Conflict and Community
in the Medieval Caucasus*

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Abstract

In the 230s/850s, the caliph al-Mutawakkil sent his general, Bughā al-Kabīr, to assert control over the wayward northern frontier of the ʿAbbāsid Caliphate. This campaign typically appears in modern scholarship as a moment that pitted Armenian Christians against tačiks (Arab Muslims). This paper complicates this binary by (1) placing Tʿovma Arcruni's History of the Arcruni House *in dialog with Arabic accounts of the campaign and (2) locating the campaign in the broader context of fragmented political power in the Caucasus as a whole. It reviews Bughā's main allies and adversaries in the conflict with close attention to the descriptors (or lack thereof) of their identities in medieval texts. From there, it challenges the oversimplification of the campaign in ethnoreligious absolutes as Arab v. Armenian or Muslim v. Christian as a product of Tʿovma's own agenda. This article posits the narrative use of ethnic and religious signifiers, despite the apparent flexibility of communal identities in the medieval period, and focuses specifically on the experience of women in the campaign to signal the close relations between groups of different ethnicities and religions.*

In 238/852-3,[1] Abū Mūsā Bughā al-Kabīr, a celebrated general in al-Mutawakkil's army, sent two of his lieutenants, Zīrak and the son of Abū al-ʿAbbās, against an opponent named Abū Mūsā in the town of Kithīsh/Kʿtʿiš.[2] The battles that followed constituted

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1. In an effort to speak consistently across disciplines, the dates will appear first in *hijrī* (238), then according to the Common Era (852-3). Similarly, the toponyms appear here first in Arabic (Kithīsh), then in Armenian (Kʿtʿiš) or, if relevant, in Georgian.

2. Abū Mūsā Bughā al-Kabīr was a Turkish slave soldier who started his career in the army of the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim. Over the course of his exceptionally long life, he participated in some of the more famous ʿAbbāsid campaigns of the early ninth century. He helped quell Bābak's Khurramī rebellion and sack ʿAmmūriyya; see Matthew Gordon, "Bughā al-Kabīr," in *EI³*. Bughā built a reputation of piety, military skill, and devotion to the ʿAbbāsid family. For example, al-Masʿūdī reports that Bughā survived his battles unscathed despite the fact that

the final legs of a long and arduous campaign that pitted the caliphal army against many *amīr*s and armies of the South Caucasus.[3] Historians today rely heavily on the main primary source for this campaign, the tenth-century *History of the Arcruni House* by T'ovma Arcruni, which deplores the circumstances of Armenian Christians under *tačik* (understood as either Arab or Muslim) rule.[4] Yet this particular moment in Kithīsh/K't'iš—and many others like it through the course of the campaign—illustrates a messier reality. None of these leaders were Arabs. Bughā and Zīrak were Turks, Abū al-ʿAbbās was Armenian, and Abū Mūsā was Caucasian Albanian. The battle lines were not drawn by religion: Bughā and Zīrak were Muslims while the son of Abū al-ʿAbbās, Abū Mūsā, and their soldiers were Christians. Despite T'ovma's claims about the bonds and brotherhood of the Christian community, a common faith did not always draw up armies. Rather, Christians and Muslims fought together on both sides.[5] Our Christian protagonists in this episode even sport Arabic *kunya*s, hinting that T'ovma's construction of a distinct ethno-religious community was important specifically because of the blurred borders between Arab, Armenian, and Albanian that existed in the ʿAbbāsid period.

Al-Mutawakkil ordered Bughā to the Caucasus in response to the murder of a caliphal governor, Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī. The resulting campaign spanned over a number of years and stretched over territory now part of the modern Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. As local leaders decided whether to fight or to join the caliphal forces, they negotiated alliances that served their own needs and concerns. In the process, they built bonds

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he wore no armor because the Prophet Muḥammad himself had appeared in a dream and promised him longevity for helping a Muslim avoid punishment for a crime; for a translation of the full passage, see Ali Anooshahr, *The Ghazi Sultans and the Frontiers of Islam: a Comparative Study of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 81-2. The Armenian tradition, though, preserves an alternative reading of Bughā's life. He appears in Armenian as Bułay (or Buxay or Buhay), "a sly and faithless man"; Kirakos Ganjakecʻi, *Patmutʻiwn Hayocʻ* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakčʻutʻyun, 1961), 78. A few pages later (82), Bughā appears alongside Afshīn, Abū Saʿīd, and Yūsuf in a list of ոստիկանք շարք և անմարդիք արձակեալք լինէին յաշխարհս մեր. He is enshrined in the Armenian national epic as the villain Batʻmana Buła, where Batʻmana renders the Persian *bad nām*, i.e., infamous; C. J. F. Dowsett, "Versification in the Armenian epic," in *David of Sasun: Critical Studies on the Armenian Epic*, ed. Dickran Kouymjian and Barlow DerMugrdechian (Fresno: Press at California State University, 2013), 128.

3. The "South Caucasus" refers to Armenia, Albania, and Georgia. On the problematic use of the term *Caucasus* in reference to the early ʿAbbāsid period, see Alison Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces under Early Islam: Islamic Rule and Iranian Legitimacy in Armenia and Caucasian Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xv. Sources in Arabic, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian instead refer to the South Caucasus as "the North."

4. T'ovma Arcruni's *History of the Arcruni House* cuts off in 904CE. We do not have firm birth or death dates for the author, but he claims to have recorded the accounts of the combatants themselves: "And I myself with my own eyes saw that man who struck him [Yūsuf b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī, the caliphal governor whose murder sparked Bughā's campaigns], and from him I learned the truth about it"; T'ovma Arcruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunikʻ: Translation and Commentary*, trans. Robert Thomson (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1985), 187, see also 18; *Patmutʻiwn Tann Arcruneacʻ* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakčʻutʻyun, 1985), 190.

5. Mixed armies had a long history in the Near East and can be identified through the entire period of caliphal rule in Armenia and Albania. See Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces*, 190 (for Armenia) and 203 (for Albania); Wadād Al-Qāḍī, "Non-Muslims in the Muslim Conquest Army in Early Islam," in *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Fred Donner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2016); Khalil ʿAthamina, "Non-Arab Regiments and Private Militias during the Umayyad Period," *Arabica* 45, no. 3 (1998).

between communities with mixed religious and ethnic ties, solidified through intermarriage. This article examines the descriptions of the protagonists and circumstances of Bughā's campaign in order to investigate how our authors represent communal identity and loyalty in the Caucasus for their own purposes.

Bughā's Campaign as a Case Study into Local Identities and Loyalties

Bughā's Caucasian campaign has never been the object of close scholarly interest, perhaps because it drags the scholar out of the centers of the Caliphate but more likely because it demands the exploration of both Armenian and Arabic texts. As a result, the campaign typically appears as an episode of Armenian history, rather than in broader studies of the Caliphate.[6]

In an early study of ʿAbbāsid Armenia, M. Ghazarian explains Bughā's campaign in religious terms. "Mutawakkil sandte nun den Befehlshaber Bughā al-Kabīr mit dem Auftrage, das muslimische Blut an dem unbotmässigen Land zu rächen und dessen Grossen gänzlich auszurotten."[7] This assumes a certain type of identity construction: Bughā campaigned in the Caucasus to avenge "muslimische Blut," which is implicitly different from Christian blood. This makes little sense given that Bughā killed and imprisoned Muslim *amīr*s and soldiers in the course of the campaign and, accordingly, modern studies have moved away from the religiously charged interpretation. More recently, Z. Pogossian noted that "[a]lliances were formed and discarded startlingly fast and the religion of parties involved was by no means an obstacle or the most determining factor in creating partnerships or betraying a onetime ally."[8]

Most modern introductions to medieval Armenia focus instead on ethnic identifiers. They mention the campaign with brief references to the annihilation of the Armenian nobles (*naxarar*s), the devastation of the Armenian heartlands, and the expansion of Arab landholding to the detriment of the Armenian nobility. A. Ter-Łevondyan, the foremost modern expert on medieval Arab-Armenian relations, set the tone for how scholars discuss Bughā's campaign in his *Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia* (1965 in Armenian; translated into English in 1976), which remains today one of the best sources on ʿAbbāsid-era Armenia. He approaches Bughā's campaign for what it can tell us about the Arabization of Armenia in the ʿAbbāsid period and explains that

> Bugha left Armenia in A.D. 855. All the leading *naxarar*s had been taken prisoners [sic] and the time had apparently come for the Arab settlers to make the most of the situation.

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6. I discuss the problematic tendency to separate Armenian from early ʿAbbāsid history in Vacca, *Non-Muslim Provinces.*

7. Mkrtitsch Ghazarian, "Armenien unter der arabischen Herrschaft bis zur Entstehung des Bagratidenreiches nach arabischen und armenischen Quellen bearbeitet," *Zeitschrift für armenische Philologie* 2 (1904): 191.

8. Zaroui Pogossian, "Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context," (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 177. I would like to thank Zara for sharing this article before its publication.

The local Arabs had contributed in every way to the advance of Bugha's army, and gradually increased their own holdings.[9]

Here Ter-Łevondyan is echoing (and citing explicitly) T'ovma Arcruni's famous statement that the caliphal army was "accompanied by the *tačik*s of Armenia who dwelt in various regions of the land and guided Bugha on his way in and out of the country."[10] Yet T'ovma's history also clarifies that some of the Armenian élite were in fact not imprisoned and that some of the local Muslims refused to help Bughā. Despite this, Ter-Łevondyan borrows from T'ovma to imagine the battle lines drawn around ethnicity, effectively polarizing Armenians and Arabs.

In *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam* (1919, but rewritten and republished in 1980), Laurent and Canard offer another perspective on the Armenian responses to Bughā's campaign: "Toutes les familles arméniennes ont fourni des hommes qui, dans cette crise, se sont conduits en égoïstes, en véritables traîtres contre leurs compatriotes, bien que les historiens arméniens ne les aient pas jugés aussi durement."[11] Laurent and Canard here account for what Ter-Łevondyan's analysis cannot, namely that many Armenians joined Bughā's forces, rendering problematic the facile division between Armenian v. Arab. Yet Laurent and Canard's reading also presumes the existence of a cohesive and recognizable ethnic identity in the medieval period. As their discussion stands, they invite the reader to subscribe to the idea that Armenians were united, such that any Armenian who collaborated with Bughā was perforce a selfish traitor. The very fact that medieval historians do not lambast such collaborators as traitors (although T'ovma certainly did, albeit very selectively) hints that perhaps modern concepts of national identity have dictated our reading of medieval social organization.

Yet even with the recognition that some Armenians in fact aided Bughā's advance, modern scholars have generally persisted with the organization of Bughā's campaign around recognizable ethno-religious groups. For example, N. Garsoïan summarizes the campaign briefly, including T'ovma's quote about how the *tačik*s helped Bughā. She explains that Bughā deported

a multitude of captive *naxarars,* among them the *sparapet* [general] Smbat whose neutrality or continuous loyalty to the Muslim authorities had not saved him from sharing the fate of the other Armenian magnates. The condition of Armenia after the devastating expeditions of Bugha was once more tragic. The Arab emirs profited from the captivity of the Armenian princes to expand their own possessions.[12]

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9. Aram Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. Nina Garsoïan (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1976), 44. This is Garsoïan's English translation, but the original *Arabakan amirayut'yunnerə Bagratunyac' Hayastanum* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč'ut'yun, 1965), 84 does indeed employ արաբ here, not *tačik*.

10. Arcruni, *History*, 198, though Thomson translates *tačik*s as "Muslims"; *Patmut'iwn*, 206; Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 43.

11. Joseph Laurent and Marius Canard, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'en 886* (Lisbon: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1980), 149.

12. Nina Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni (640-884)," in *Armenian People from*

This summary sets the story into a comfortable framework of Arab empire v. Armenian rebel. Armenians, regardless of their loyalties, were imprisoned while Arabs profited. This is an entirely valid reading of T'ovma's account of Bughā's campaign. Yet this does not allow for the Armenian and Albanian patricians who did not end up in Samarrāʾ, nor does it mention the Zurārids, who were also deported to Samarrāʾ despite the fact that they were Muslims. Nor can this explain why "Arab emirs profited" and yet Bughā "defeated and killed the local Muslim emir [Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl] and burned the [Muslim] city of Tiflis."[13]

In response to the reliance on T'ovma's account prevalent in modern discussions of the ninth-century conflict, this article suggests two methodological interventions to the way that we read Bughā's campaign. The first is that we need to balance Arabic and Armenian sources despite the fact that T'ovma's *History* offers significantly more detail than any extant Arabic source. T'ovma is crafting a lesson that speaks to his *Armenian* (frequently, even a specifically Arcruni) audience and employs the story for a reason, namely to construct conceptual borders between Christian Armenians and *tačik*s. This explains why T'ovma relies heavily on pre-Islamic narratives of Armenian battles and persecution. He calques large portions of Ełišē's history of the Armenian-Persian wars of 451 into an ʿAbbāsid setting by changing the Sasanian emperor Yazdegerd and his vizier Mihrnerseh to the caliph al-Mutawakkil and his general Bughā. T'ovma's purpose is not to tell the story of Bughā's campaign but to emplot this moment of Armenian history into a metanarrative of Christian minorities under imperial persecution, tapping into a storyline that was well known to an Armenian audience but completely absent in Arabic accounts. Reading T'ovma against al-Ṭabarī (or any other Arabic source) is a useful reminder to disentangle T'ovma's interpretation of the campaign from the details that he offers about the main protagonists.[14]

The second methodological intervention proposed here is related to the first: we need to situate the campaign in the ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of the Caucasus as a whole. Bughā's campaign crops up most regularly in studies of Armenian history that are interested primarily in situating *Armenian* experience during the conflict. This article instead places the campaign into the far more religiously- and ethnically-diverse setting of the Caucasus. This complicates the Armenian v. Arab narrative and instead presents Armenians as some of the many peoples confronting and colluding with Bughā. By examining Bughā's campaign as a moment in Caucasian instead of Armenian history, we can take a step back to reconsider the usefulness of broad identity markers such as Armenian, Muslim, Albanian, Christian, or Arab. T'ovma saw Christianness as the main determinant not just of communal identity, but also of communal loyalties. Why, then, are the many varied Christian leaders of the Caucasus, like Abū al-ʿAbbās and Abū Mūsā, fighting on opposite sides? How are these identities performed, if at all, in moments charged by violence and threats of annihilation?

Ancient to Modern Times, ed. Richard Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 141.

