only the public groups discussed above but also a fairly large layer of direct producers, as it turns out, were involved in *patronqmob*a (patron and vassal) relations under the common name of *qma-s* (serfs) during this period (Bogveradze, 1973, p. 211).

A. Sarjveladze thinks, *qrma* (child, young man) became a term for a domestic servant, as it contained

the concept of scarcity from the beginning. When the development of society created the need to denote the lower class, the word *qrma* naturally evolved into a term of social context. In the early feudal era, it denoted a domestic servant and was used concurrently with *mona* (slave). For comparison, the word *khutsesi* (elder) is noteworthy; it simultaneously denotes an old man and an elder – an elder by age and social status (Sarjveladze, 1988/1, p. 94-95).

Thus, in the monuments of Georgian literature, the use of *qrma* in the social sense indicates that the main focus of the term *qrma* was to emphasize agelessness. During the period of Jakob, the Priest's work, he needed a father – an educator, guardian, caretaker, and protector in the form of a patron.

Conclusion

From a modern perspective, hagiography is seen as the antithesis of historiography rather than a subspecies of it, as was previously thought (Sanok, 2019, p. 420). The primary purpose of hagiographic literature was not to document secular history; its unique literary character inherently limited its historical accuracy and emphasized otherworldly or spiritual themes (Siradze, 1967, p. 2). However, the material in *The Martyrdom of Holy Queen Shushanik* by Iakob Khutsesi shows that, despite its spiritual focus, hagiography offers valuable insights for both local and global historiography. It illustrates how this earliest Georgian text significantly enhances the understanding of its contemporary era and highlights the importance of examining late antique and medieval hagiography to reconstruct the socio-cultural and political realities of past societies.

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