Migration und Integration von der Urgeschichte bis zum Mittelalter
Migration and Integration from Prehistory to the Middle Ages

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Complex processes of migration: the south Caucasus in the early Islamic Empire (7th–10th century AD)

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In memory of Bruni Baumgartner (1941–2017)

Zusammenfassung

Komplexe Migrationsprozesse: Der südliche Kaukasus im frühislamischen Reich (7.-10. Jh. n. Chr.)


Summary

The incorporation of the south Caucasian kingdoms of Armenia, Iberia (eastern Georgia), and Caucasian Albania into the Arab Caliphate in the 7th century AD commenced a gradually accelerating process of immigration of Muslim elites (of Arab, Persian, Kurdish, and, later, Turkish-Central Asian origin), together with their retinues, into this region, which began to lead to the creation of new centres of Islamic power alongside the principalties of the local aristocracy in the late 8th century and the 9th century AD. The south Caucasian aristocracy, meanwhile, maintained traditions of aristocratic mobility, being active most notably in the Byzantine Empire, where Armenian warriors and settlers played an important role in defending and securing the Empire’s eastern borders. These intertwined migratory movements are analysed on the basis of historiographical and archaeological sources. The heterogeneity and complexity of these pre-modern migration processes, as they emerge from a survey of the evidence, also sound a note of caution against simplistic and homogenizing migration models.

The kingdoms of the south Caucasus between empires

The late antique kingdoms of the south Caucasus – Lazica in modern-day western Georgia, Iberia in eastern Georgia, Caucasian Albania in modern-day Azerbaijan, and Greater Armenia (Armenia maior in contrast to Armenia minor to the west of the Euphrates River), covering large parts of modern-day eastern Turkey and today’s Republic of Armenia – were located at the peripheries of the neighbouring great powers, the Roman (or Byzantine) Empire and Sasanian Persia, but in the centre of their competing imperial claims (Fig. 1). In contrast to other frontier areas, these regions had an indigenous historiography which had been emerging since the 5th century AD (especially in the case of Armenia), and which provides us with a valuable perspective on the policies of these empires as seen by their «objects» or even «victims» (Preiser-Kapeller 2009; Preiser-Kapeller 2015).

The highlands of the south Caucasus are characterised by a landscape fragmented by various mountain ranges, where larger alluvial plains around rivers and lakes are of central economic importance but are also often subject to a delicate ecological balance of temperature, precipitation, and evaporation (Preiser-Kapeller forthcoming). In Late Antiquity, these topographical parameters also fostered a fragmentation of political power among a number of aristocratic houses competing for power and prestige. Their authority could also be enhanced by ties of patronage to a superior, exterior imperial power (Adontz 1970; Garsoyan 1997). It was this internal fragmentation of power, in particular, which allowed Rome/Persia and, later, the caliphate to exert their influence within the region and even to divide it into spheres of interest. Yet competition among the noble families and fragmentation of political power restricted not only the chances of collective action on the part of the aristocracy, but also the stability of foreign domination; like the indigenous kings, the representatives installed by the imperial overlords were unable to enforce universal allegiance to the suzerain and had to find compromises with the indigenous nobility. The structure of the aristocratic societies, equally, allowed for a certain degree of flexibility in relations with the great powers, an adaptation to separation between various spheres of interest and the existence of multiple layers of authority and loyalty.1 Members of

the same noble clan could serve different empires, on either side of the frontier. Forming «small-local families» was one way in which noble houses could maintain power in the face of changing political conditions (Waring/Hoelder 2009; Preiser-Kapeller 2010). Aristocratic mobility with respect to the neighbouring imperial spheres became an essential element of the strategies of both individuals and aristocratic houses (Greenwood 2003).

Migrations from the Caucasus into the Roman/Byzantine and Sasanian Persian Empires

For the competing empires this mobility on the part of the indigenous aristocracy provided ample opportunity either to attract new clients locally, and thus to expand their sphere of influence in strategically important frontier areas, or to integrate valuable new followers into the imperial service, thus weakening the opponent. Yet, under changing circumstances, these aristocrats were also willing to cross borders several times (Preiser-Kapeller 2010). Nevertheless, Byzantium relied on a constant flow of military expertise and manpower from these regions (Charanis 1961; Settipani 2006; Brubaker/Haldon 2011, 159–192), as can be seen from a successful campaign of the armies of Anatolia in AD 778.

for instance: three of the five most important army groups (among them the themes of Armenien) were commanded by Artabasdes (Artabazos with the powerful house of Mamikono- in, who left Armenia after a rebellion in AD 771), Gregory the Mashtotsi (also a Mamikonean, son of Mutil and Tatatses (Tatatz Anjants), who had defected to Byzantium around AD 750). In AD 782 after negotiations with the Arabs, the latter returned to Armenia, where he became «spreading prince» of the country in the service of the caliph (and died in AD 785 in battle against the Khaizar). Another example of aristocratic flexibility with regard to changing imperial patrons (Phinizze 1960, 440–450; Tschakruri 1977).

Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire

Scholarship has emphasized the significance of these mobile aristocrats and their retinues for the formation of elites in the Byzantine Empire, where in the 11th/12th cen-
tury AD up to 30% of the families of the military elite trace their origins back to the south Caucasus (Fig. 2; Kachidzhan/ Ronchey 1999, 333–338); sometimes this significance was even over-emphasized, for instance when P. Charanis (1961) wrote about a «Greek- Armenian Empire». One might ask to what extent such families could still be considered «Arme-
nians» several generations after their migration to Byzan-
tium. To successfully join the Byzantine elite, one had to adopt both its linguistic (Greek) and religious preferences; for Armenian noblemen this included conversion to the By-
antian Orthodox Church, which had been in schism with the Armenian Church since the early 7th century AD (Garsan 1999). After such processes of assimilation, individuals of Armenian origin even rose to the imperial throne in Con-
stantinople, for example Emperor Leo VI (regnum AD 886–
888). His oldest son, bearing the Armenian name «Smbat», was renamed «Constantine» on the occasion of his crown-
ing as co-emperor. This indicates Leo’s efforts to «fit in» by abandoning too obvious signs of Armenian identity; how-
ever, his initiative to re-vitalize iconoclasm (directed against the veneration of holy images in the church) earned him enduring hatred press in Byzantine historiography, the bynames of «the Armenian» and «the Amaikite» (one of the hostile neighbouring people of the Israelites men-
tioned in the Old Testament), which targeted his «non-
Roman» background (Phinizze 1960, 444; Turner 1999). Integrat-
one into Byzantine society may have seemed easier for individu-
als of Georgian background, since their church remained in ecclesiastical communion with the Byzantine one. In their case too, however, there were difficulties; we learn, for instance, that the use by Georgian monks of a lan-
guage other than Greek in the liturgy in 9th century AD Bithynia aroused the suspicion of the Byzantines (Tchikidze 2011, 237). Byzantium was a multi-ethnic empire of various languages and religions, but with a clear premium for those who adopted the use of the Greek language, Orthodox Chris-
tianity and the «Roman» cultural heritage (Garasian 1998).

Despite the religious difference between the Christian nobilities of the south Caucasus and the official Zoroastrian cult of the Iranian elite, similar career opportunities existed for aristocrats in the service of the Sasanian Great King; after his defection from Byzantium, the Armenian noblemen Smbat Bagratuni, for instance, achieved a most honoured posi-
tion at the court of the Sasanian Great King Xusrow II (regnum AD 590–628), who even awarded him the title Xusrow Sum (Xusrow’s son). Smbat relied on already existing networks of Armenian noblemen and their retinues in the service of the Sasanians and with the help of these troops distinguished himself as a general, especially against the enemies of the Great King in Central Asia (Preiser-Kapeller 2010; Preiser-
Kapeller 2015). During these campaigns, he encountered descendants of Armenians deported by the Persians (along with people from the Roman Empire, especially the Syrian provinces) some decades earlier; the episode is an interesting illustration of the gradual loss and «re-vitalisation» of linguistic and religious elements of Armenian identity in the «diaispora». We learn that these deportees «had forgotten their own lan-
guage, lost the use of writing, and lacked the priestly order.» But Smbat Bagratuni took care that «they were confirmed in the faith and learned to write and speak their language» again, amongst other things by appointing an Armenian priest for them (Seboes 197; transl. Thomson 1999, 44). The Armenian community was located in the frontier region between Iran and Central Asia, to the east of the Caspian Sea, where the Sasanian Great Kings had maintained a 200 km long line of fortifications and military settlements (the «Great Wall of Georgia») in a most impressive way since the 5th century AD, as recent archaeological excavations have illustrated. Manpower both for the garrisons and the agricultural cultivation of the surrounding areas was mobilized from various parts of the Persian Empire (Sauer et al. 2013; Alizadeh 2014). Similar measures were also undertaken for the protection of the fron-
tiers in the south Caucasus (see below).

