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## KING PACORUS/BAKUR OF LAZI\*

The personality of Pacorus/Bakur the king of Lazik has become the subject of an interesting historiographic discussion in recent years. The discovery of a pitcher in Achmarda with the inscription “Εγὼ Πάκουρος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς ἁ μνοῖς ἔδωκα” played a key role in stimulating discussion of this issue. There is every reason to believe that king Pacorus/Bakur played an active role in the events that occurred on the territory of Georgia in the third quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. We take into account the information provided in the “Scriptores Historiae Augustae”, on the facts of the discovery of Greek inscriptions on the signet from Zhinvali and on silver vessels from Gagra and Maikop, and also take into account the passage from “Life of Kartli”. There is every reason to believe that Pacorus/Bakur became king of Lazik at the behest of Antoninus Pius. The Lazik managed to unite the whole Western Georgia under their rule after half of a century. Pacorus/Bakur also supposedly participated in the power struggle in Iberia. The very fact of the discovery of a pitcher that attracted our attention suggests that Pacorus/Bakur controlled the area of modern Gagra.

**Key words:** Pacorus/Bakur, Lazik, Georgia, Colchis, Iberia, Rome.

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## ЦАРЬ ЛАЗОВ ПАКОР/БАКУР

Личность царя лазов Пакора/Бакура стала в последние годы предметом интересной историографической дискуссии. Обнаружение в Ачмарде кувшина с надписью «Εγὼ Πάκουρος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς ἁ μνοῖς ἔδωκα» сыграло ключевую роль в активизации обсуждения этого вопроса. Есть все основания полагать, что царь Пакор/Бакур сыграл активную роль в событиях, произошедших на территории Грузии в третьей четверти III в. н.э. Учитываем сведения, приведенные в «Scriptores Historiae Augustae», факты обнаружения греческих надписей на печатке из Жинвали и на серебряных сосудах из Гагры и Майкопа, а также анализируем пассаж из «Картис Цховреба». Есть все основания полагать, что Пакор/Бакур стал царем лазов по воле Антонина Пия. Пройдет еще полвека и вся Западная Грузия будет объединена под властью лазов. Пакор/Бакур также, видимо, участвовал в борьбе за власть в Иберии. Сам же факт обнаружения привлекшего наше внимание кувшина говорит о том, что Пакор/Бакур контролировал район современных Гагр.

**Ключевые слова:** Пакор/Бакур, лазы, Грузия, Колхида, Иберия, Рим.

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Antique age burial was discovered near village Achmarda, Gagra district, Abkhazia in 2005. The burial was damaged by robbers. Materials of the archaeological expedition working near Achmarda was published by the group of scholars in Moscow in 2007. The burial interesting for us is indicated as the burial № 5, located between the burials № 1 and № 2. The deceased person is buried supine. Silver cup was discovered there among other grave goods<sup>1</sup>. It was located near pelvis bones. Greek inscriptions performed with dotted carving and stamped is placed on it. Letters are inclined to have vertical direction. First the text starts on cup's neck as a line, then continues on the line below splitting the word<sup>2</sup>. A. Vinogradov reads the text as follows:

Ἐγὼ Πάκουρος ὁ βασιλεὺς τοῖς ἀ  
μνοῖς ἔδωκα

“I, king Pacorus, gave this to [my] sheep” (Vinogradov 2013: 55, 62).

In Vinogradov's opinion the inscriptions is performed not by a professional engraver but just a writer. Letters are irregular, of different sizes, slightly inclined and they look like papyri script, especially Δ and Ω according to his evaluation. He dated the inscription back to quite a wide range of period — 1<sup>st</sup> — 4<sup>th</sup> cc. CE however other grave goods, specifically analysis of four pointed glass bottle (such type of roman utensils are not used after 4<sup>th</sup> c. dates the inscriptions as not later than 3<sup>rd</sup> c.) (Vinogradov 2013: 56, 58, 62, 65). Content of the inscription, in scholar's opinion, is unparalleled in Greek epigraphic material and supposedly, has oriental origin. Concept of the relationship between kings and subjects as shepherd and his sheep make the scholars to assume this (Vinogradov 2013: 55, 62).