13. Garsoïan, "The Arab Invasions," 141.

14. The question of how and why Armenian families and provinces appear in Arabic sources is another avenue for future research in ʿAbbāsid historiography; see, for example, Alison Vacca, "Al-Basfurraġān and Banū al-Dayrānī: Vaspurakan and the Arcrunikʿ in Arabic Sources" (forthcoming). The focus on T'ovma in this article reflects both the centrality of his account to our understanding of Bughā's campaigns and the placement of Bughā's campaigns at the heart of the *History of the Acruni House.*

By looking at Bughā's campaign as a case study into the roles and representations of ethnicity, religion, and gender in the expression of medieval Caucasian identities, this article offers an alternative reading to the traditional interpretation: Caucasian communities were pluralist, fluid, and built on pragmatic, local concerns instead of around any grand sense of ethno-religious solidarity. To explore this campaign as a moment that pitted Christians v. Muslims or Armenians v. Arabs buys into medieval "identity-talk"[15] and reduces the complexity of medieval social organization into nationalist discourse more familiar to modern readers than to the protagonists of this story. As R. Suny points out in his study of the construction of identities in the modern Caucasus, "[r]ather than appearing coherent and uniform as it might look from afar, ethnicity at closer range looks fragmented, its cultural content contested and conflicted."[16]

In exploring how this played out in a medieval context, modern studies on identity have been particularly useful, including insightful studies of Arabness published by P. Crone,[17] M.C.A. MacDonald,[18] J. Retsö,[19] and P. Webb;[20] of Persianness and Iranianness by S. Savant,[21] M. Cooperson,[22] and R. Payne;[23] of Kurdishness by B. James;[24] and of Armenianness by B. Martin-Hisard, N. Garsoïan[25] and A. Redgate,[26] as well as broader theoretical approaches

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15. Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Quarterly Journal: International Security* 24, no. 3 (1999): 144. "When people talk about identity, however, their language is almost always about unity and internal harmony and tends to naturalize wholeness. It defaults to an earlier understanding of identity as the stable core…But even as ordinary usage tends to homogenize and essentialize identities, theorists of identity insistently claim that as difficult as it is to accept, the apparent and desired wholeness and unity is made up, imagined, to create a provisional stability in a changing world." He refers to the discourse of wholeness as "identity-talk."

16. Suny, "Provisional Stabilities," 139.

17. Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

18. Michael C. A. MacDonald, "Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic before Late Antiquity," *Topoi* 16, no. 1 (2009).

19. Jan Retsö, "The Earliest Arabs," *Orientalia Suecana* 38-39 (1990).

20. Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

21. Sarah Savant, "'Persians' in early Islam," *Annales islamologiques* 42 (2008).

22. Michael Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': the Uses of Ethnicity in the early Abbasid Period," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, ed. Asad Q. Ahmed, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

23. Richard Payne, "Avoiding Ethnicity: Uses of the Ancient Past in Late Sasanian Northern Mesopotamia," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1100*, ed. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

24. Boris James, "Arab Ethnonyms (ʿAjam, ʿArab, Badū and Turk): the Kurdish Case as a Paradigm for Thinking about Differences in the Middle Ages," *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014); "Le 'territoire tribal des Kurdes' et l'aire iraqienne (Xᵉ-XIIIᵉ siècles): Esquisse des recompositions spatiales," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 117-118 (2007).

25. Nina Garsoïan and Bernadette Martin-Hisard, "Unity and Diversity in Medieval Caucasia, 4th–11th centuries," in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Georgian*, ed. Stephen Rapp and Paul Crego (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

26. A. E. Redgate, "Myth and Reality: Armenian Identity in the early Middle Ages," *National Identities* 9, no. 4 (2007).

to identity construction. D. Nirenberg's *Communities of Violence* (1996) and T. Sizgorich's *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity* (2009) serve as models for the way that both authors situate the expression of religious identity broadly, but also specifically in the context of medieval conflict. Sizgorich, for example, expounds on a seeming paradox: in order to study identity, "one frequently must look past the explanations ancient peoples provide (or seem to provide) for their own behavior, especially insofar as those explanations are contingent upon appeals to what is frequently represented as the 'essential nature' of their own identity group."[27] In order to understand the role of religion and ethnicity in the particular context of Bughā's campaign, we have to reassess the layer of interpretation offered in T'ovma's account as his own attempt to supply borders for Armenian Christian identity.

With a close reading of the alliances and communities involved in Bughā's campaign, it becomes clear that there was no coherent or unifying concept of Armenianness, Albanianness, Georgianness, or Arabness in the Caucasus, let alone Muslimness or Christianness. Ethnicity and religion were significant markers of identity, but they were multiform and did not necessarily inform loyalties and allegiances. Communities did not emerge from monolithic and universal categories of ethnicity or religion, but from shared concerns localized in specific places and moments in time. Communal identity was historically contingent, defined according to the needs and challenges facing small, inchoate, heterogeneous familial groups. The inhabitants of one village would easily ally themselves with the people of a neighboring town even if they did not share a common religion, language, heritage, or ethnicity.[28] After all, these markers of identity were malleable: people in the medieval Caucasus rewrote their histories and genealogies, learned new languages, and converted to other religions. Perhaps more importantly, even when certain markers of identity remain stable, medieval authors frequently do not apply descriptions of ethnicity and religion consistently if these do not advance their narrative agendas.

Bughā's campaign serves to illuminate both the localized nature of communal identity and medieval "identity talk," i.e., the construction of the metanarrative around ethnicity and religion. Examining the role of women in the accounts of Bughā's Caucasian campaign is one efficient way to reveal localized concepts of communal identity that supersede ethno-religious affiliations. Women, we will see, navigate between and participate in a multiplicity of groups that might otherwise appear as ethnically or religiously uniform. Modern studies on the role of gender in medieval identity construction such as S. Barton's *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines* (2015) and N. el-Cheikh's *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (2015) have "investigated the multiple and complex ways in which interfaith sexuality, power, and group identity intersected."[29] El-Cheikh, for example, clarifies that "depictions of women, gender relations, and sexuality are at the heart of the cultural construction of identity and

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27. Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 22.

28. This fits with Mottahedeh's "acquired loyalties" in Būyid Iran, namely in that they were contractual "deliberately acquired obligations"; Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 40.

29. Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 144.

collectivity."[30] Approaching the study of identity from a gendered perspective by focusing on the women who forged ties across communities in the ninth-century Caucasus reveals the dissonance between imagined and lived communities, thereby offering a more nuanced alternative to the traditional reading of Bughā's campaign in T'ovma's ethno-religious absolutes.

Summary of Bughā's Campaign

With these concepts and concerns in mind, the goal here is not merely to describe the skirmishes, sieges, and battlegrounds of the various armies involved in Bughā's campaign, but to prepare the subsequent discussion about how medieval authors describe identity in the ʿAbbāsid-era Caucasus. As such, the following narrative focuses closely on how the extant sources elaborate or obfuscate markers of identity of the main protagonists of this campaign and their communities. For the moment, it also bypasses the lengthy descriptions of martyrdom and refutations of apostasy in T'ovma's account.
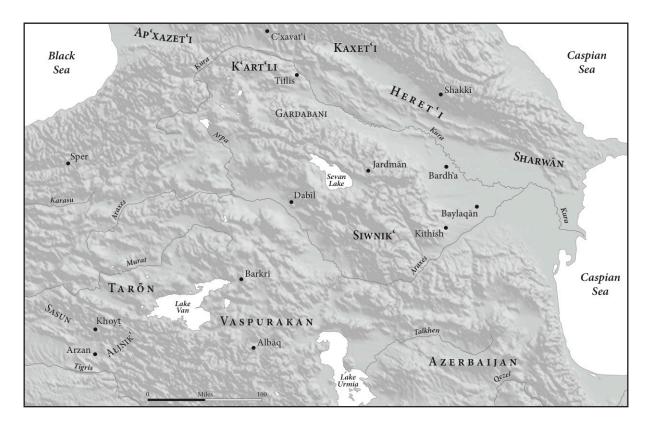

Fig. 1: Map of the South Caucasus in the Third/Ninth Century.

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30. Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.

The Rationale for Bughā's Campaign

In either 234/848-9 or 235/849, al-Mutawakkil posted Abū Saʿīd Muḥammad b. Yūsuf as governor over Armenia. The two most powerful Armenian noble houses at the time, the Bagratunis (known as banū Sinbāṭ in Arabic) of Ṭārūn/Tarōn and the Arcrunis (banū al-Dayrānī) of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, refused to allow Abū Saʿīd into their territories. Abū Saʿīd returned to Samarrāʾ with the tax revenues from Armenia and with letters of complaint against the Armenian nobility penned by local *tačik*s. Al-Mutawakkil assigned troops to force the North to accept his governor, but Abū Saʿīd died on his return trip. The army passed to Abū Saʿīd's son Yūsuf, who was able to negotiate with the Bagratunis and the Arcrunis and sent both patricians back to Samarrāʾ to ensure the terms of their agreements. Yūsuf's subsequent death at the hands of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ on the edge of the Bagratuni territory of Ṭārūn/Tarōn and Zurārid-held Aḷjnikʿ precipitated the caliphal campaign. The traditional narrative of Bughā's campaign suggests that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ were infuriated by the captivity of the Bagratuni patrician and so killed Yūsuf in revenge. Al-Mutawakkil dispatched Bughā to avenge Yūsuf and wreak havoc on the Armenian noble houses.[31]

It is, however, not entirely clear whether the authors of our medieval sources recognize al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ as Armenians, let alone as kinsmen of the Bagratuni family. Their name is a derivative of the toponym Khoyṭ/Xoytʿ, a mountain on the periphery of Armenian territory. Al-Balādhurī explains that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ "are barbarians (*ʿulūj*) who go by the name al-Arṭān."[32] While this Arabic identifier could feasibly refer to the Armenian town Ardahan in Gugarkʿ, it is rather more likely a calque on the Syriac. Minorsky includes "the Χοθαῖται [= al-Khuwaythiyya] in the canton of Khoyt of Sāsūn, the Orṭāyē [= al-Arṭān] in the bend of the Euphrates)" among the groups haphazardly bundled under the designation Kurds (*akrād*) in Arabic.[33] The relationship to Kurdish populations is uncertain, though, as the Syriac indicates that they are the inhabitants of Urartu. In other words, we should assume that al-Balādhurī's الارطان, *al-arṭān*, in fact clarifies that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ are ܐܘܪܛܝܐ, i.e., Aramean *urṭāyē*.[34] The Armenianness of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ was thus not apparent

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31. Arcruni, *History*, 186; *Patmutʿiwn*, 190. See also Yovhannēs Drasxanakertcʿi, *History of Armenia*, trans. Krikor Maksoudian (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 119; *Hayocʿ Patmutʿiwn* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakčʿutʿyun, 1996), 120. Note that Drasxanakertcʿi here conflates Abū Saʿīd and his son Yūsuf. Later accounts place some blame on the Byzantines, as well: Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abûʾl Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus: Being the First Part of His Political History of the World*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003), 142.

32. Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 211.

33. David Neil MacKenzie, Vladimir Minorsky, and Thomas Bois, "Kurds, Kurdistān," in *EI²*. On the multiple definitions of *akrād* in the medieval period, see James, "Arab Ethnonyms," especially 712.

34. Margoliouth defines ܐܘܪܛܝܐ as the people, Urartians, not the place, Urartu. "This people is supposed to have been a remnant of Aramean autochthones, and to have inhabited the district of Anzitene in Armenia"; Jessie Payne Margoliouth, *Supplement to the Thesaurus syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 10. Nöldeke first identified al-Balādhurī's الارطان with the Syriac: "Der Name könnte immerhin mit dem der ܐܘܪܛܝܐ identisch sein; wir müssten den annehmen, dass Theile desselben Volkes sich in verschiedenen Gegenden des südarmenischen Gebirgslandes angesiedelt hätten. Wie wir oben sahen, sind ja solche Spaltungen bei kurdischen Stämmen nichts seltenes; für Kurden werden wir aber ein von den Armeniern wie von den Syrern unterschiedenes Volk in dieser noch jezt [sic] hauptsächlich von Kurden bewohnten Gegend doch am ersten

Snapshot of the ʿAbbāsid Caucasian Campaign

The identity markers supplied here refer to how these protagonists typically appear in medieval sources.

Bughā's Allies

Communal or Family Name	Main Actors	Traditional Identity Markers	Geographical Association
Albanians	Qiṭrīj	Albanian Christian	Jardmān/Gardman
Arcrunis	"traitor" elements, such as Vasak	Armenian Christian	Al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan
Bagratunis	Smbat Aplabas, Mušeł	Armenian Christian	Ṭārūn/Tarōn
ʿUthmānids		Arab Muslim	Barkrī/Berkri

Bughā's Opponents

Communal or Family Name	Main Actors	Traditional Identity Markers	Geographical Association
Abkhazians	Tʿewdosi	Abkhazian Christian	Abkhāz/Apʿxazetʿi
Albanians	Abū Mūsā ʿĪsā	Albanian Christian	Kithīsh/Kʿtʿiš
Amīrs of Tiflīs/Tpʿilisi	Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl and his wife	Mawālī Muslim [with an Avar Christian wife]	Tiflīs/Tpʿilisi
Arcrunis	"hero" elements, such as Ašot, Gurgēn, Hṙipʿsimē, and Gurgēn the son of Apupelč	Armenian Christian	Al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan
Gardabanians		Christian	Gugarkʿ
Al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ	Yovhan	Armenian (Syrian?) Christian	Khoyṭ/Xoytʿ
Mtʿiuls		Christian	Mtʿiuletʿi
Al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʿ		(Arab? Chechen?) Christian	Khākhiṭ/Kaxetʿi
Zurārids	Mūsā b. Zurāra	Arab (Armenian? Syrian?) Muslim [with an Armenian Christian wife]	Arzan/Arcn

to historians writing in Arabic. This suggests that the people on the edges of Armenia and Mesopotamia were perceived as different from the central Armenian houses.

T'ovma offers an extended description of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' and, interestingly, his discussion also presents several challenges to their Armenianness. First, he is clear that they are incomprehensible: "their mutual speech is a patchwork of borrowed words." He even offers a false etymology for their name, as *xut'* in Armenian means "obstacle," which T'ovma associates with their "obscure and inscrutable speech." Second, he dismisses them as "savage in their habits" and "drinkers of blood," presumably othering them from his own Arcruni society. Third, he traces their lineage back to Syria, labeling them as "peasants of Syria." He further claims that, "they know the psalms in the old translation of the Armenian teachers." This, as R. Thomson points out, likely refers to Armenian reliance on Christian texts in Syriac before the invention of the Armenian alphabet.[35] The only thing that identifies al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' as Armenians in T'ovma's text is their loyalty to "their princes," which modern scholars read as the Bagratuni patricians.

Modern scholars have elaborated on the relationship between the Bagratunis and al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' by glossing a corrupted passage of an Arabic text. Al-Yaʿqūbī presents the name of the person responsible for Yūsuf's death, but the text is illegible. Houtsma offers سوان بن الدف with the note "Ita cod. Veram lectionem ignoro,"[36] which Ghazarian corrects to يونان to render T'ovma's Յովնան, a native of Khoyt'/Xoyt' who "had inflicted severe losses on the royal army" and was later martyred for arguing with al-Mutawakkil.[37] In fact, during his audience with the caliph, Yovnan reportedly boasted about his involvement in Yūsuf's assassination: "[i]n my disdain for you I put your general and his troops to the sword."[38] Markwart goes further by identifying Yovnan's father as T'oṙnik, a Bagratuni soldier who fought against Bughā on the command of Bagarat Bagratuni, clarifying that al-Yaʿqūbī's name should read يونان بن < تُر > نيق.[39] If this reconstruction is correct—and there is no evidence to either substantiate or disprove it—we see a clear connection between al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' and the Bagratunis by providing a Bagratuni father to Yūsuf's Khuwaythī murderer.