Mobility of elites and migrations into the south Caucasus before the Arab conquest

While the mobility of individuals and groups from the south Caucasus has been discussed in many studies, including studies of the «pre-history» of the well-known modern Armenian diaspora, scholarship has for some reason paid less attention to the phenomenon of the migration of exter-
nal elites and populations into the south Caucasian regions, especially during the Early Islamic Empire, in the period between AD 630 and 900 on which the present paper focuses (cf. especially Ter-Ghevondyan 1979). Even before that period, the neighbouring great powers, which attracted migration from Armenia, Georgia, and Caucasian Albania, also moti-
vated the movement of people into these areas.
The cities on the Black Sea coast of historical western Georgia, some of them ancient Greek colonies, formed an important transition zone between the wider Mediterranean world and the Caucasus. For a time, Roman imperial troops (of various origins) were also garrisoned in these cities; in the 6th century AD, facing renewed intensive conflict with Persia in the south Caucasus, Emperor Justinian I (reign AD 527-565) intensified this presence and erected a new fortified city with a Roman garrison in Petra (today Cikisdirir) on the Black Sea littoral (see Fig. 1; Selit 1992; Braund 1994, 235-314; Everill 2014). Equally, the expansion of Roman control into western Armenia after the division of Armenia maior between Rome and Persia in AD 387 brought about the movement of Roman officials and soldiers of various ethnic backgrounds into these regions (sometimes accompanied by their families); as in the case of the important city of Theodosiopolis (today Erzrum; see Fig. 1), founded under Emperor Theodosius II (reign AD 408-450) (Blockley 1987). These fortresses also had the purpose of controlling the mobility of the Armenian population across the newly established Roman Persian border, as described by the Byzantine historian Procopius for the time of Justinian I. Later Byzantine legislation also tried to impede the free movement of Armenian groups once they had settled under imperial authority (Procopius, De Aedificiiis III, 3,3-9; Dignas/Winter 2007, 208; Preiser-Kapeller 2017).

Between the late 4th century and the late 6th century AD, the Sassanian Persian Empire claimed suzerainty over the lion's share of south Caucasus almost unchallenged, including most of Armenia maior and all of Caucasian Albania and eastern Georgia (Iberia). In order to secure their imperial claims, the Great Kings also transferred troops and settlers into these regions. Focal points of these measures were the strategic strongholds on the main routes across the Caucasus, such as Derbent (today, Republic of Dagestan, Russia) on the Caspian Sea (in Arabic Ribb al-Ahwid; lit. "Gate of Garevan"; Fig. 1: p-q) and Darijal (from Persian Dar-e-Alam, meaning "Gate of the Alans", the Alans being a people settled to the north of this route) in the central Caucasus to the north of Tbilisi (Fig. 1: p-q), they served to defend against nomadic raids from the steppes to the north. While later historians of the early Islamic period attributed the fortification and settlement of these places primarily to the Sassanian rulers of the 6th-century AD, archaeological excavations have traced back the origin of these measures to the early 5th century AD (as in the case of the above-mentioned wall of Gorgin) and recently also identified further lines of defence and settlement projects emerging in that period to the south, in modern day Azerbaijan and north-west Iran (Kramers 1936; Alizadeh 2014; Sauer et al. 2015). Further destinations of these movements of people in the service of the Great Kings were the main cities of Armenia, Georgia, and Caucasian Albania, for instance administrative centres such as the Armenian capital of Dvin, prov. Ayartak, where after the deposition of the last Armenian king of the Arsacid dynasty in AD 428 a Persian governor (marzban) took up residence, together with his retinue (Fig. 1: 7). In addition, Dvin served as a hub of interregional commerce and attracted traders (and migrants) from all over the Sassanian realm and beyond (Procopius, Bella II 2,25, 1-3; Manandian 1965; Garsoyan 2012, 31-33). Accordingly, we learn that on the occasion of the
first Arab attack on the city in AD 640 the population of Dvin consisted of Christians (mostly Armenians), Jews (whose communities had been present in the country since the 1st-century BC) and Magians, i.e. followers of the official Zoroastrian religion of Sassanian Persia (al Baladuri, Kitāb al Futūḥ 314–315). The Arab historian al-Baladuri also tells us that Great King Xuad I (reign AD 531–579) not only brought soldiers and settlers from the core areas of Persia into the south Caucasus, but also Sogdians from Central Asia (see below), with whom he populated the fortified city of Saghdebel in eastern Georgia, near Tablis (al-Baladuri, Kitāb al Futūḥ 306; Kramers 1998). In various regards, the caliphs of the early Islamic Empire would follow the examples of their Sassanian predecessors.