In the process of identification of king Pacorus, A. Vinogradov discussed all possible candidates with the name Pacorus/Pacuros/Bakur, who were familiar for him from the history of the region and underlined who could possibly be Pacorus of Achmarda inscription. He eliminated Parthian king Pacorus, also Pacorus, king of Characene (aka Mesene) as possible candidates. As for Pacorus of Armenia who ruled Armenia for a short period (161—163 CE) Vinogradov did not eliminate him completely since there was another cup with Pacorus inscription according to K. Trever which seemed to be more connected with Pacorus of Armenia for Trever. However, Vinogradov posed two counterarguments against connection of Pacorus of Armenia and Pacorus of Achmarda inscription:

1) name of the Armenian king was given in shortened form Πάκορος, while the form Πάκουρος is attested only after the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.<sup>3</sup>;

2) Greek language is less possible to encounter in the diplomacy of the pro-Parthian king (Vinogradov 2013: 56, 63). A. Vinogradov did not totally eliminate possibility of this connection. He himself was more inclined to believe that this should be one of the Bakur/Pacorus of Iberia,

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<sup>1</sup> A. Vinogradov identified the vessel as a “jar” however in Georgian its was translated as a “cup” therefore it circulated mentioned as “cup” in scientific literature, however in fact it is a jar (small oinochoia) by description.

<sup>2</sup> Vinogradov's article was published in two languages: Russian and translation in Georgian. References indicate both texts.

<sup>3</sup> The theory itself seems not very relevant for us, two forms Πάκουρος and Πάκορος could be parallel forms.

known from “Life of Kartli”. He listed all possible candidates from “Life of Kartli”: “**Bakur, sucesor of Vache** (son according to Leonti Mroveli) and predecessor of Mirdat (father according to Leonti Mroveli); **Bakur, son of Revi** and father of Trdat (Leonti mentions Bakar, son of Mirian and father of Mirdat in his place); **Varaz—Bakur**, successor of Trdat (This is Varaz-Bakar, son of Mirdat and father of Pharsmanes according to Leonti Mroveli, he is also mentioned as nephew of Trdat according to “Conversion of Kartli”; **Bakur, son of Trdat** (Leonti mentions Trdat, father-in-law of Varaz—Bakar instead of him)” (Vinogradov 2013: 56, 63—64). From all above-mentioned possible candidates, Bakur, son of Vache who also is Bakur, mentioned by Rufinus (reigned in 390—397) seems more connected with Achmarda cup according to the scholar (Vinogradov 2013: 58, 64). However, he did not give us an explanation how the cup of Iberian king happened to end up so far from Iberia, in the most north-western part of Colchis. This would seem especially intriguing since western Georgia (Lazica) was not under the influence of Iberian kings at that point. Finally, he stated: “It is obvious, that territory of Achmarda was not a vassal of neither to Iberian, nor to Armenian king: According to Arrian and other sources, north-western part of Abkhazia did not belong to either in 2<sup>nd</sup> — 4<sup>th</sup> cc. However existence of a king of Colchis-Lazika unknown from other sources and the one who subjugated Abasgi and Apsiloi periodically, should not be excluded” (Vinogradov 2013: 59, 65).

Identity of king Pacorus of Achmarda inscription was established quite quickly after this publication. In the same year, T. Dundua and A. Chikobava published a paper (Dundua, Chikobava 2013), in which they finished the process of identification. Authors of the paper responded to the above-mentioned quote of A. Vinogradov and stated: “For Pacoros being the Lazi king is not a possibility, but — reality” (Vinogradov 2013: 10). He is mentioned in records in the times of Antoninus Pius (will be discussed later), while Apshils and Abasks were permanent subjects of the Lazi kings<sup>4</sup>. And moreover, as we shall see further, there were no Apshils and Abasks at all living in Gagra district in the 2nd c. CE. Also, Pacuros/Pacoros seems to pave the way for formation of Lazica, centralized Western Georgian kingdom comprising the whole Colchis, in the 3rd c. CE (Dundua, Chikobava 2013: 10—11; Dundua 1997: 116—117).