Al-Ṭabarī claims that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' "constituted the majority of the inhabitants of Armenia." It seems plausible that he might be conflating al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' with the

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halten. Sicher ist das freilich alles durchaus nicht"; Theodor Nöldeke, "Zwei Völker Vorderasiens," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 33, no. 1 (1879): 165. See also Josef Markwart, *Südarmenien und die Tigrisquellen nach griechischen und arabischen Geographen* (Vienna: Mechitharisten-Buchdruckerei, 1930), 222 n. 3.

35. Arcruni, *History*, 187-8 and n. 3; *Patmutʿiwn*, 190-92.

36. Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb b. Jaʿfar b. Wahb b. Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 598; the more modern edition of the text (Beirut, 2002) offers بنوان بن البف .

37. Re: the identity of Yovnan, see Ghazarian, "Armenien," 191 n. 2: "Für die Lesung des Namens الدف habe ich keinen Anhaltspunkt"; Arcruni, *History*, 253 n. 3 seems reticent to ascribe to Markwart's hypothesis: "This Yovnan is not attested elsewhere."

38. Arcruni, *History*, 253; *Patmutʿiwn*, 294.

39. Markwart, *Südarmenien* 298 n. 1; Aram Ter-Łevondyan, "'Hayocʿ išxanə' arabakan tirapetutʿyun žamanakašṙjanum," *Patma-banasirakan Handes* 2 (1964): 130. We are assuming that the T'oṙnik mentioned in Arcruni, *History*, 176; *Patmutʿiwn*, 174 is in fact the same T'oṙnik, father of Yovnan.

Bagratunis here. But al-Balādhurī offers another possible interpretation. He suggests that in murdering Yūsuf, al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ were acting on behalf of the Armenian people *in toto*. Yūsuf, he explains, had sent another caliphal representative named al-ʿAlāʾ into al-Sīsajān/Siwnikʿ, where he looted a monastery named Dayr al-Aqdāḥ, which enraged the Armenian patricians, lesser nobility, and chiefs.[40] The Armenians, spurred on by the looting of the monastery and the imprisonment of Bagarat (here: Baqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ), sent emissaries to convince al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ to rebel and provided them with arms: "they roused them against him because he had carried Baqrāṭ off."[41] In this way, the murder of Yūsuf becomes a collective pan-Armenian effort, including even the region of al-Sīsajān/Siwnikʿ with its variable relation to Armenia; perhaps al-Ṭabarī's "majority" may accordingly refer to the perceived support that other Armenians offered al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ.

Bugha's Campaign against Vaspurakan

While al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ appear as the main rebels in the Arabic texts about Bughā's campaign, Tʿovma instead boasts of the blame of the Arcruni family and thereby shifts away from both al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ and the Bagratunis. He explains that Abū Saʿīd's lieutenant, al-ʿAlāʾ, had faced off against Ašot Arcruni when Abū Saʿīd first attempted to collect the taxes from Armenia. Ašot's forces subsequently defeated and massacred so many local Muslims that the widows of Arzan/Arcn travelled to deliver the news of the conflict to al-Mutawakkil "with unveiled faces, bareheaded, and having discarded the natural apparel of women, as is their custom especially for the *tačik* nations" (տաճկական ազանց). They lamented in the audience of the caliph himself, claiming that Ašot alone had wrought the devastation and the rebellion against caliphal power.[42]

After Yūsuf's death, al-Mutawakkil's advisors suggested that the caliph gather a great army to imprison Ašot Arcruni, the patrician of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, after which "all others will easily submit."[43] Given that Tʿovma dedicated his book to the son and grandson of this Ašot, his interest in establishing the significance of his house is clear. He states unequivocally that Ašot "was more glorious and famous than those before him who had been princes of all Armenia, those in the East and the North, and especially those in the land of Vaspurakan who had been princes in positions of authority."[44] Tʿovma has al-Mutawakkil himself rally troops to move against Armenia with the exclamation that no one since the rise of Islam had "inflicted such embarrassing reverses on us, our nation and army and our generals as has Ashot prince of Vaspurakan."[45]

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40. This is not reported in Armenian literature with the possible exception of Ps.-Šapuh Bagratuni, see Šapuh Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller (also known as Šapuh Bagratuni)," trans. Robert Thomson, *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 21 (1989): 213. He mentions that the *tačik*s set fire to churches after the death of Abū Saʿīd.

41. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* 211.

42. Arcruni, *History*, 180 except that he renders *tačkakan* as Muslim; *Patmutʿiwn*, 180.

43. Arcruni, *History*, 190; *Patmutʿiwn*, 196.

44. Arcruni, *History*, 174; *Patmutʿiwn*, 170.

45. Arcruni, *History*, 192; *Patmutʿiwn*, 198.

With descriptions brimming with textual borrowing pulled directly from Ełišē's fifth-century history of the Sasanian attack on the Caucasus, T'ovma painstakingly tracks Bughā and his lieutenant Zīrak through al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. Ašot Arcruni, accompanied by nobles of the secondary houses of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, rallied in the castle Nkan. While under siege, some nobles of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan turned against Ašot and approached Bughā, "destroying the unity of harmonious concord between brothers."[46] These lesser nobles offered Ašot to Bughā in exchange for clemency, that they should be allowed to remain on their own land. They also warned Bughā about Gurgēn Arcruni, Ašot's brother, who had left al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan but retained the ability to rally Arcruni troops against caliphal forces. Ašot, recognizing his men's perfidy, handed himself over to Bughā, who sent him to Samarrā'.

Al-Yaʿqūbī notes that Ašot, who appears in Arabic as Ashūṭ b. Ḥamza al-Armanī, was decapitated in Samarrā', but this is undoubtedly merely transferring the fate of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, al-Yaʿqūbī's next person of interest, to the Arcruni nobleman. Armenian sources allow for Ašot's survival and return to Armenia. Al-Ṭabarī, for his part, preserves a story that clarifies that Ašot survived Bughā's campaigns and his subsequent imprisonment:

> Al-Mutawakkil saw Ashūṭ b. Ḥamza al-Armanī a few days before he [Mutawakkil] was killed [247/861]. The caliph grumbled about having an audience with Ashūṭ and ordered that he be evicted. When asked whether he was satisfied with Ashūṭ's service, he replied, "Yes, indeed, but I dreamt a few nights ago that I had been riding him, when he turned to me, his head becoming like that of a mule, and said to me, 'How much longer [do you suppose] you will molest us? Only a few days remain until the end of your appointed time of fifteen years.'" Salamah said: It tallied with the number of days [remaining] of his caliphate.[47]

This reveals that Ashūṭ (Ašot Arcruni) was at the court in Samarrā' years after his imprisonment, presumably with his head and body intact, and in the service of al-Mutawakkil, who was apparently well pleased with Ašūṭ's service.

Bughā's campaign against Ašot Arcruni in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan thus reveals the disunity even within the noble houses in Armenia. Ašot, reportedly the greatest threat that the Caliphate had ever faced, was not even able to rally the other nobles of his own province around a banner of Armenianness.

Bughā followed the warning offered by the nobles of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan and turned against Gurgēn Arcruni, Ašot's brother. Gurgēn gathered his troops and sent his mother, Hŕip'simē, to negotiate Ašot's release with Bughā, who was camped on the banks of the river Zāb/Zav. While Hŕip'simē was treated with respect, she was not able to stem the next assault. Aided by an angel of God as he prayed and recited Psalms, at least as T'ovma recounts the battle, Gurgēn annihilated Bughā's troops at a place aptly called the Lake of Blood. Gurgēn

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46. Arcruni, *History*, 201; *Patmut'iwn*, 210.

47. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume 34: Incipient Decline: The Caliphates of al-Wathiq, al-Mutawakkil, and al-Muntasir A.D. 841-863/A.H. 227-248*, trans. Joel Kraemer (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 183; *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), III 1463-4.

was subsequently, and rather incredulously, invited to Bughā's camp where he was named and fêted as the prince of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan in his brother's stead. This appears as part of a broader plot to reduce the Arcruni patrician through artifice when military means proved ineffectual. After three days, Bughā forged a letter from al-Mutawakkil and claimed that the caliph had demanded the capture of Gurgēn. Bughā duplicitously imprisoned Gurgēn and sent him to Samarrāʾ while Gurgēn's soldiers scattered ineffectually throughout al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.

Bughā's Campaign against Arzan/Arcn and Khoyṭ/Xoytʻ

Tʻovma's narrative of the ʿAbbāsid campaign therefore sends Bughā after the Arcrunis to retaliate for the murder of Yūsuf b. Muḥammad, despite the recognition of the guilt of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ for this crime. The Arcruni patrician did not even hold the title Prince of Armenia, a position that entailed responsibility of keeping locals such as al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ in line with caliphal concerns. Tʻovma accordingly devotes significant space to the heroic actions of his patrons' (and his own) noble house, and yet he never places caliphal troops against the very people whom Bughā was sent to chastise. This does not align with Arabic accounts of Bughā's Caucasian campaign, which retain interest in al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, only mentions the Arcrunis after Bughā neutralized his first target, a local Muslim ally of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ.

Mūsā b. Zurāra, known as Abū al-Ḥurr (literally: "the father of the freeman"),[48] ruled Ałjnikʻ from Arzan/Arcn. In Armenian sources, Mūsā appears as "Musē, son of a Hagarite Zōrahay."[49] The use of Hagarene here is unusual in Tʻovma's text and he does not use *tačik* to refer to the Zurārids, perhaps subtly implying distance between Mūsā and the rest of Bughā's forces. Despite the fact that modern scholars uniformly assume that Mūsā was Arab, neither the Arabic nor the Armenian sources explicitly identify him as such and he has no known tribal *nisba*. Laurent, Canard, and Ter-Łevondyan suggest that he might have been from the Bakr tribe, like the nearby Shaybānī *amīr*s, because Mūsā's son was in close contact with ʿĪsā b. Shaykh, the leader of Diyār Bakr.[50] There is nothing to support this suggestion, though, and the Zurārids claimed close ties to a number of non-Arab and/or non-Muslim groups in the North, as well. It is rather more likely that the Zurārids were either Armenian or Syrian converts to Islam. M. Canard notes that "Mûsâ b. Zurâra fit cause commune avec les princes arméniens, se comportant plus comme un prince arménien que comme un émir arabe."[51] As such, modern scholars are confronted not only with the blurry nature of ethnic groups due to the lack of ethnic identifiers in the medieval texts, but also with the modern assumptions that there is an identifiable difference between Armenian and Arab comportment.

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48. The word "freeman" in an Iranian context refers to the nobility: *ḥurr* (more commonly in plural as *aḥrār*) in Arabic is rendered as *azat* in Armenian and as *āzād* in Persian. In Syriac this appears as ܒܰܪ, but is usually rendered as "the son of the freemen" (ܒ݁ܰܪ ܚܺܐܪ̈ܶܐ) instead of "the father of the freemen."

49. Arcruni, *History*, 175; *Patmutʻiwn*, 172.

50. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 42; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 391-92.

51. Marius Canard, "Les principautés arabes en Arménie," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 11 (1976): 198.

The Zurārids allied with the Bagratuni family against Bughā. Al-Ṭabarī explains that: "When Yūsuf deported Buqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ [Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Msaker], the Patrikioi (*al-baṭāriqa*)[52] took an oath to kill Yūsuf and vowed to shed his blood. Mūsā b. Zurāra went along with them in this. He was responsible for the daughter of Buqrāṭ."[53] Mūsā b. Zurāra was married to the daughter of Bagarat Bagratuni and so allied with al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' when they moved against Yūsuf b. Muḥammad. This verifies that local alliances informed Zurārid responses to Bughā's campaign.

Al-Ṭabarī also maps out an itinerary that avoids Arcruni territory entirely. Bughā "headed for Armenia from the direction of the Jazīrah. He began in Arzan [by attacking] Mūsā b. Zurārah—he is Abū al-Ḥurr—and he had sisters and brothers, [namely] Ismāʿīl, Sulaymān, Aḥmad, ʿĪsā, Muḥammad, and Hārūn. Bughā deported Mūsā b. Zurārah to the gate of the caliph"[54] and Bughā reportedly killed 30,000 Zurārid allies in this leg of the campaign. T'ovma's perceived battle pitting Christian Armenians against the ethno-religious "other" and his desire to vaunt his sponsors' deeds blind him to moments that counter these narratives. Accordingly, T'ovma does not record Mūsā's alliance with the Bagratunis or his fate, but instead deploys a caliphal general against an Armenian noble because someone else killed a caliphal representative.

Al-Ṭabarī's version, much more believably, has the added benefit of sending Bughā against al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut', while Zurārid Aɫjnik' stood *en route* between al-Jazīra and Khoyṭ/Xoyt'. After the deportation of the Zurārid family to Samarrāʾ, Bughā turned against al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' themselves. Al-Ṭabarī clarifies that Bughā "proceeded to lay siege in the mountain of al-Khuwaythiyya. They constituted the majority of the inhabitants of Armenia and were the killers of Yūsuf b. Muḥammad."[55] During this campaign, Bughā's forces reportedly killed 30,000 of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' and imprisoned still more. It is only after the subjugation of Khoyṭ/Xoyt' that al-Ṭabarī sends Bughā against the Arcruni capital at Albāq (here: Aghbagh)/Aɫbak.

Bughā's Campaign against Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi

After the destructive campaign in Khoyṭ/Xoyt', al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' next appear further north as allies of the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi, Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl b. Shuʿayb, who appears as Sahak the son of Ismayēl in Armenian. This brings the narrative of Bughā's campaign back into

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52. On the appearance of the title *patrician* and its use in Greek (πατρίκιος), Armenian (պատրիկիկ), and Arabic (بطريق), see Ter-Łevondyan, "Hayocʿ išxanə"; Karen Yuzbašyan, "Les titres byzantins en Arménie," in *L'Arménie et Byzance: Histoire et Culture*, ed. Nina Garsoïan (Paris: Sorbonne, 1996).

53. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 114; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409.

54. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 115; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409. See also ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī-l-Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādr, 1995), VII 59; ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, [1391] 1971), IV 276; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, [1424] 2003), IV 123. Note the prevalence of Judeo-Christian names in the Zurārid family. While these names are certainly not unusual among Muslim Arabs, this might potentially suggest that they were converts who maintained a connection to Biblical stories.

55. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 115 and n. 373; *Taʾrīkh*, III, 1409; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam* IV, 123.

dialogue with Tʻovma's version, who does not mention al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ but does send Bughā north against Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi after wintering in Dabīl/Duin.

Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi had been functionally independent for decades by the time of Bughā's campaign. Ibn Khurradādhbih recognizes Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl as the Lord of Armenia (صاحب ارمينية) and perhaps this vaunted status encouraged him to ignore Bughā's summons.[56] He "was a stocky old man and had a large head. He was tattooed with blue (indigo) markings, and was ruddy, bald, and cross-eyed."[57] Isḥāq's ancestry remains uncertain. Al-Masʿūdī explains: "I think that he was a Qurayshite of Banū Umayya, or their client"[58]; he appears most frequently in Arabic sources as Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl *mawlā banī Umayya*.[59] This *mawlā* status is at least a generation off, as either Isḥāq's father Ismāʿīl or his grandfather Shuʿayb was a *mawlā* of the last Umayyad caliph Marwān b. Muḥammad,[60] who was the governor of Armenia before becoming caliph. Modern scholars have assumed that Isḥāq was part of "a line of Arab amīrs" and conclude that "the amīrate [at Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi] had long been a focus of Arab power in the Caucasus."[61] While later *amīr*s were Arabs, extant sources do not corroborate the claim that Isḥāq was. The repeated reference to his family's *mawlā* status in lieu of a tribal *nisba* instead suggests that Isḥāq was not perceived as Arab.