The Arab conquest and the reaction of the local elites

The Arab Islamic expansion between AD 630 and 660 dramatically changed the geopolitical environment of the countries of the south Caucasus with the conquest of the entire Sassanian Persian Empire and the "roll-backs" of the Byzantine times from Egypt and Syria into Asia Minor (Höyland 2013; Berger 2010). The Arabs were also prepared to acknowledge the "special" conditions in the Caucasian highlands when they entered the scene from the 640s onwards and allowed the indigenous aristocracy a high degree of autonomy, which initially also included the absence of Arab troops in the area. In order to secure the Armenian loyalty, however, Mu’awiya, then governor of Syria, demanded the dispatch of more than 1000 hostages to Damascus. Nevertheless, a majority of the aristocracy defected to the Byzantine emperor in AD 656, when the caliphate was weakened due to the «First Fitna», the civil war between Mu’awiya and Ali. Only after the restoration of Arab power with Mu’awiya’s victory in AD 661 did the Armenian nobility acknowledge the caliph’s suzerainty again (Sebōts 175; trans. Thomson 1999, 153; Dölger 2009, 229-234). This pattern repeated itself during subsequent periods of internal turmoil in the caliphate, until a stricter regime (including regular taxation and Arab garrisons) was established during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik b. Marwan (reign AD 685–705, Fig. 8) after a more permanent expulsion of Byzantine forces (Sebōts 1996; Garsoian 1997). This reorganisation was preceded by another violent uprising of the Armenian aristocracy, whose suppression was described as extremely cruel even in Arabic sources. Furthermore, in the following decades, despite the Arab administration, the south Caucasus became the regular target of raids (Arabic gizar), similar to those in other border regions of the Islamic world such as Byzantine Anatolia (Khaliifa ibn Khayyat 157; 2013). Parts of the aristocracy reacted to the new regime and, in particular, to the reorganisation of taxation with recurring rebellions. Other aristocratic families fought co-operation with the new rulers, and local historiography complains of the ongoing competition between the aristocratic houses, which prevented the establishment of a unified front against the Arabs (Tovmaz Acurieli 2011). In order to secure the loyalty of the nobility and to restore tranquillity, the Umayyad authorities also resorted to the deportation of hostages or individual rebellious aristocrats to the capital, Damascus, or other distant regions of the caliphate, such as Yemen (mentioned in the following Armenian sources: Sebōts, Patmut’iwa Sebōsī 175; Vovkannès Dragansakertcić 1: 20; Lewand 108). Other nobles tried to escape from the Arab grasp into the Byzantine Empire, especially after failed uprisings, sometimes they were accompanied by a large number of people, for instance in AD 788, when allegedly 12000 men, women, and children migrated across the frontier into Byzantine Asia Minor (Lewand 216). The Byzantine emperors (as in earlier periods) resettled such groups both in the border provinces next to the Arab Empire, but also in more distant areas, such as the Balkans and Italy (Ditten 1993; Asa Eger 2015; Preiser-Kapeller 2017). Particularly in the 9th-century AD, as a result of these wars, abductions, and escapes, we observe a significant decline in the number of aristocratic families whose representatives either died in the struggle against the Arabs or left their homelands (Fig. 9). This general demographic and economic decline in various areas, as described in the literary sources, can also be measured quantitatively for the region around Lake Van in historical south Armenia (see Fig. 1) by a systematic reading of the datable building activity, as well as by the evaluation of the environmental data from drill cores from the sediments from Lake Van (Fig. 10; Preiser-Kapeller forthcoming a) Muslim leaders and their followers now moved into the resulting political power vacuum.4

4 We can observe a similar phenomenon in western Georgia, where the Arab invasions from the early 9th-century AD onwards led to the collapse of the kingdoms of Lazika, whose capital of Archachopis (Nikotakviri) was abandoned (as archaeological evidence also demonstrated) and parts of whose elite and population migrated to Byzantine territory in the homeland of Tskhinvali (where a new "Lazika" emerged); in this case the main beneficiaries were not Muslim groups, but the neighbouring princes of Abkhazia who acquired the former core areas of Lazika and emerged as a new pretender power in western Georgia from the late 9th-century AD onwards (ibid 1992; Eversli 2013, 9-13).
The migration of Arab groups into the south Caucasus in the 8th century AD