Al-Yaʿqūbī claims that Isḥāq offered money and a pledge of allegiance to the caliph, but refused Bughā's summon to appear before the army personally by claiming that "he did not deviate from obedience [to the caliph]."[62] In 238/852-3, Bughā set his army against Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi while Zīrak moved across the Kura River into Ṣughdabīl/Sagodebeli. Most Arabic accounts of this siege note the catastrophic use of naphtha against the city made of wood and the high death toll of 50,000. In this leg of the campaign, according to al-Ṭabarī, "Bughā also sent Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Wārithī al-Naṣrānī against the inhabitants of Armenia, Arab and non-Arab alike" (عربها وعجمها).[63] Bughā sat above the town and watched Zīrak and Abū al-ʿAbbās burn the city and capture Isḥāq and his son ʿAmr. We find in this explicit confirmation that Bughā's campaign was against "Arab and non-Arab alike"; we also find confirmation that Armenian troops outside of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan were helping Bughā. Al-Ṭabarī identifies Abū al-ʿAbbās as a prince (*al-wārithī* is a translation of the Armenian *sepuh*)[64] and a Christian (*al-naṣrānī*) and later clarifies that this refers to none other than Sinbāṭ b. Ashūṭ, the Arabization of Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni, the brother of the deported Prince of Armenia

56. Abū al-Qāsim ʿUbayd Allāh Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1889), 163.

57. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 123; *Taʼrīkh*, III 1415; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67.

58. Vladimir Minorsky, *A history of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th–11th centuries* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1958), 161.

59. Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʼrīkh*, IV 276; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, IV 124; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67.

60. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and Vladimir Minorsky, "Al-Kurdj," in *EI²*.

61. Clifford Edmund Bosworth and David Neil MacKenzie, "Al-Ḳabḳ," ibid; Vladimir Minorsky, "Transcaucasica," *Journal Asiatique* 217 (1930), 60 calls him "l'amīr arabe (ḳuraišite)".

62. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʼrīkh*, II 598.

63. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʼrīkh*, III 1416. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam,* IV 124. Ibn Miskawayh confuses Abū al-ʿAbbās and Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl. Minorsky, "Transcaucasica," 61.

64. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 406; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʼrīkh*, III 1416 changes this to *wāthī*.

Bagarat Bagratuni, the son of Ašot Msaker, and the *sparapet* of Armenia.[65] In other words, Bughā rallied Turks, Arabs, and Armenians against a non-Arab *amīr* in Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi with Muslims and Christians are on both sides of the battle lines.

When Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl was captured, his wife interceded with Bughā on his behalf. Extant sources do not specify her religion or ethnicity, but do identify her as the daughter of the King of the Throne (صاحب السرير), whom Arabic geographical texts identify as Christian.[66] Modern scholars at times recognize the term al-Sarīr as an ethnonym,[67] though it does not consistently function as such in medieval texts. Historians and geographers work instead to explain the name based on connections to the Sasanian past with the explanation that either Anūshirwān or Yazdegerd supplied the eponymous throne (*al-sarīr*).[68] Ibn Rusta identifies the name of the king as Avar (وملكهم يسمّى اوار), a detail corroborated by al-Gardīzī (except as *āvāz*: وملك ايشانرا آواز خوانند).[69] Tʻovma Arcruni refers to al-Sarīr as *awrhazkʻ* (աւրհազք), a claim that Minorsky parses: *-kʻ* denotes the nominative plural case, *-hr-* shifted to *-rh-* through metathesis, and the *–z* constitutes an Iranian suffix along the model of Lakz and Gurz. As such, he recovers **Auhar* from Tʻovma's *awrhazkʻ*, signaling the Avarness of al-Sarīr to confirm Ibn Rustah and al-Gardīzī's somewhat oblique comments.[70]

Minorsky suggests, though, that al-Sarīr might in fact refer to a sixth-century group whom Theophylactos Simocatta identified as "pseudo-Avars" (Ψευδάβαροι) who coopted a foreign identity that allowed them unearned prestige.[71] Again, the study of ethnonyms rests

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65. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416.

66. On the Christianity of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of the Throne, see Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik* (Leiden: Brill, 1927), 223; Josef Markwart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: ethnologische und historisch-topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)* (Leipzig: Weicher, 1903), 423. Ibn Rusta explains that the fortress population is Christian, but the rest are not. He also tells of the ruler of Ḥaydān who prays with the Muslims on Fridays, the Jews on Saturdays, and the Christians on Sundays just to cover his bases; Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad b. ʿUmar Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa* (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 147-8.

67. David Testen, "An Early Reference to the Avars Reconsidered," *The Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia* 6-7 (1994-6), 3.

68. Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī, *Les prairies d'or: Texte et traduction [Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawāhir]* (Paris: L'Imprimerie impériale, 1861-1877), 4-5; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 382; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ,* 196.

69. Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 147. Minorsky notes elsewhere that "this name does not cover the local population," remarking that this is meant to refer to the king of al-Sarīr alone; Minorsky, *Sharvān* 168 n. 7. Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Ḥayy b. Ḍaḥḥāk b. Maḥmūd al-Gardīzī, *Zayn al-Akhbār [Taʾrīkh Gardīzī]* (Tihrān: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1363 [1984]), 594. A more convoluted thread in the discussion of the Avarness of al-Sarīr is al-Balādhurī's title alternatively rendered as وهرارانشاه , وهرازانشاه or وهراواورنشاه , or وهرارانشاه ; for a detailed treatment of this problem, see Testen, "Early Reference."

70. *Ḥudūd al-ʿālam, The Regions of the World, a Persian Geography, 372AH-982AD*, trans. Vladimir Minorsky (Cambridge: EJW Gibb Memorial, 1982), 447-8 and note 2; Markwart, *Streifzüge*, 496. Thomson renders this as *Apkhaz* with the note: "The text of Patkanean reads *Awr̄hazkʻ*. Brosset renders 'Awars,' Patkanean suggests 'perhaps Apkhaz,' and Vardanyan renders 'Abkhaz.' A corruption *wr̄* from *pʻ* in Armenian is not implausible"; Arcruni, *History*, 240 and note 6.

71. Minorsky is referring to the Avar attack on Constantinople in Theophylact Simocatta, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, trans. Mary Whitby and Michael Whitby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 23;

on shaky ground and, as Minorsky concludes, "[i]t must be remembered that the evidence for the distinction of the true Avars and Pseudo-Avars […] is rather frail" but that al-Sarīr "could have usurped a name which did not strictly belong to them."[72] We might take this a step further to recognize that medieval Caucasian Avarness as a whole is a somewhat tenuous concept. This case demonstrates the contested nature of ethnic identity, a reminder that the distinction between "true" and "pseudo" Avars is a product of both medieval claims and modern concern about fitting peoples into recognizable boxes.

During the siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi, the potentially Avar, presumably Christian wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl was fortified in Ṣughdabīl/Sagodebeli and protected by al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ.[73] According to T'ovma, she came unveiled and distraught before Bughā to beg for Isḥāq's life, but Bughā ordered Isḥāq to be crucified near the Kura River and sent his head on to Samarrāʾ so that he could be free to marry his widow.[74] Isḥāq's wife announced that she would take her complaints to al-Mutawakkil: "For my sake, you killed my lord. I am not content to be your wife but the great caliph's [wife]."[75] Bughā did eventually send her on to the caliph, who married her and heard her complaints. This, T'ovma explains, was the eventual cause for Bughā's death. Al-Mutawakkil was jealous of Bughā's relationship with his wife, but Bughā was too popular and successful to kill outright. Al-Mutawakkil instead arranged his death by dispatching him on an impossible mission in Khurāsān with the expectation that Bughā would not survive.[76] In this way, T'ovma stresses the significance of the Caucasian campaign by constructing a link between Bughā's deeds and his death and, accordingly, rendering the campaign fatal.

The siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi also introduces a paradox to the story of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ. The traditional rendition of the story has al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ kill Yūsuf b. Muḥammad out of vengeance for Bagarat Bagratuni's imprisonment. The idea that al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ would guard the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, then, is particularly odd in the face of Smbat Bagratuni's involvement in the siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. If al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʿ did indeed kill Yūsuf in

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Historiarum libri octo (Bonn: Impensis ed. Weberi, 1834), 38. Simocatta describes these Avars (τοὺς Ἀβάρους) as Huns (Οὖννοι) and refers to their leader as the "Chagan of the Huns" (τοῖς Οὖννοις Χαγᾶνος). He does indeed accuse these Huns of misappropriating Avarness: "These named themselves Avars and glorified their leader with the appellation of Chagan […] for among the Scythian nations that of the Avars is said to be the most adept tribe. In point of fact even up to our present times the Pseudo-Avars (for it is more correct to refer to them thus) are divided in their ancestry…" (189-90 in English; 284 in Greek).

72. *Regions of the World*, 448.

73. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416.

74. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1415; Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 25; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 598; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), II 10. These recount the arrival of Isḥāq's head in Samarrāʾ. Al-Ṭabarī says that he was crucified on the Gate of Thorns, but on the page before this statement, al-Ṭabarī lists the gates of Tiflīs and does not include a Gate of Thorns. Minorsky claims that he was hung on the gate of Ṣughd, so this might be Ṣughdabīl gate; see Minorsky, "Transcaucasica," 62 n. 2 on باب الحسك . On the veil in Christian societies of the North, see the Georgian martyrology of Šušanik in David Marshall Lane, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956).

75. Arcruni, *History*, 239; *Patmutʿiwn*, 272.

76. Placed in a Christian context, T'ovma may here be drawing on 2 Samuel, comparing al-Mutawakkil to King David, Bughā to Uriah, and the wife of Isḥāq, Bathsheba.

response to Bagarat Bagratuni's imprisonment, their presence on the battlefield arrayed *against* Smbat Bagratuni demands additional explanation. If we set aside the interpretation offered for their murder of Yūsuf and look at their actions and alliances, another picture of al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ emerges. They murdered a caliphal representative and then allied with a local Muslim *amīr* to battle a caliphal army even though it arrayed them against the Bagratunis. Despite the rhetoric of both Arabic and Armenian sources about the unity of the Armenians, al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ appear to be more interested in fighting caliphal forces than remaining loyal to the Bagratunis.

Bughā's Campaign against the North Caucasus

After the siege of Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi, Bughā's campaign faltered against the fragmented political landscape of the northern Caucasus. Most Arabic and Armenian sources skip straight from Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi to Albania with the exception of the Arabic translation of the *Darband-nāmeh*, which states that "Muhammad [b. Khālid] had returned to al-Bāb, whereas Bughā spent the winter in the town of Dabīl and then fought the Georgians and Abkhazians in a number of battles. Each time he was victorious, slew many of them and carried away many prisoners and much booty. Then he fought (*ghazā*) the Alān and the Khazar (*Khazrān*) and was victorious over them and took poll-tax (*jizya*) from them all."[77]

The Georgian *Book of Kʻartʻli* adds significantly more detail here. After Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi burned, Tʻewdosi, the king of the Abkhāz/Apʻxaz, challenged Bughā's army. Bughā subsequently sent Zīrak and Bagrat, son of Ašot *curopalates* (Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Msaker, who was already in Samarrāʾ according to all other accounts) against the Abkhāz/Apʻxaz while he himself moved against the Mtʻiuls, men from the mountains of what is now northern Georgia. The Abkhazian king Tʻewdosi fell to Bughā's troops under the direction of Bughā's lieutenants.

> On their way back they were opposed at Juaris-Guerdi by the Gardabanians, who inflicted severe losses on their army. When Buǧa learnt of this, he moved from there and went to Čartʻaletʻi, where he stopped. He took hostages from the Mtʻiulni, 300 men. He was intending to attack Ossetia, so he advanced to Cʻxavatʻi. But Abulabaz, the *eristʻavi* of Armenia, and Guaram, son of Ašot, sent a message to the Mtʻiulni that they should not let them pass. So they sacrificed their hostages. God helped them, because snow fell. They offered resistance and engaged battle. God gave them the victory, and a numberless host of Saracens was slain. Their horses fed on azaleas, and many died. But the loss was not apparent from the multitude of the army, because their number was about 120,000.[78]

With the neutralization of Abkhazian forces through the efforts of the caliphal and Bagratuni troops, Bughā aimed at Ossetia and advanced to Cʻxavatʻi, northwest of Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi. The

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77. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 25 (in English) and 3 (in Arabic).

78. *Book of Kʻartʻli* in Robert Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: the Medieval Armenian Adaptations of the Georgian Chronicles: the Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 261.

Gardabanians here probably refer to the people of the region Gardabani, Gugarkʻ in Armenian.

If we can move past the image of horses munching on azaleas, the interesting part of this passage is that it demonstrates that "Georgian" responses to Bughā's campaign were no more unified than Armenian. There was no concept of Georgia as modern observers would recognize it,[79] even if the blanket term appears in Armenian and Arabic sources. We are still centuries away from unification under the Bagratuni family. Georgianness did not rally armies to challenge Bughā, but rather the Abkhāz/Apʻxaz, Gardabanians, and Mtʻiuls fought him independently. Further, the author of the *Book of Kʻartʻli* does not offer any suggestion that religious differences informed these skirmishes. Abulabaz, "the *eristʻavi* of Armenia," is al-Ṭabarī's Abū al-ʿAbbās, the same Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni who allied with Bughā and fought alongside Zīrak against Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi.

Here Smbat appears instead to undermine Bughā's projected attack on Ossetia by convincing the Mtʻiuls to resist the caliphal army, even if that meant consigning hundreds of captives to their deaths. There are a few possible, if conjectural, interpretations of this. First, perhaps the author of the *Book of Kʻartʻli* is confused about the loyalties involved and makes assumptions about Bagratuni allegiances during the campaign. This might explain why the Armenian rendition of this text omits this passage. Alternatively, we might hypothesize that Bagratuni allegiance to Bughā was not absolute, indicating that Smbat Bagratuni's support occasionally faltered. We would then have to explain why Smbat Bagratuni supported Bughā's campaigns against other peoples of the Caucasus, but not against the Mtʻiuls. Finally, and perhaps most believably, this might mark a narrative attempt to supply distance between the caliph and Bughā. As we will see later, the *Book of Kʻartʻli* is the only source to identify Bughā as a Khazar. It is also the only source that inserts al-Mutawakkil into the campaign north of Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi: "when the *amir-mumin* became aware that he [Bughā] was negotiating with the Khazars, his clansmen, he sent word to Bughā that he should leave Kʻartʻli to Humed, son of Xalil [Muḥammad b. Khālid]."[80] With this rendering, Smbat's undermining of Bughā's plan in fact augments his pro-ʿAbbāsid agenda, since Bughā sought to expand his personal power via collaboration with his Khazar kinsmen. Accordingly, Smbat is proving his loyalty to the caliph by thwarting Bughā's grab for power.

Aborting the campaign against Ossetia, Bughā turned back towards Albania. He faced al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ (Σαναραῖοι of classical texts), who presented the greatest challenge to the campaign. Al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ were remarkably effective against Bughā's troops, defeating them multiple times in short succession. There is no modern consensus on the territory and origins of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ, but Khākhiṭ/Kaxetʻi in Georgia and Shakkī/Šakʻē in Albania appear regularly.[81] Al-Masʿūdī places them between Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi and Bāb al-Lān and identifies them as Christians; while Tʻovma confirms their Christian affiliation, he does not locate them exactly. Al-Masʿūdī also writes that they "claim to be descended from

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79. For an overview of the appearance and definition of Sakʻartʻvelo (Georgia) in Georgian literature, see Stephen Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

80. *Book of Kʻartʻli* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261-62.

81. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 62 n. 68 and 63 n. 70; Vladimir Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," *Bulletin of SOAS* 15, no. 3 (1953): 506; Ghazarian, "Armenien," 220.

the Arabs, namely from Nizār b. Maʿadd b. Muḍar, and a branch (*fakhdh*) of ʿUqayl, settled there since olden times." Minorsky dismisses this out of hand ("The original Tsʿanar may have been of Chechen origin. They certainly had nothing to do with Arab tribes"),[82] but we have no way to corroborate or invalidate these claims. The *Darband-nāmeh* merely explains that they lived in Georgia (Jurzān, which usually refers to Kʻartʻli).[83]

Bughā fought al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ either sixteen or nineteen times in only nine days and his repeated losses were humiliating.[84] While Tʻovma does not refer to any outside help, al-Yaʿqūbī explains that al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ turned to Byzantium, the Khazars, and the Saqāliba (Slavs) for support against Bughā's attacks. Faced with this army, Bughā wrote to al-Mutawakkil, who sent Muḥammad b. Khālid al-Shaybānī as governor over the North. This appeased al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ enough to sue for peace.[85] Laurent and Canard note that their main goal was to maintain the Kura River as a territorial divide, claiming that "ils ont à cet effet accepté tous les alliés, musulmans ou chrétiens, que l'intérêt du moment leur donnait."[86] Laurent and Canard's subsequent list of the allies of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ indicates that they were involved in power struggles between various groups of Arabs in the North, while al-Yaʿqūbī verifies that they were well-connected to other non-Georgian, both Christian and non-Christian, familial groups of the Caucasus and beyond.

Bughā's Campaign against Caucasian Albania

The repeated victories of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ in the North pushed Bughā back south into Caucasian Albania. We have comparatively little information on Albanian responses to Bughā's campaign because the Albanians left no written record of their own unless we count Movsēs Dasxurancʻi's tenth-century compilation, the *History of the Albanians,* which was written in Armenian. Dasxurancʻi, though, notes Bughā's campaigns only briefly: "In the fulfillment of the 300th year of the Armenian era [28.4.851 – 26.4.852] the Christian princes of Armenia and Albania paid the price for their sins, for in this year they were taken prisoner, cast into irons by the *tačik*s, exiled from their homes, and sent against their will to Baghdad."[87]

After his defeat at the hands of al-Ṣanāriyya/Canarkʻ, Bughā entered Bardhʿa/Partaw and subsequently attacked the stronghold Kithīsh/Kʻtʻiš (or: "the fortress of Kīsh in the district of al-Baylaqān"),[88] where he encountered an Albanian patrician named Abū Mūsā ʿĪsā b. Yūsuf b. [ukht?][89] Iṣṭifānūs, whom Ibn al-Athīr instead identifies as ʿĪsā b. Mūsā. He appears in

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82. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 162; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 47 for possible Chechen origin.

83. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 23 (in English) and 2 (in Arabic).

84. Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 19; Arcruni, *History,* 241; *Patmutʻiwn,* 274.

85. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, II 598; Markwart, *Südarmenien,* 200; Minorsky, *Sharvān,* 110 n. 2.

86. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 48.

87. Movsēs Dasxurancʻi, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, trans. C. J. F. Dowsett (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218, except that he supplies "Arabs" for *tačik*s; *Patmutʻiwn Ałuanicʻ ašxarhi* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakčʻutʻyun, 1983), 332.

88. Ibn Khaldūn, *Taʾrīkh*, IV 276. Al-Ṭabarī explains that Kithīsh/Kʻtʻiš is 10 *farsakh*s from al-Baylaqān/ Pʻaytakaran and 15 *farsakh*s from Bardhʿa/Partaw. See Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," 513.

89. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam,* IV 124 add the *ukht*.

Armenian as Esayi Apumusē, who was "noted as a reader and was known as 'son of a priest',"[90] a detail confirmed in the Georgian *Book of K'art'li*, which discusses "a certain priest's son who had become *mt'avari*."[91]

Declaring it "[an act of] great piety to slay the enemies of God,"[92] Esayi Apumusē promised his men martyrdom should they die facing Bughā's army. As we will see in more detail below, the Armenian Christians on the battlefield invoked the Second Coming and placed the battle into the broader story of the End of Time. Yet the Armenian forces were there to support Bughā and fight *against* the Albanian forces who rallied under the banner of Esayi Apumusē. Mušeł Bagratuni the son of Smbat Aplabas, whom T'ovma later acknowledges as one of the *naxarar*s who was not deported to Samarrāʾ, led the Armenians. Esayi Apumusē, then, fought Bagratuni troops as part of Bughā's army, facing off twenty-eight times over the course of an entire year. They desisted when Bughā presented Esayi Apumusē with a letter from al-Mutawakkil. Apumusē and his father were subsequently sent to Samarrāʾ.[93]

From Arabic sources alone, it seems that Bughā's campaign was even more destructive in the eastern lands (as Albania appears in Armenian sources) than in Armenia itself. Yet not all Albanian patricians fought Bughā's advance. Qiṭrīj, whose name is an Arabization of Ktrič or Ktričen (this also appears as Karič if the Armenian ս is mistaken for an ա), was the patrician of the Albanian stronghold at Jardmān/Gardman. This prince was "beguiled by the devil" and so collaborated with Bughā by turning over Vasak, the prince of al-Sīsajān/Siwnikʿ, "calculating that Bughā might favor him for this."[94] His efforts were evidently in vain, as Zīrak later conquered Jardmān/Gardman and took him prisoner.[95]

Again, as in Armenia and Georgia, there is no sense of ethnic solidarity that might have joined Abū Mūsā and Qiṭrīj into an Albanian alliance to preserve "Albania," because power was organized regionally in terms of principalities instead of provincially. Nor were the battles drawn by religious affiliation, even though Abū Mūsā evoked martyrdom and apocalyptic rhetoric to galvanize his troops.

Bughā's Second Campaign against Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan

As Bughā campaigned in Albania, Gurgēn Arcruni, the son of Apupelč [Abū Balj], a kinsman of the other Gurgēn Arcruni who had already been deported to Samarrāʾ, occupied the power vacuum in Armenia. T'ovma establishes his credentials as "a scion of Senekʿerim and of the Mamikoneans from Chen,"[96] meaning that he claimed descent from two of the most revered

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90. Arcruni, *History*, 241-42; *Patmut'iwn*, 276.

91. *Book of K'art'li* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261.

92. Arcruni, *History*, 243; *Patmut'iwn*, 278.

93. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; *History, Vol. 34*, 124 n. 408; Minorsky, "Caucasica IV," 512-14; Vardan Arewelcʿi, *La domination arabe en Arménie: extrait de L'Histoire universelle de Vardan traduit de l'arménien et annoté* (Louvain: Imprimerie J.-B. Istas, 1927), 63.

94. Drasxanakertcʿi, *History*, 123; *Patmut'iwn*, 128.

95. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 149; Arewelcʿi, *La domination arabe*, 63 mentions his imprisonment, but under Bughā himself without mention of Zīrak.

96. Arcruni, *History*, 256; *Patmut'iwn*, 300.

Armenian noble lines, the Arcrunis on his father's side and the Mamikoneans through his mother.

Gurgēn "acted wisely in not opposing the evil one" (Bughā), but instead fled to Bagratuni-held Sper (modern: İspir). While in the west, he defeated Byzantine forces and the emperor Michael III personally invited him to cross into Byzantine territory, hoping to turn him into an ally of Constantinople. Gurgēn instead fought Byzantine forces, for which Bughā himself reportedly offered his "profound thanks." That said, T'ovma mentions that Bughā's campaign pitted the caliphal army against Byzantine towns: "[Some] *tačik* soldiers from Bugha's army had come to attack the Greek forces in the castles. Gurgēn opposed them numerous times, inflicting no small loses on the *tačik* army."[97] At this point, then, three mutually belligerent armies occupied Bagratuni territory at close proximity to each other: the Byzantines, Bughā's troops (not including Bughā himself), and the Arcrunis. Smbat Aplabas, Bughā's Bagratuni ally, spoke on Gurgēn's behalf and convinced Bughā to see Gurgēn as an ally because of his success against the Byzantines, but this did not last.

To contend with Gurgēn, Bughā sent a lieutenant named Budayl in Arabic, Butel in Armenian, along with the ʿUthmānids of Barkrī/Berkri, known in Armenian as the Utʿmaniks. T'ovma again presents this in ethno-religious terms: "Valiantly distinguishing themselves, the Armenian troops battled the foreigners (ընդ այլազգիս) for many drawn-out hours, inflicting great losses on their army."[98] But, yet again, the battle lines were not so clearly drawn. When Gurgēn had been off fighting the Byzantines and the *tačik*s, rivals from his own house arose in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. Accompanying Bughā's forces were other members of the Arcruni family who did not embrace Gurgēn's claim to power and so hoped to profit from the disruption by winning al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan. In defeating Bughā's army, Gurgēn was also establishing his own rule over "numerous members of his own family, faithless relatives false to their pacts and oaths."[99] Gurgēn's defeat of caliphal forces was also a victory over "numerous members" of Arcrunis and the ʿUthmānids. And, again, there were Armenian Christians on both sides of this conflict. Bughā subsequently acknowledged Gurgēn's claim over al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.

After Bughā's departure from Armenia, Gurgēn had to protect his position against Ašot Arcruni when he returned from Samarrāʾ. With this, he had the help of Mūsā b. Zurāra's son, again demonstrating the interrelations between Muslim and Christian forces of the Caucasus. Ter- Łevondyan, though, adopts T'ovma's description of ethno-religious boundaries in his description of Muslim-Christian relations by offering the ʿUthmānids as a counterpoint: "In the second half of the ninth century, however, the Zurārids formed an exception insofar as they supported the Armenian *naχarar*s. The ʿUthmānids of Berkri, for example, in addition to their support for Bughā's expedition, also began to nourish designs against the Armenian *naχarar*s."[100] This overlooks the fact that the ʿUthmānids, precisely through "their support

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97. Arcruni, *History*, 259 except that Thomson renders *tačkac'* as Muslims; *Patmutʿiwn*, 302; Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie* 148.

98. Arcruni, *History*, 261 except that Thomson renders foreigners as Muslims; *Patmutʿiwn*, 306.

99. Arcruni, *History*, 261; *Patmutʿiwn*, 308.

100. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 56.

for Bugha's expedition," had previously fought alongside Arcruni forces as allies arrayed against Gurgēn. Mixed armies were the norm, such that the close relationship between the Zurārids and the Arcruni and Bagratuni houses cannot be construed as an anomaly. Given the power struggles within the Arcruni house itself, close relations between some Arcruni factions and the neighboring *amīr*s seems to have been central to bolstering rival claims to power.

The Immediate Aftermath of Bughā's Campaign

T'ovma, in his exuberance to extol Gurgēn Arcruni, subsequently fails to record significant details about Bughā's departure from the Caucasus. Despite the immense upheaval over the course of three years, Bughā's campaign came to an abrupt halt when T'ovma switches gears to recount the return of the captives from Samarrāʾ.

T'ovma claims that Bughā's goal was "the removal of the Armenian magnates from the country."[101] By this standard, the campaign was a resounding success. Even Smbat Aplabas, Bughā's closest Armenian ally, ended up in Samarrāʾ even if his sons did not. Yet Bughā's goals must have been much broader, as he also succeeded in removing the Albanian patricians from their territories, as well as the Muslim *amīr*s from Arzan/Arcn and Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi. The campaign cannot therefore be simplified as anti-Armenian or anti-Christian, despite the interpretations offered by T'ovma. Given the bewildering array of alliances and traitors alike in this dramatic struggle, T'ovma's explanation is soothingly and deceptively simple.

The goal for the remainder of this paper is to explicate those details that do not make sense in the framework of ethno-religious divisions by proposing that such a perspective merely reflects T'ovma's ideal community in lieu of a much more complicated reality. While religion and ethnicity certainly served as markers of communal identity, they did not always inform allegiances, which were forged locally. A closer look at ethnicity, religion, and gender in the construction of communities reveals a certain pragmatism whereby local concerns informed alliances aimed at protecting local power. In the face of external threats, these alliances served to efface differences within multiconfessional and multiethnic groups.

Ethnicity and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

As we saw above, A. Ter-Łevondyan claims that "the local Arabs had contributed in every way to the advance of Bugha's army."[102] Compounded by the concern for the Armenian nobility and the integrity of Armenian land, such a statement draws stark battle lines along ethnic identifiers. Ter-Łevondyan's view fairly reflects the descriptions of the campaign as found in T'ovma Arcruni's *History* should we render *tačik* as Arab. Yet despite this, T'ovma and other historians passing along information about the ninth-century Caucasus confirm

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101. Arcruni, *History*, 254; *Patmutʻiwn*, 296.

102. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 44. He refers here to the Jaḥḥāfids, a group of Qaysī Arabs who settled in Aršarunikʻ and Sirāj/Širak after marrying into the Armenian Mamikonean family in the eighth century. Al-Ṭabarī has Sawāda b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Jaḥḥāfī advise Yūsuf b. Muḥammad of Bagratuni duplicity, but this is the only reference to the Jaḥḥāfids in relation to Bughā's campaigns, making this conclusion suspect. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409 .

that the communities involved in Bughā's campaigns do not organize around Arabness or Armenianness.

By employing terms that are deliberately vague or avoiding the ethnic identifiers, medieval authors actually minimize the role of ethnicity in order to account for multiethnic communities. In fact, ethnic identifiers frequently emerge specifically to laud cooperation within multiethnic gatherings, rather than to inscribe differences between various social groups. Where ethnonyms are employed as markers of social difference, as with the use of "*tačik*" to refer to an Arab or "Elamite" for a Turk, these also have religious connotations that fit neatly in the narrative agenda of the medieval authors.

The Many Meanings of the Ethnonym Tačik

Modern scholars have struggled to conceptualize ethnonyms in reference to ʿAbbāsid-era communities. P. Crone, for example, clarifies that "'Arab' was a word with many meanings. One meaning certainly had to do with descent: a genuine Arab (*aṣīl, min anfusihim*) was a person who descended from an Arab tribesman on his or her father's side. But the word was rarely used to indicate descent alone." Instead, the term could also refer to an Umayyad sympathizer, to a "rigid, legalistic scholar," or even to any convert to Islam with passing knowledge of Arabic.[103] Given the changing definition and subjective guidelines for Arabness, then, we should be wary of relying on ethnicity as a way to understand the alliances around Bughā's campaign. While families or individuals may well have identified with Arabness in the Caucasus, we are left with sources that present significant barriers to conceptualizing what that meant.