The above-mentioned reorganisation of Arab rule in the south Caucasus by Caliph Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan included the deployment of Arab troops to important fortresses on the frontier facing Byzantium and on the routes across the Caucasus, as well as in the urban centres of Armenia (Dvin, Nasikavan), eastern Georgia (Tbilisi), and Caucasian Albania (Partaw), thus following the spatial patterns of earlier Sasanian Persian domination (Fig. 1). All these areas were combined into the major province of al-Annamiya, whose governor (like the Persian marzaban before him) resided in the Armenian capital of Dvin. Office bearers, together with their retainers, now also constituted permanent settlements (Kartlis Caxovela 324–323; Garskian 1997a). As in other provinces of the caliphate, these military settlers received both regular payments from tax revenues and other sources of income from the immediate environment of their garrisons, such as landed property; this we learn to have been the case, for instance, in Derbent (Bib al-Abwaḥ; see Fig. 3–4) on the Caspian Sea, where Maslama b. Abd al-Malik (flourished AD 709–731), a general and son of Caliph Abd al-Malik, reportedly settled 24,000 Arabs from Syria in order to secure this route against incursions from the steppe empire of the Khazars to the north of the Caucasus (al-Baladhuhi Kitāb al-Futūḥ 323; Daniel 2011a; al-Sharkawi 2013).

Armed alongside by local ISM soldiers, the Arab garrison was already in place in Dar-e Aflatun in the central Caucasus by the time of Tbilisi; this was confirmed recently by archaeological excavations, where burial documents the continuity of this settlement from the early 8th to the 10th century AD (see Fig. 1–2). Al-Baladhuhi gives a further insight into the early settlement of Arab groups in the garrison towns of Melitene (Malatya) and Theodosiopolis (Erzurum), on the border with Byzantium, (see Fig. 1) when he describes the devastation of these places in the 750s by the troops of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine V (reign AD 741–775), who took advantage of the revolt of the Abbasid against the Umayyad caliphs at that time. We learn that besides the Arabs, Armenians still lived in Theodosiopolis and supported the Byzantines during the conflict, and that later the second Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (reign AD 754–775) ransomed the surviving prisoners and rebuilt the city with them as well as with settlers from Mesopotamia and other places (al-Baladhuhi, Kitāb al-Futūḥ 313 f.).

In general, with the Abbasid period the amount of information on Arab and Muslim migration to the south Caucasus increases; from the beginning it is clear that the new arrivals were not a homogeneous community, but consisted of different groups, usually linked through tribal loyalties but also competing with each other and by no means always acting according to central planning. E. Orthmann, in her monograph of 2002, had relativised the basic division between south Arabian tribes (Yaman) and north Arabian groups (Qais), which has been also observed for other regions (Orthmann 2002, especially 278 ff.; cf. also Cron 1980; Franz 2007); but our sources describe at least the smaller-sized tribal classifications as relevant for the dynamics of Arab immigration (cf. also Daniel 2012; Berger 2016, 245–251). Particularly significant in this regard is the narrative of al-Ya’qubī for the time of the famous caliph, Harūn ar-Rashīd (reign AD 786–809): Harūn ar-Rashīd appointed Yusuf b. Rashaṭ al-Sulami as governor of Arminiyya (in AD 786–787) [...]. He transplanted a mass of Nizari to this land, and [until then] the Yemenites had formed a majority in Arminiyya, but in the days of Yusuf, the Nizari increased in number [...]. Then Harūn ar-Rashīd named Yazīd ibn Mazyad ibn Za’ida al-Shaybānī (in AD 787/788), and he brought from every side so many of the Rabi’a that they now form a majority, and he controlled the land so strictly that no one dared to move in it. After him came Abd al-Kabīr ibn Abī al-Hāmid (in AD 788) [...], whose home was Harran. He came with a multitude of men from Dīyar Muḍar, stayed only four months and left [...], i.e. Yu’qubi, Trav’Ib 515 [trans. Ter-Ghewondyan 1976, 31]). We learn that originally members of south Arabian tribes (Yaman) represented the majority of Arabs in Arminiyya. This is also confirmed by the names of several of the first governors of the country documented in the Umayyad period, which refer to Yaman tribal groups (Laurent 1980). Under the Abbasids, these conditions of power apparently changed in favour of such north Arab tribal groups as the Qais, whom we have already encountered previously in northern Mesopotamia, especially the Nizari, with their subgroups of the Muder, Rabi’a, and Bakr (Fig. 12; Ter-Ghewondyan 1976, 31–33; Orthmann 2002, 106–109). But even these groups, which were related to each other, at least in the tribal tradition, competed for land and power in Arminiyya; the Rabi’a around Yazīd al-Shaybānī, whose descendants we later find as emirs in the region, had such success that the migration project of the Muder from Barrān (today in south-east Turkey) failed. Similar strife between tribal groups or between early arrivals and latecomers can be observed for other regions of Arab settlement throughout the caliphate (Minorsky 1953; Ter-Ghewondyan 1976, 31–33; Daniel 2012).

Divisions and conflicts among the Islamic migration communities

The leader of these groups from northern Mesopotamia, however, saw themselves not only confronted by Arab competitors, but also by Iranian elites and groups who had fol...
In addition to these tribal rivalries and ethnic conflicts (both called in Arab sources of that time 987), we also observe religious tensions within Muslim migrant communities in the south Caucasus. For the year AD 875 al-Yaqubi reports bloody conflicts between followers of the Mu'tazila, a philosophically influential branch of Islam, at which time the support of the Abbasid caliphate. This report of the Sunni orthodoxy, which rejected the religious policy of the imperial centre (al-Yaqubi, Tarh '11:410; trans. Orthmann 2002, 299)). An even more dangerous challenge to the caliphate in the region was the insurrection of the Khurasanites (from Persian Jorand-shin, the followers of the Isfahani religion, who, as P. Crome (2012) has recently analysed in detail, combined elements of the ancient Persian Zoroastrianism with resistance to Arab rule over the Iranian regions. Under the leadership of Babak, in his inaccessible fortress, al-Radi, they gained control over vast parts of the Azerbaijani and Turkish regions between AD 816 and 889, also making use of internal power struggles within the Abbasid dynasty. Babak also allied with the Persian讷l princes (al-Sawajik) of eastern Persia, whose daughter he even married. Several times, the caliph mobilised troops against Babak, but in vain, as for instance in the year AD 877; on this occasion we learn that these campaigns not only brought moreArabic conquerors from the ranks of the Yaman, Babia, and Murad of northern Mesopotamia (the Jorand) to the south Caucasus, but also Muslims from Gilb (central eastern Iran), Basra (Iraq), Beja, Oman, and al-Sabrayn on the Arabian peninsula as well as from Fars and Ahwaz in south-west Iran (see Fig. 13; Orthmann 2002, 186). Success against the Khurasanites' rebellion was only brought about by representatives of a new group of Central Asian origin, the Turkmens, who, from AD 843 onwards, found their way to the central lands of the caliphate with the Caliphs al-Mumun (regno AD 813–853) and his brother al-Mu'tasim (regno AD 853–862). Among them were Baysari ibn Khawla Alshin and his followers, who had only recently converted to Islam, already come into the country in the first half of the 9th century AD (Fig. 14). The main axes of distribution, with few exceptions, connect Armenia with the centres of Umayyad power in Syria, northern Mesopotamia, and Iraq. This image changes impressively for the Abbasid period (AD 750–900); the geographical range of the potential numismatic links appears even wider than the one resulting from the written sources (Fig. 15). However, if we draw the main axes of distribution of the coin material, by means of a network analytic model, on the basis of the multiple joint occurrence of individual mints in hoards6, then these main axes, in accordance with historiography, lead to the Abbasid imperial centre around Baghdad, to Azerbaijan, to eastern Iran, and to Central Asia, the areas of origin of the new elites of the Abbasid period (Fig. 16), with an «outlier» to a mint in North Africa.