This is particularly important because the word "Arab" almost never appears in Armenian sources on the campaign. Instead, medieval Armenian authors typically employ the ambiguous term *tačik*, whether for some local Muslims or for Bughā's troops. The Armenian word *tačik* comes from the Middle Persian. While harkening back to the Arabic طيء , the Middle Persian *tāčīk* and the Parthian *tāžīk* refer to Arabs (not just those of the Ṭāʾī tribe) before the rise of Islam and so typically appear in English translation as Arab. Several modern translations of Armenian texts similarly render *tačik* as "Arab" and the term was indeed used as such in pre-Islamic Armenian literature such as Agatʿangełos's *History of the Armenians*.[104]

Pre-Islamic variants of the word *tačik* also appear in other languages such as Georgian, Sogdian, Sanskrit, and Syriac.[105] From approximately the fourth century, authors writing in Syriac did not necessarily use ܛܝܝܐ (*ṭayyāyē*) to denote ethnicity (*ʿarabāyē* appears to render Arab), but rather lifestyle. Some scholars suggest, albeit initiating significant debate, that a

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103. Crone, *Nativist Prophets*; Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians,'" 365.

104. Heinrich Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1908), 86-87.

105. John Perry, "Tajik (i) the ethnonym," in *EIr*. On the Sogdian, see Werner Sundermann, "An Early Attestation of the Name of the Tajiks," in *Medioiranica: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 21st to the 23rd of May 1990*, ed. Wojciech Skalmowski and Alois van Tongerloo (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 163. On alternatives to the relationship between the Ṭāʾī tribe and *tačik*, see Hans Heinrich Schaeder, "Türkische Namen der Iranier," in *Festschrift Friedrich Giese*, ed. Gotthard Jäschke (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowwitz, 1941), 19-20.

ṭayyāyē might be understood as a nomad.[106] After the rise of Islam, the term was applied to Muslims, although not clearly relating to their ethnicity or religious affiliation. M. Penn has recently suggested that the term was deliberately vague to allow readers to efface markers of difference between the conquered and the conquerors. Discussing the *Bēt Ḥālē Disputation* between a notable and a Christian from the 720s, Penn notes that "[t]he text called the notable a *ṭayyāyē,* a Son of Hagar, or a Son of Ishmael—all terms that Syriac authors could also apply to Christians. The text avoided *Hagarene,* which was reserved only for Muslims."[107] In Syriac, then, the word *ṭayyāyē* is not necessarily an ethnonym, but rather plastic enough to read difference into social groupings according to the specific circumstances.

As a counterpoint, the variant *täžik also entered Turkish via the Sogdian *tāžīk* in the eighth century to refer to the Muslims involved in the conquest of Central Asia, who were both Arabs and Persians. It was typically used to denote Muslims irrespective of ethnicity. While many of the *täžik*s in contact with the Turks were likely Persians, it is not until the eleventh century with the rise of New Persian literature that the term reverts back to an ethnonym, this time to refer to Persians.[108] Again, the word may have also had social implications, separating nomadic and sedentary lifestyles.[109] "The distinction between Turk and Tajik became stereotyped to express the symbiosis and rivalry of the (ideally) nomadic military executive and the urban civil bureaucracy."[110] Here the meaning of *täžik* has shifted, such that its use in Syriac designated nomadic lifestyle while its use in Turkish a few centuries later provided the exact opposite meaning.

Given the contextually-dependent definition of the word *tačik,* then, we cannot in good faith organize the analysis of Bughā's campaign around its translation as Arab even if earlier Armenian authors such as Agatʿangełos used it as such. To do so would assume that the meaning remained stagnant in Armenian when it was fluid in every other language. In fact, most of the relevant Armenian sources employ the term in a more generic sense to mean Muslim, not Arab.[111] Tʿovma, for example, refers to one of the martyrs from Bughā's campaign as a Christian convert who was "a *tačik* and a Persian by race" (տաճիկ և ազգաւ պարսիկ), i.e., he was a Persian Muslim.[112] Later, he also generalizes about "all the races of the *tačik*s" (ամենայն ազգբն Տաճկաց).[113] This suggests that by the tenth century the Armenian word

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106. Judah Benzion Segal, "Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984): 100. Cf: the use of the ethnonyms "Kurd" or "Arab" to refer to nomads, refuted in James, "Arab Ethnonyms," 686; Retsö, "Earliest Arabs," 132-3; MacDonald, "Arabs," 290-1 and 94-7.

107. Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (2015), 73.

108. Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "Tādjīk," in *EI²*.

109. Schaeder, "Türkische Namen," 3.

110. Perry, "Tajik"; Schaeder, "Türkische Namen," 25 also discusses the use of "Turk and Tajik" as a phrase like *al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam* to refer to "alle Menschen."

111. Thomson typically translates *tačik* as such.

112. Arcruni, *History*, 207, see also 64 n. 6; *Patmutʿiwn*, 222.

113. Arcruni, *History*, 218 n. 7. Thomson glosses this: "here Thomas has especially in mind Arab settlement," citing Ter-Łevondyan and Laurent/Canard. Given the difficulties in pinning down the Arabness of local *amīr*s and the multiplicity of ethnicities Tʿovma includes in the caliphal forces, this interpretation should be revisited.

tačik implied a religious connotation although by comparison to the Syriac we might also wonder if the definition of the term is dependent largely on context.

The Fluidity and Narrative Function of Ethnonyms

Even without the fluid definition of the Armenian term *tačik*, it would be difficult to read the alliances and loyalties of the main protagonists of this story as ethnically proscribed. Our main sources on Bughā's campaign exhibit little interest in defining ethnicity and do not elaborate on ethnic differences. We already saw above that extant sources offer no clear evidence that the *amīr* of Arzan/Arcn Mūsā b. Zurāra or the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tpʻilisi Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl were in fact Arabs. There are other local Muslim patricians who formed "Arab emirates" in Armenia who similarly do not consistently appear as Arabs in medieval sources. For example, al-Yaʿqūbī identifies the Jaḥḥāfids as Sulamī (hence, Arab), but Drasxanakertcʻi claims that they were Persians, while modern scholars wonder if they might have been Kurds.[114] The unclaimed and contested claims of ancestry reveal the process of continual rewriting of identity in the medieval period, where our authors apply or withhold ethnonyms depending on circumstances.

This inconsistent assignment of ethnonyms demonstrates the flexibility of medieval identity construction, but more importantly, it also served a narrative function. Bughā himself serves as an interesting case. Almost all medieval sources identify him as a Turk, likely from the eastern frontiers of the Islamic world. Yet while some Caucasian sources identify Bughā as a Turk, two do not. First, a passage in the Georgian *Book of Kʻartʻli*, omitted from the Armenian redaction, suggests that he may instead have been Khazar.[115] Second, an Armenian source with a decidedly controversial date of composition instead claims that Bughā was "the son of a priest" from a town called Mutʻvan in the region of Albāq/Aɫbak, the capital of Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan.[116] On the one hand, these could reveal misinformation, disagreements, or simple ignorance in the same way that authors reveal uncertainty about how to group Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl or al-Khuwaythiyya/Xutʻ. But Bughā's alternative identities—Khazar and Armenian—locate him for a Caucasian audience, making him local as he allied and battled with other Caucasian powers. As we saw above, this may potentially supply distance between Bughā and the source of his power (the caliph), which functionally allowed Caucasian populations to declare themselves loyal to al-Mutawakkil while at the same time battling his general.

Tʻovma offers two clearer examples of how ethnonyms can serve a narrative function. First, he recognizes Bughā as "a Turk by race" (ազգաւ թուրք),[117] but he does not employ the term Turk consistently. Instead, he also frequently refers to the participants in the

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114. Ter-Ɫevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 34.

115. *Book of Kʻartʻli* in Thomson, *Rewriting*, 261-62. "But when the *amir-mumin* [al-Mutawakkil] became aware that he was negotiating with the Xazars, his clansmen, he sent word to Buǧa that he should leave Kʻartʻli to Humed, son of Xalil [Muḥammad b. Khālid]." *Rewriting*, 262 n. 14: "his clansmen: The author equates Xazars and Turks."

116. Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller," 214.

117. Arcruni, *History*, 193; *Patmutʻiwn*, 194.

campaign as Elamites, a term that, like *tačik*, claims a number of meanings and so refuses easy categorization. R. Thomson explains that later Armenian historians employ Elamite to refer to Turks, but "Thomas himself generally uses the expression in a vaguer sense, in combination with other regions of Asia." He clarifies, though, that Tʿovma is probably informed here by biblical precedents such as Isaiah 22:6 and 21:2, the later referring in fact to Persians instead of Turks.[118] In choosing to use Elamite instead of Turk, Tʿovma supplies a gloss to connect his story to the Biblical framework, a project that speaks more to his goals than to concern about the ethnic "other." This places Bughā's campaign in a biblical context for Armenian readers, but leaves ethnic identification uncertain because of the difficulty in applying the term Elamite to contemporary society.

Tʿovma also uses ethnonyms to advance his narrative in his description of the caliphal army. He recognizes the diversity of the caliphal army by placing the explicit suggestion into the mouths of caliphal advisors, who opined that al-Mutawakkil should send forces "from all the nations that are under your [caliphal] control."[119] He follows up with a list of participants from "Syria and Babylonia, Turkastan and Khuzhastan, Media and Ela, Egypt and as far as inner Tachkastan near the borders of Sakastan,"[120] including "the archers and stalwart bowmen of the Elamites and Arabians."[121] Later, Tʿovma also claims that "Bugha despatched soldiers from all nations, from among all magnates and all governors, Persians, Elamites, Babylonians, and Arabs, who had come with him to wage war at the command of the caliph and the great general, more than 15,000 men."[122]

Tʿovma's insistence that the caliphal army was pulled from all corners of the Caliphate has several possible explanations. It might reflect how diverse the caliphal army actually was, such that the Armenian authors cannot summarily identify the troops. Arabic sources corroborate that the higher ranks of soldiers were Turkish slaves and the infantry under Bughā's command were *maghāriba,* or North African troops in the service of the ʿAbbāsids.[123] They appear as *małripikkʿ* in Armenian.[124] This could suggest the involvement of Berbers or East Africans, but most likely refers to Qaysī or Yamanī Arabs from the Ḥawf (lit: "edge"), the Egyptian district to the east of the Nile delta.[125]

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118. Arcruni, *History*, 193 n. 1.

119. Arcruni, *History*, 190; *Patmutʿiwn*, 196. This same idea is repeated in a letter from al-Mutawakkil to Bughā: *History*, 217; *Patmutʿiwn*, 236.

120. Arcruni, *History*, 191; *Patmutʿiwn*, 198.

121. Arcruni, *History*, 192-93; *Patmutʿiwn*, 200 (զկապարճաւորս և զկորովիս աղեղնաւորացն Ելեմացւոց և Արաբացւոց).

122. Arcruni, *History*, 209; *Patmutʿiwn*, 224.

123. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1416; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VII 67 speaking of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl.

124. Bagratuni, "The Anonymous Storyteller," 214; *Patmutʿiwn ananun zrucʿagri karcecʿeal Šapuh Bagratuni* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH Gitutʿyunneru Akademiayi Hratarakčʿutʿyun, 1971), 147.

125. Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: a History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.)* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 38. Here he is relying on al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, VII 118; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, VI 452. The term *maghāriba* is frequently placed in contrast to the *mashāriqa,* "Easterners," which frequently referred to Turks. It literally means "Westerners." Some were freemen, but others were prisoners from al-Muʿtaṣim's campaign in Egypt in 214. See Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the*

Yet T'ovma's list of ethnonyms ("Persians, Elamites, Babylonians, and Arabs") was not meant to cast the campaign as an ethnic conflict, but rather served as an embellishment to vaunt the significance of Armenia, i.e., that this matter was so pressing to the caliph that he mustered armies from the entire Islamic world, or to suggest the military valor of the Armenians, i.e., that it would take the entire Caliphate to check the military threat posed by the Armenians.

The complete absence of ethnonyms (e.g., the Zurārids), the variability of ethnic identifiers (e.g., Bughā), and the use of ethnonyms as a tool to further the narrative agenda (e.g., Elamites) corroborate the conclusions above about the flexibility of the term *tačik*, namely that our authors allow for malleable constructions of ethnic identity. The "indeterminacy of identity," as M. Cooperson calls it, acts "to destabilize any rigid definition of such ethnonyms such as 'Arab' and 'Iranian' and 'Persian.'"[126] Given the contextual value of ethnonyms of some of the main protagonists examined here, the indeterminacy of identity in the sources about Bughā's campaign constitutes a deliberate attempt at vagueness specifically to avoid the reduction of communities to ethnic monoliths. This cannot imply that ethnicity was either important or unimportant to individuals; rather, there were ways that medieval authors could rewrite or completely ignore ethnic divides in the formation of communities or alliances between communities in the face of conflict. Ethnonyms appear and disappear to allow for the creation of communities that fit the narrative agenda of our authors.

Religion and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

Many scholars of Late Antique and early Islamic history have honed in on religion in lieu of ethnicity as the primary category of social differentiation. While allowing for the persistence of ethnic identifiers in early Islamic Iraq, M. Morony claims that the societal shifts after the arrival of Islam "meant the replacement of other means of identification based on language, occupation, or geographical location by a primary identity based on membership in a religious community."[127] Others follow suit, such as Sizgorich's assertion that

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Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State (London: Routledge, 2005), 125-6; Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: the Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 260 n. 622. The identification of *maghāriba* as Berber troops seems to refer to a later period. See Mohamed Talbi, "Maghāriba," in *EI²*; Paul Walker, "Kutāma, Kalbids and Other Westerners: The Maghāriba in Cairo," *Alifbâ: Studi arabo-islamici e mediterranei* 22 (2008): 48, identifies the *maghāriba* in Fāṭimid Cairo as "Arabs as well as Berbers, true Maghribīs from Ifrīqiya [Tunisia] along with the Ṣiqillīs [Silicians] (and possible Andalusīs)—that is, anyone from west of Egypt."

126. Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians,'" 382. Comparable to the "indeterminacy of identity," R. Payne has addressed the avoidance of ethnicity in pre-Islamic Mesopotamia, also for a narrative reason (for Christians "to articulate their social status in terms of their cities and noble lineages"); Payne, "Avoiding Ethnicity," 207, see also 20.

127. Michael Morony, "Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17, no. 2 (1974): 8. While he is primarily concerned with Jewish and Christian communities in Iraq, he extends this to Muslims, as well: "Although the social realities of Muslim Arabs in this period have more to do with tribalism, Islam contained within itself the concept of a community that replaced the bonds of kinship with a bond of faith. The working out of this concept among Muslims in Iraq where they forged the bonds of a religious community after the fashion of the people around them lies at the

"in the premodern Mediterranean and Near East, every community was, first and foremost, a religious institution."[128]

A glance at Tʿovma's *History* suggests that these conclusions about the centrality of religious affiliations to identity construction might indeed be transferable to the Caucasus. As Tʿovma discusses the conversion of an Arcruni patrician to Islam as a result of Bughā's campaign, he notes that the stories of apostates no longer belong in his history: "lest I expatiate too long on his shameful error—wicked, selfish, unrepentant, and without scruple— let us eject him from the annals of the princes."[129] Tʿovma's story, then, revolves specifically around Arcruni Christians, so we should assume that Tʿovma defined communities around religious conviction instead of ethnicity or even closer familial ties. This is usual for medieval Armenian sources; as N. Garsoïan points out "they stress the unity of the Armenian Church, even where this leads them into contradictions."[130]

Tʿovma's account of Bughā's campaign is a study in such contradictions. For all of his rhetoric, we consistently face difficulties in organizing communities around religious convictions. Religion was significant to communities of the Caucasus, so Tʿovma is not alone in suggesting that religion defined communities. Yet Tʿovma's projection of a Christian community working in tandem against the religious "other" cannot withstand scrutiny. Throughout Bughā's campaign, Christian communities splinter, while Christian and Muslim communities stand side-by-side.

Tʿovma's descriptions of two moments of the campaign stand out as particularly enlightening due to the religious overtones present in Tʿovma's descriptions: Bughā's siege of the Arcruni patricians in Nkan and the Bagratuni battle against Abū Mūsā, the patrician of Kithīsh/Kʿtʿiš. These demonstrate that the agendas of local patricians did not align with Tʿovma's religiously-charged expectations. Instead, these moments reveal the metanarrative of Christianness that Tʿovma used to supply meaning to Bughā's campaign. Through his liberal use of Ełišē's fifth-century *History of Vardan and the Armenian Wars,* Tʿovma emplots Bughā's campaign onto the history of Late Antique Christian persecution, offering a charged interpretation of the campaign rather than its description.

Fissures within Christianness

Tʿovma claims that the Arcrunis were united before the arrival of Bughā. Yet the purported unity of the Arcrunis, let alone the Armenian forces *writ large*, falls apart on numerous occasions. The conveniently-named Vasak[131] "came to the caliph bearing letters full of

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heart of the emergence of an Islamic society" (130).

128. Sizgorich, *Violence and belief*, 155.

129. Arcruni, *History*, 224; *Patmutʿiwn*, 248.

130. Nina Garsoïan, "Armenia in the Fourth Century: an Attempt to Redefine the Concepts 'Armenia' and 'Loyalty,'" *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 8 (1971): 342.

131. Vasak Siwni was the traitor *par excellence* in Armenian literature, lambasted for siding with the Persians at the Battle of Avarayr in the fifth century. Tʿovma's audience, who would have been familiar with Ełišē and Łazar, would have noted the significance of the name Vasak here. This is one of the many ways in which Tʿovma's descriptions of Bughā's campaign serve as a sequel to Ełišē.

charges against the nobles living in Armenia and piling [blame for] much damage to affairs of state on Prince Ashot. By their capricious terms these stirred up the caliph in hostile fashion against the prince."[132] Bughā would later supply the crown of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan to Vasak Arcruni as a consolation prize on his way to Samarrāʾ, where he converted to Islam.[133]

This Vasak is not alone in his plots against Ašot. "Although Ašot, the great prince of the Arcruni house, had taken measures to resist the violent Bugha with his warriors, yet, his *naxarar*s were not of the same mind with him in this matter."[134] According to Tʿovma, many of the patricians of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan failed to uphold the noble intentions of his hero by "feigning friendship" yet approaching Bughā for right of safe passage. "They loved turbulence more than peace, destroying the unity of harmonious concord between brothers, relatives, and friends wherever they found it to exist. So they went out like the traitor of the Incarnate Saviour."[135] Tʿovma is here lambasting scions of lesser-known families in al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan, the Vahevunis and Trunis, for collaborating with Bughā instead of following Ašot Arcruni, yet again breaking down the reductive Armenian v. Arab narrative. Specifically, this treachery is described in religious overtones as an act against Jesus himself, but unlike the example of Vasak there is nothing to suggest that the Vahevunis or Trunis converted to Islam. Tʿovma presents the patricians of al-Basfurrajān/Vaspurakan as enemies to the Christian cause because they did not fight Bughā despite the fact that they were Christians.

This same fracturing of the Christian families is found elsewhere in Tʿovma's descriptions of Arcruni responses to Bughā's campaign. When Gurgēn son of Apupelč faced Bughā's forces, "Even the priests among the multitude of fugitives took part in the battle, for it was a spiritual battle and not a physical one; they were fighting for the holy churches and the people of God."[136] Gurgēn prayed and recited psalms, and his army was even accompanied by angels: "But not only the valiant Armenian heroes fought in that great battle; there were also incorporeal, heavenly hosts fighting with the Armenian army."[137] There are two points to keep in mind about this encounter, though. First, we saw above that Bughā's forces were supplemented with both the ʿUthmānids and rival factions of the Arcruni family. So some of the enemies arrayed against Gurgēn that day were Arcruni Armenian Christians. Mixed Muslim-Christian armies were in fact the norm in this campaign. Second, this description is dependent on earlier models of Armenian literature (Ełišē also has priests fighting for the "Armenian Christian" cause) that Tʿovma manipulates in order to build borders for Armenian Christian identity.

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132. Arcruni, *History*, 180; *Patmutʿiwn*, 180.

133. Laurent and Canard, *L'Arménie,* 148. On Ašot's imprisonment, see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, III 1410. On Vasak's conversion, see Arcruni, *History*, 224; *Patmutʿiwn*, 248.

134. Drasxanakertcʿi, *History*, 119; *Patmutʿiwn*, 122.

135. Arcruni, *History*, 201; *Patmutʿiwn*, 210-12.

136. Arcruni, *History*, 214; *Patmutʿiwn*, 232.

137. Arcruni, *History*, 214; *Patmutʿiwn*, 232.

Interconfessional Cooperation

There are plenty of other moments during the campaign, including descriptions of Abū Mūsā, that confirm the problematic assumptions about Christianness as a bond in Tʿovma's history. As with the example of Gurgēn Arcruni, Tʿovma has the Albanian patrician Abū Mūsā appeal to religious solidarity: "Only let us with united hearts take refuge in God's help. If it happens that anyone is killed, it will be considered a glorious thing for himself and his clan, and he will receive a martyr's crown from Christ. For it will not be a death of a common sort, but one on behalf of the holy church and God's people."[138]

At the subsequent battle, Mušeł the son of Smbat Aplabas "was stationed in the open on a hill, and stood there watching in fearful and tremendous amazement,"[139] contemplating the power of the Cross and ruminating on the Second Coming:

> He raised his mind to the future coming of Christ and the awesome thunderings and crashings that will then occur: the bolts of fire and fearsome consternation on earth, and how the bands of angels will press forward one after the other, and how the Lord's cross will shine forth with awesome rays, and whatever accompanies these at the future coming of Christ on the last day.[140]

Tʿovma's descriptions of Bagratuni veneration of the Cross and Mušeł's encouragement of his coreligionists' battle in defense of Christianity obscure the fact that Mušeł was actually present at the battle to fight for Bughā, not as succor for the Christian Albanian forces under the command of Abū Mūsā. The Bagratunis, despite their apparent admiration for the devotion of the Christian Albanians who were fighting the caliphal army, were still putting their swords at Bughā's disposal. At the end of his description of captives in Samarrāʾ, Tʿovma specifies that the Bagratunis, including Mušeł explicitly, were the only nobles left in the North because they had cooperated and heeded Bughā's commands.

In fact, these accounts demonstrate repeatedly that multiconfessional armies were the norm throughout the course of Bughā's campaign. The problem, then, lies in reconciling Tʿovma's construction of communities around religious conviction against the examples he himself provides of Christians aiding Muslim armies against their Christian coreligionists. The crux of this endeavor lies in Tʿovma's extensive reliance on an earlier Armenian history in order to construct Armenianness and Christianness.

Ełišē and the Metanarrative of Persecution

Tʿovma's descriptions of Bughā's campaign are undoubtedly charged with religious expectations. The leaders recite psalms and pray as they battle. They rely on the aid of angels when victorious and are crowned with martyrdom when defeated. Yet this focus on religious difference is understandably absent in Arabic accounts of the campaign. Additionally,

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138. Arcruni, *History*, 242; *Patmutʿiwn*, 276.

139. Arcruni, *History*, 247; *Patmutʿiwn*, 284.

140. Arcruni, *History*, 247; *Patmutʿiwn*, 284.

T'ovma—and other Armenian and Arabic sources—preserve details to add nuance to this neat narrative of Christianness in the Caucasus.

The borders that T'ovma constructs between Christian and non-Christian or Armenian and non-Armenian are his own. As D. Nirenburg reminds us,

> The choice of language [of persecution] was an active one, made in order to achieve something, made within contexts of conflict and structures of domination, and often contested. Thus when medieval people made statements about the consequences of religious difference, they were making claims, not expressing accomplished reality, and these claims were subject to barter and negotiation before they could achieve force in any given situation.[141]

T'ovma is making his own claims when he presents the campaign as a confrontation between Christians and Muslims despite the fact that the protagonists of this campaign did not always find allies among their coreligionists and demonstrated no qualms working across confessional lines. In the process, he borrowed a framework of persecution from Ełišē, whose fifth-century Armenian *History* described the Sasanian attacks on Armenia, Georgia, and Albania as religiously charged.

J. Muyldermans was the first modern scholar to notice that T'ovma repurposed large sections of Ełišē's *History* to describe al-Mutawakkil's reign,[142] but R. Thomson has expanded his brief remarks substantially, meticulously marking where T'ovma borrows and blends discrete phrases or entire passages from Ełišē into his account of Bughā's campaign. So, for example, Ełišē expounds at great length about the unity of the Armenians and their common devotion to the Christian cause. While Ełišē claims that "up to this point I have not at all hesitated to describe the afflictions of our nation which were cruelly inflicted upon us by the foreign enemies of the truth," so T'ovma writing five centuries later could opine that "up to this point we have not hesitated to relate the dangers and tribulations which befell us from the enemies of the truth."[143] T'ovma's reliance on Ełišē rests mainly on a few main topics: political leaders (al-Mutawakkil is fashioned on the model of Yazdegerd and Bughā on Mihrnerseh), ruminations on the unity of the Armenian people and their faith, and stories of persecution and martyrdom.[144]

This depiction of Bughā's campaign as persecution of Christians is a way to lend meaning to the story by linking it to one of the foundation narratives of the Armenian people, viz., the defeat at Avarayr and simultaneously tapping into a universal theme of persecution in early Christian literature. By invoking a metanarrative of persecution, individuals no longer

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141. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 6. For a similar discussion in an Armenian setting, see Garsoïan, "Armenia," 342, which separates claims of Movsēs Xorenac'i re: "a single, unified Armenia" and "the unity of the Armenian Church" from the evidence offered to the contrary.

142. Joseph Muyldermans, "Un procédé hagiographique," *Handēs Amsōreay* 40 (1926).

143. Arcruni, *History*, 49 and 189; *Patmut'iwn*, 194; Ełišē, *The History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. Robert Thomson (Delmar: Caravan Books), 141; *Vardani ev Hayoc' paterazmi masin* (Erevan: Erevani hamalsarani hratarakč'ut'yun, 1989).

144. Robert Thomson has expounded on the relationship between T'ovma and Ełišē in the introduction and notations of the former.

represent their own transitory interests or local concerns, but rather become transformed into representatives of their faith at large.

> Understood in this way, moments of conflict with other communities became legible as new episodes in an ancient cycle of persecution, in which the survival of the one true community of God upon earth depended upon the capacity of true Christians for intransigence and, increasingly, active or even violent resistance.[145]

Conflict thus lends an opportunity for interpretation, a chance to delineate and enforce communal boundaries despite the popular tendency to overlook differences in ethnically and religiously diverse milieux.

Gender and Communal Identity in the Medieval Caucasus

While our medieval authors not only divided the world along ethnic and religious borders into their world, they also chronicled the deeds of people who crossed these lines. We have, then, an opportunity to look past the metanarrative and to chip away at the suggestion that ethno-religious solidarity informed medieval loyalties. Rather than following Tʻovma's lead here, we might examine the individuals who do not perform Christianity in any recognizable way. In Bughā's campaign, women frequently reveal the dissonance between communal identity as it played out and the imagined ethno-religious solidarity. Here we shift from ethnicity and religion—which operate in our texts based on their ability to further our authors' narratives—to the women who defy these agendas.

Women as Negotiators in Bughā's Campaign

The political exchanges related to Bughā's campaign demonstrate that individuals, in many cases women, navigated between different ethnic and religious groups, promoting the creation of a local identity not defined in strict sense in either ethnic or religious terms. For example, the Bagratunis were related through marriage to the Arcrunis, as Ašot Msaker Bagratuni's daughter Hṙipʻsimē, sister to both Bagarat and Smbat Bagratuni, was the mother of Ašot Arcruni. "A woman wise in words and deeds, very intelligent and also pious," she appeared before Yūsuf b. Muḥammad and convinced him to make peace with the Arcrunis.[146] In other words, a Christian Bagratuni noblewoman approached a Muslim Khurāsānī *mawlā* governor on behalf of her Arcruni husband's family to broker terms. She later came before Bughā to beg clemency for her son Gurgēn and subsequently followed her sons to captivity in Samarrāʾ.[147] Hṙipʻsimē demonstrates that women had *political* clout in the medieval Caucasus, while other women in this story not only negotiate terms, but also serve as symbols of the alliances that draw together familial groups of different ethnicities and religions. As such, these women reveal the *social* power wielded by women as cultural mediators in the medieval Caucasus.

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145. Sizgorich, *Violence and belief*, 274.

146. Arcruni, *History*, 184; *Patmutʻiwn*, 186.

147. Arcruni, *History*, 210; *Patmutʻiwn*, 22.

Mūsā b. Zurāra married an Armenian Christian woman, the sister or daughter of Bagarat Bagratuni. T'ovma explains how she, like Hŕip'simē, served as an intermediary between Muslim and Christian armies. Before Bughā's arrival in Armenia, the Bagratunis and the Zurārids clashed, which led to the interference of Mūsā's wife to beg her kinsmen to spare the lives of her husband's men.[148] This episode establishes her as a mediator in her own right, walking with immunity between two hostile armies in a way that, presumably, most men could not. She was not only safe, but also an effective negotiator because she belonged, effectively, to both communities. Mūsā's marriage into the Bagratuni family therefore offered him immediate gains in local disputes, but it also created lasting ties between an Armenian Christian and a (Syrian? Armenian?) Muslim family, in practice redrawing the borders of local communities by forging alliances that allowed them to respond as one in defense of local interests despite differences in ethnicity and religion. This dramatically changes local responses to Bughā's campaign.

Mūsā backed al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut' in their murder of Yūsuf, making him complicit in fomenting rebellion against the caliph. Al-Ṭabarī's history suggests that he defected because his marital ties to the Bagratunis weighed heavier on him than his connection to the caliphal administrators: "When Yūsuf deported Buqrāṭ b. Ashūṭ [Bagarat Bagratuni the son of Ašot Masker], the Patrikioi took an oath to kill Yūsuf and vowed to shed his blood. Mūsā b. Zurāra went along with them in this. He was responsible for the daughter of Buqrāṭ."[149] The fate of the Zurārid family rested on Mūsā's decision to ally with the Bagratunis instead of bow to caliphal authority. Mūsā's wife is not acting of out of her interests, but rather serves as a textual marker for local loyalties because she is the most visible symbol of the Zurārid-Bagratuni alliance.