Mapping the diversity and focal points of Islamic migration

Has this extensive migration of Muslim elites and population groups into the south Caucasus been the first 150 years after the Arab conquest also left archaeological traces? One of the few material remains systematically surveyed so far are the hoards of Arab coins in Armenia; if the mints where these coins originated cannot be unambiguously identified, we can draw conclusions about the mobility of these objects (Mousheghan et al. 2000). We can map all the Umayyad mints whose coins occur in hoards in Armenia; connection lines, however, are drawn only to those places from which coins had definitely

Footnotes:

6 For the methodological and technical background to this and other network models presented in this paper cf. Preiser-Kapeller/ Daim 2015.
were soon augmented, however, in particular by bases in the south of Armenia, near the upper Mesopotamian settlement areas of the Arab groups mentioned above, and at other important junctions in the network of routes (Fig. 11; Hewsen 2001). An analysis of the relative centrality of the different locations in a GIS-supported, distance-weighted network model also illustrates the orientation of the main axes of Muslim migration movements (Fig. 17); on the one hand along the three main access routes from Mesopotamia and Persia to Armenia and to Caucasian Albania, on the other hand along cross-connections from Theodosiopolis in the west to the capital cities of Dvin and Partaw in the east, and from the Araxes valley in the south via Dvin and Thbilisi to the main ridge of the Caucasus in the north. This pattern emerged from the interplay of strategic planning by the central authorities of the caliphate and the preferences and opportunities of the various groups of arrivals from the provinces of the Islamic Empire.

Cooperation and cultural exchange between old and new elites

After a century of Arab domination, the result of the emigration and immigration processes described so far was a mosaic of centres of Muslim power, but also of new Armenian and Georgian principalities, which, like their new neighbours, were able to profit from the disappearance of competitors from the ancient aristocracy (Fig. 18). As the already mentioned example of the alliance between Babak and Karakashan suggests, further contacts and cooperation between the petty states of the sixteenth century may have further strengthened these new principalities in their interactions with the caliphate and with each other.
and the Prince of Sownik demonstrates, these regional lead-
er were soon ready to cooperate with one another across
ethnic-linguistic and religious boundaries, both against
competitors of their own or other faiths and against central-
isng attempts by representatives of the caliphate. Already
forty years before Babak’s revolt, the princes of the formerly
most powerful Armenian family of the Mamikonian, who
had been losing ground in the struggle against the represen-
tatives of the caliphate, had given one of their princesses in
marriage to Ghahfar, an Arab leader, presumably from north-
er Mesopotamia, in doing so they also ignored recent pro-
visions of the Armenian Church (decreed at the Synod of
Partaw in AD 628) against marriages between Christians
and ‘infidels’. After the emigration of the last Mamikonian
to Byzantium in the 730s, Ghahfar took over not only part of
their territorial heritage around the city of Marakiz (today
Malazgirt in Turkey; Fig. 11), but also the ‘family tradition’
of the struggle against the competing noble house of the
Bagratuni, as well as against the officials of the caliph (see
Ghewondyan 1976, 34-40; Garsoian 1997a, 133 ff.).

The Bagratuni, on the other hand, tended to cooperate
with the Arab authorities, and thus profited from the dwindling
of the Armenian aristocracy in the 8th century AD, rising to be its
most powerful representatives (Garsoian 1997a, 136-138). At
the time of Babak’s rebellion, we find the brothers Bagrat and
Smbat Bagratuni as lords of Bagravoi in the north and Taron
in the south of the country (Fig. 18) and in an alliance with
Musa ibn Zara, the Emir of Aljufik and Billis near Lake Van
(Fig. 13). According to Arab custom, Smbat also bore the telecom-
nyr (Arabic kusht) Alahah (father of Atab), exemplifying the
spread of the use of the titles among the Christian aris-
tocracy at this time, indicating the beginning of a reciprocal
acquisition of customs between the native and immigrant elites
(Jones 2007; Signes Coderer 2014, 245-249).