While there are several other mentions of women intervening in political discussions in the course of Bughā's campaign, both Arabic and Armenian sources offer the most information about the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, the *amīr* of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. As the daughter of the King of the Throne, she similarly served as an intermediary between different kinship groups. In this example, though, the marriage does not (to our knowledge) prompt any demonstrable change in the response to Bughā's campaign. We hear nothing of the King of the Throne or his response to Bughā's siege of Tiflīs/Tp'ilisi. Yet we do find a woman claiming a prominent place in both Arabic and Armenian accounts of a military siege, negotiating, albeit unsuccessfully, with the religious and ethnic "other" on behalf her husband. She also serves as a reminder of the multiconfessional and multiethnic communities that solidified around local interests. Backed by the Christian al-Khuwaythiyya/Xut', a (Christian? Avar?) woman faced a combined force of Muslim Turks and Christian Bagratunis in an effort to save her Muslim husband.

These three women illustrate the close relationship between different ethnic and religious communities by producing a traceable thread to tie together diverse kinship groups in the Caucasus. Through their marriages, they are able to navigate across religious and/or ethnic boundaries and so serve as the connection between diverse groups looking to ally in defense of local concerns against the outsider.

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148. Arcruni, *History*, 177; *Patmutʻiwn*, 174-6.

149. Al-Ṭabarī, *History, Vol. 34*, 114; *Taʾrīkh*, III 1409.

Gender, Power, and Identity Construction

Modern studies on identity and conflict, particularly those written about al-Andalus, have established the role of interfaith marriage as a key to understanding boundary construction and maintenance between discrete groups. Following Pitt-Rivers's study of intermarriage in the Hebrew Bible, several modern studies on al-Andalus suggest that a powerful group would not allow their women to marry an outsider because such a marriage would symbolize their inferiority or their inability to protect their own community. The dominant group marries or enslaves the women of the weak group in an "aggressive strategy" to proclaim their hegemonic power over their neighbors by controlling the reproductive abilities and subsequent children of their weaker neighbors.[150] This perspective relies on an assumption that sexual intercourse is an expression of hegemonic power: "Penetration symbolizes power. For men of one group to have sex with women of another is an assertion of power over the entire group."[151] As Barton claims, "[a]llowing outsiders to engage in sexual relations with a group's own women could be construed as an act of submission, as a metaphor for external domination."[152] He goes so far as to recognize intermarriage between Muslims and Christians in al-Andalus as "an instrument of psychological warfare"[153] and claims that interfaith "sex was, perhaps, the ultimate colonizing gesture."[154] These claims rely heavily on the assimilation of sex and hegemonic power and on the laws and customs dictating that children of mixed marriages belonged to their father's ethnoreligious community.

With the possible exception of the marriage reported between al-Mutawakkil and the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, none of this adequately describes our examples. In the medieval Caucasus, the emphasis is not on contesting or displaying power, but on accruing power. It is hard to imagine that the marriage between Mūsā b. Zurāra and Bagarat Bagratuni's daughter signifies an admission that the Bagratunis were politically submissive to the *amīr* of Arzan/Arcn. Arzan/Arcn was not powerful, nor could it have been representative of Islamic power.[155]

The interpretation of interfaith sex as boundary-maintenance in al-Andalus relies on sources from a period when Islamic power in the peninsula had fallen, or at least collapsed southward, and such boundaries were part of the broader process of societal transformation

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150. Ragnhild Johnsrud Zorgati, *Pluralism in the Middle Ages: Hybrid Identities, Conversion, and Mixed Marriages in Medieval Iberia* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 160. Many of the studies on al-Andalus rely on Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: or, The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). In particular, his seventh chapter examines sexual hospitality and marriage patterns in Genesis to analyze the relationship between political power and intermarriage between discreet cultural or familial groups.

151. Karras, apud. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 39.

152. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 69.

153. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 6.

154. Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 41.

155. If the modern theorists on Muslim-Christian intermarriage have the key to understanding this, it may very well lie in the fact that interfaith marriage in al-Andalus tended to involve *muwallad* families, that is: locals who had converted to Islam, instead of Arab or Berber émigrés. On this, see Zorgati, *Pluralism*, 94. This seems to hold true for our examples, as well, given that both Muslim *amīr*s in question were probably not Arabs, but rather converts or descendants of converts.

at that particular time. The intermarriages of the medieval Caucasus are perhaps more easily compared to the many instances of intermarriage in Islamic al-Andalus before the expansion of Christian power in that they serve as political alliances.[156] In the Caucasus, interfaith marriage was a way to collapse boundaries by blending discrete communities and to solidify relations between groups of different ethnicities or religious affiliations.

Intermarriage produced immediate ambassadors in the wives and, later, the children who could traverse both worlds. So, while Mūsā b. Zurāra's Bagratuni wife could stand between and negotiate with her brother and her husband, the half-Bagratuni, half-Zurārid son from that union was similarly claimed by both sides. Abū al-Maghrāʾ, who also appears as Abū al-Muʿizz in Arabic and is known as Aplmaxray in Armenian, clearly maintained a close relationship with both the Armenian noble houses (he married an Arcruni woman) and local Muslim *amīr*s (in particular, the nearby banū Shaybān). He crosses the ethnoreligious boundaries and appears simultaneously as part of both communities. Despite the fact that Abū al-Maghrāʾ usually appears as a Muslim, Drasxanakertcʿi claims that he was secretly Christian,[157] allowing him the religious identifiers that mark him as an insider to both Bagratuni and Zurārid society. In Abū al-Maghrāʾ, we find the results of a deliberate blurring of ethnoreligious communities to create a locally organized identity in order to facilitate close alliances between Muslims and Christians, Armenians and others. Again, the study of the main alliances responding to Bughā's campaign reveals the significance of local instead of universal markers of medieval identity.

Agency, Belonging, and the Flexibility of Identity

The recognition that women both created and crossed boundaries—the very thing that allows historians like Nadia El-Cheikh to place women as a central element to the contestation of identity as a whole—presents modern scholars with a promising approach to the role of both women and gender in history and historiography. Women mediated between different ethno-religious groups and, in the specific examples associated with Bughā's campaign, this even placed women directly on the battlefield.

At the same time, the jump from power to agency requires substantiation. Despite the centrality of these women in the history of the campaign—the clear recognition of their political and social power—historians recorded very little about them personally. Extant sources do not even preserve the names of the wives of Mūsā b. Zurāra or Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, let alone speak to their own self-identification as Armenian or as Avar or to their attachment to any particular religion. Modern scholars might hypothesize, for example, that the wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl is a Christian Avar because she is the daughter of *ṣāḥib al-Sarīr*, but this is an inference based on generalized group identity rather than self-referential evidence. Did her identity perforce mirror her father's identity?[158] Did she see herself as Avar? Did she remain

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156. For examples, see Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 105-6; Janina M. Safran, *Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Islamic Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 105-06.

157. Drasxanakertcʿi, *History*, 145; *Patmutʿiwn*.

158. Eastmond, in his study of Tamta, similarly examines the blurred lines between Georgianness and

Christian even as she married a Muslim man? Tʻovma claims that she wandered the camp unveiled "which was not customary for the women of the *tačik* people" (տաճկական ազգի կանանց);[159] does this mean that she had converted or that she had always been Muslim? Perhaps she remained Christian, but was expected to follow Muslim customs as the wife of a powerful *amīr*. Could she, as an individual instead of as a representative of her father's or husband's communities, make her own religious or cultural decisions? Did she choose to marry Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl? She certainly did not choose to marry Bughā, but she was subsequently able to demand revenge.

Historians of al-Andalus have also tackled this problem, recognizing the liminality of women in medieval sources even while women stepped over the lines of religious, ethnic, and cultural difference. J. Coope, for example, recently noted that "[t]he ideology of gender also created unclear boundaries during the Umayyad period. A woman was both part of and not part of her ethnic and religious group."[160] By framing women as outsiders to their own communities instead of allowing them access to multiple communities and the ability to mediate between different communities, these women retain their subaltern position in the world drawn and ruled by men. The primary disconnect between Coope's position and the evidence marshalled here relates to questions of belonging and, again, to power. Coope argues that the status of women of al-Andalus was akin to *dhimmitude*, i.e., that they were outsiders even to their own communities, because they were all similarly "a subordinate category of person in Sharīʿah" without full legal rights.[161] Men might change their identities by becoming Muslims or Arabs through conversion or *walāʾ*, but women will always retain secondary status.[162] This opens a few possible avenues of discussion. First, belonging in an ethnic or religious group is not akin to citizenship, and does not entail or require full legal rights and responsibilities. Women might have curtailed rights but still rightfully claim Arabness or Christianness, etc. Further, secondary legal status—as Coope herself points out—cannot equate to how power plays out on the ground. Even if the political and social systems stacked against them, we might still talk of women's agency within these structures.

The centrality of women in the narratives about Bughā's campaign has little to do with the formal status of women in Caucasian society or under Armenian or Islamic law, but with the ability of élite women to speak to power. As rare as it may be, there are at least some indications that women asserted themselves, meaning that they were not solely pawns in

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Armenianness and, further, the marriage of an Armenian woman to men of different ethno-religious affiliations. He claims that we might discuss Tamta's identity based on what we know of her father's identity; Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World: the Life and Encounters of a Medieval Noblewoman from the Middle East to Mongolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

159. Arcruni, *History*, 239 except that Thomson supplies "Muslims" for *tačkakan*; *Patmutʻiwn*, 272.

160. Jessica A. Coope, *The Most Noble of People: Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Identity in Muslim Spain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 2.

161. Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 87.

162. Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 90.

their fathers', brothers', or husbands' contestations.[163] Bughā did not technically deport Hṛipʿsimē Arcruni, but rather she followed her sons to Samarrāʾ in grief. Further, Gurgēn the son of Apupelč married a widow named Helen to gain control of al-Zawazān/Anjewacikʿ after she not only proposed marriage to him, but ordered him to be quick about it. The wife of Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl confronted Bughā, and then demanded recompense for her fate from the caliph himself. In short, Tʿovma's account of the conflict suggests that women claimed their own voices in the Caucasus, albeit within the restraints of both a patriarchal society and a hierarchical power structure. In other words, they were constrained not only by their position as women in a male-dominated society, but also by the expectations placed on them due to their social status as wives or daughters of the political élite. Yet even with these restrictions, they were actors, not outsiders, in their own multiform communities. If modern scholars cannot create a space for women to claim some modicum of agency, they actively efface those moments when women such as the wives of Mūsā b. Zurāra or Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl effectively shifted (or even ineffectually attempted to shift) the political and military landscape, as we see happening during Bughā's campaign.

Conclusions

The focus on identity in this article is dictated by the role that the campaign currently plays in discussions of medieval Armenian history. Modern scholars have allowed Tʿovma's agenda to inform our discussions about the campaign, maintaining his claim that Armenian Christians defended their Armenianness and Christianness against the *tačik*s. This article has challenged this interpretation by using both Armenian and Arabic sources on the campaign to identify and problematize the metanarrative offered in Tʿovma's version. It has also explored the campaign in a broader Caucasian setting to decentralize the focus on Armenia and Armenianness for a campaign that stretched much further afield.

Ethnic differences cannot make sense of this campaign. We focused above on Arabness, particularly on the fluidity of the term *tačik* and our sources' frequent inability or unwillingness to assert ethnic difference. Instead, there are several examples, such as Mūsā b. Zurāra, Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl, and even Bughā himself, where our authors obfuscate or completely avoid ethnonyms. The fluidity of ethnonyms suggests that the campaign cannot have mobilized communities based on ethnic solidarity. Further, to assume such categorical division between Armenian and "other" requires the reader to recategorize the Armenians who cooperated with Bughā as non-Armenians, to brand them as traitors, or to expunge them from the record entirely. Yet the Armenian allies of Bughā such as Smbat Aplabas Bagratuni and Vasak Arcruni were just as Armenian as Ašot and Gurgēn Arcruni. They merely had agendas that arrayed them against the people whom the Armenian historical tradition identified as the Armenian heroes.

Religious difference also cannot make sense of this campaign. We frequently find moments when Christians and Muslims fought their coreligionists, as well as evidence of

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163. On agency, Coope again refers back to legal definitions: "Sharīʿah does not, however, grant women much agency. Agency belongs to men, who are responsible for fulfilling their obligations to women and enforcing their obedience"; Coope, *Most Noble of People*, 117.

multiconfessional armies. Despite T'ovma's frequent assertions, no one rallied around Christianness or Muslimness. Bughā deported not just Bagarat Bagratuni and Ašot Arcruni, but also Mūsā b. Zurāra. He beheaded Isḥāq b. Ismāʿīl. T'ovma supplied the religious overtones to tap into the metanarrative of Christian persecution, but he also revealed details that counter his own narrative. Mušeł Bagratuni served Bughā in the campaign against Albanian Christians and numerous rival Arcrunis joined up with Bughā and the ʿUthmānids to battle Gurgēn son of Apupelč. Yet again, their goals, not their families or language or religion, set them apart from the celebrated heroes. Firm boundaries around homogenous ethno-religious communities as constructed in T'ovma's account make little sense of the frequently multiconfessional and multiethnic alliances among the communities of the South Caucasus.

None of this suggests that ethnicity and religion were unimportant, merely flexible and rhetorically useful. There were many ways to be Armenian, Muslim, Albanian, Georgian, Christian, or Arab. While T'ovma had a clear sense of what Armenianness and Christianness meant, in reality religion and ethnicity could serve to unify or to divide communities depending on circumstances. Instead, this example showcases the flexible nature of identity construction around local concerns, which trump abstract notions of ethnicity or universal religious community. A gendered look at the campaign confirms that ethnic and religious difference was entirely surmountable. To solidify close relations between Muslim and Christian families of various ethnicities, women crossed borders that medieval and modern authors alike apply to make sense of pluralist environments.

Ter-Łevondyan claims that "[i]t was natural for Mūsā [b. Zurāra] to be on bad terms with Bagarat Bagratuni, since he was the feudal lord of the lands immediately adjoining Tarōn."[164] This article suggests the opposite conclusion. Proximity led to common sets of concerns and, accordingly, alliances across religious and ethnic lines.[165] We see this in Mūsā's marriage to a Bagratuni woman, in her ability to serve as a mediator in disputes between communities of different religions and ethnicities, and in their son's acceptance in both of his parents' communities. Above all, we see it in Mūsā's decision to fight against Bughā and in the deportation of the entire Zurārid family to Samarrāʾ. T'ovma ignores Mūsā's role in the conflict and his fate because these do not add substance to his own reading in ethno-religious absolutes. Yet reading T'ovma alongside Arabic sources reveals how Bughā's campaign can serve as a clear exemplum of how local alliances played out against T'ovma's expectations in moments of conflict.

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164. Ter-Łevondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 42.

165. Mottahedeh explains that "consciously shared interests inevitably produced a shared loyalty to guard and promote that interest." His "loyalties of category" do not fit easily into this example, though, with the possible exception of the *aʿyān*; Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership*, 107.

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