In AD 839, Bagrat Bagratuni, together with Arab, Sogdian,
and Turkish members of the retinue of Caliph al-Mu’tasim,
participated in a campaign against Byzantium, which col-
morated in the conquest of the important city of Anzian in
Phrygia (Signes Coderer 2014, 287-312; Preiser-Kapeller
forthcoming). Muslim and Christian elites, however, also
increasingly vied with each other in their quest for inde-
pendence from the Abbasid central power, which was also
fading in other regions in the 9th century AD. Already for the
time of Harun ar-Rashid, al-Baladurah describes how the
princes of Armenia could only be compelled by force to pay
the stipulated taxes and otherwise ruled their areas more or
less autonomously (al-Baladurah, Kitāb al-Futūh 310). In
AD 851, Muslim, Armenian, and Georgian regional lords
rose up against the caliph’s governor named Ya’qub, who
was killed. In a last attempt to retain control in the south
Caucasus, Caliph al-Mutawakkil (reign AD 847-861) sent the
Turkish-born General Bugha ‘the Elder’ with a strong army,
including many mamluks from Central Asia. In its camps,
described as cruel in Christian and Islamic sources. Bugha devastated Armenia and Georgia and departed untruly Christian and Muslim princes to the
caliph’s residence in Sīnārāz (north of Batkoldz). Including
Bagrat Bagratuni and Musa b. Zara; others, such as Emir
Ishak ibn Mu’awiya ‘il Fatih (reign c. AD 839-853), were killed
(al-Baladurah, Kitāb al-Futūh 331 f.; K’art’is Cxwvrebə 328; Gordon 2001). The destruction of established power and set-
telement structures again opened up possibilities for the set-
tlement of new groups from the retinue of Bugha; while
T’ovma Armacn generally writes about ‘all peoples of the
Muslims’, the Georgian Chronicle and al-Baladurah report in
more detail on the settlement of groups from the north of
the Caucasus (Khazaars and As‘Oqqatians), who apparently
also converted to Islam (T’ovma Armacn II:5; K’art’is
Cxwvrebə, 329; al-Baladurah, Kitāb al-Futūh 310). The city of
Səmtir in Caucasian Albania (now Azerbaijan), mentioned
in al-Baladurah as a place of settlement of these groups, later
became the home of a community of ‘Kuksusiededeus’ under
the name of ‘Annanfeld’ between AD 1820 and 1941,
within the framework of another imperial settlement pro-
ject (Has Turiat Rossia) (Fig. 19; Antiq 2001, 73-78).

The emergence of a new multiplex framework of regional
powers
The campaigns of Bugha, however, did not alter the fact that
the central power in the Abbasid Caliphate was gradually
losing control over its provinces, a process that accelerated
after the assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil in AD 861. Shor-
y thereafter, in order to calm the revolting south Cauca-
sonian region, the mandal ‘Al’ b. Yahya al-Arman’, one of
the first less converts to Islam of Armenian origin to be found
in the sources, who had made a career in the service of the
caliphs (in Egypt and Syria), was sent as governor to Armenia.
Despite his change of faith, he was obviously more able to
reach an agreement with the native aristocracy. He also
ensured official recognition of the now dominant position
of the princes from the house of Bagratuni as the supreme
representatives of both the Christian and Muslim regional
povestants, which ultimately led to the crowning of Abol Bagra-
tuni as King of Armenia with the consent of the caliph in
AD 864-865 (Yovhananes Dragmachen’i, 25 10-12). This
reviewed ‘Armenian’ monarchy resembled the old one from before AD 428, see above) in the relatively weak
position of the king vis–à-vis the regional rulers. However,
the mosaic of regional rule, in comparison to the period
before the Arab conquest, was now enriched by new Muslim
emirates of Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and Kurdish origin
(Fig. 18). Ethnic and, in particular, religious dividing lines
could either be used to legitimise violence in the ongoing
competition for power and territory or overcome in order to
and deliberate migrations of elites and populations from these regions into neighbouring imperial spheres, all the way to Italy and North Africa in the west and Central Asia in the east. In turn, officials, troops, and workforces were settled in the south Caucasus by the respective imperial centres, but these also started processes of migration on their own initiative. The heterogeneity and intricacy of the migrations which we have observed here took place within the imperial frameworks of what C.Wickham [2005, 56f.] has categorised as the ‘strong states’ of the early medieval eastern Mediterranean region (in contrast to the ‘weak states’ of the post-Roman west); we may assume an even higher degree of complexity for medieval migration processes, in the absence of such overarching political frameworks. On the other hand, the constant competition between and divisions among groups may have fostered alliances and accommodations between indigenous elites and new arrivals more intensively than a clear-cut front line would have been defined. At the same time, these narratives of transcultural exchange should not taint the amount of devastation and displacement created through warfare, due to both imperial ambitions and regional competition. This human suffering is vividly described, again across ethnic-linguistic frontiers, in Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Arabic, and Persian sources. More generally, the heterogeneity and complexity reconstructed from these sources should also sound a note of caution against simplisticly imagining actual migration processes in pre modern periods in terms of uniformly coloured moving masses on historical maps, or of tempesting collective identities such as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Germans’, or indeed of such categories of modern-day scholarship as ‘Bell Beakers’ or ‘Yamnaya people’; in most cases, they will not do justice to the dynamics of mobility and the multiplicity of identities of migrating groups that we have to reckon with.

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Sources cited