Scholars based their identification on the narrative of Julius Capitoline: “Pharasmanes rex ad eum Romam venit plusque illi quam Hadriano detulit. Pacorum regem Laziis dedit. Parthorum regem ab Armeniorum expugnatione solis litteris reppulit...”<sup>5</sup> (SHA. Ant. Pius, IX, 6).

Short overview of their argument is the following: Pacuros/Pacoros send Achmarda silver cup to his subjects living near river Bzipi. Tribes living on this territory under the *receptio*<sup>6</sup> system strengthened the local upper class and subsequently started feudalism on this territory. Territory was under roman influence but Lazi coastal kingdom is already founded, and Pacorus/Pacoros is his king, supposedly roman client king who is sending a silver cup to his subjects (Dundua, Chikobava 2013: 3—13; Dundua 2016: 81—88; Dundua 2017a: 113—120; Dundua 2017b: 119—124).

Silver cup of Pacorus from Achmarda captured the interest of a young archaeologist, Lana Chologauri. She assumed that both Achmarda cup and Maikop cup<sup>7</sup> are of Georgian origin (Chologauri 2016: 45—47).

Despite the abundance of the research, some aspects concerning the issue still need to be discussed, namely: possible connection of Pacorus of Achmarda cup inscription, who is already

<sup>4</sup> For detailed narrative about local social contracts see: (Melikisvili 1970: 55—558; Dundua 1997: 115—118; Dundua, Silagadze 2000: 55).

<sup>5</sup> Excerpt about Pacorus was translated by Dundua and Chikobava as “He gave Pacorus to the Lazi as a king” (Dundua, Chikobava 2013: 9).

<sup>6</sup> About *receptio* system see detailed explanation (Dundua, Phiphia 2009: 20—22; Phiphia 2011).

<sup>7</sup> This is the one attributed to Pacorus of Armenia by K. Trever (Trever 1953: 242—243).

established that was an overlord of Lazica with carnelian engraved gem discovered in Zhinvali and also, with Pacorus from Maikop cup inscription published by K. Trever (Trever 1953: 242—243).

In 1974 Zhinvali expedition unearthed iron ring with carnelian engraved gem. Size of the gem is 2 × 1,5 cm. Upper, not engraved part of the gem has an inscription “BAKOYPA |M| NA...” This inscription was reconstructed by T. Kaukhchishvili as follows: “Βακὺρ, ἀμνά[ς]” — “Pacorus, lamb” (Kaukhchishvili 2000: 263—264). T. Kaukhchishvili did not try to identify this Pacorus with neither the king of Lazica nor with any Pacorus/Bakur mentioned in “Life of Kartli”. Reason is obvious: Pacorus of carnelian gem is not mentioned as a king, thus she would not be able to identify him with king of Lazica appointed by Antonius Pius, and Achmarda cup which would help to establish the fact that on the territory of Georgia a certain king could address his subjects in such an oriental way was not discovered yet, therefore it was difficult to establish the line of reasoning in 1974. Only with the discovery of Achmarda cup the more precise reconstruction of history became possible. However, it should be noted that according to A. Vinogradov, not a lamb but a goat is depicted on a carnelian gem and this is a scene of goat milking (Vinogradov 2013: 58, 64). Vinogradov also reads the inscription in a different way: “Βακὺρ Ἀ[.]?λανας” or “Ἀ[.]?λαναγ” (the latter is explained with ossetian suffix “ag”) — “Bakur of Alania” (Vinogradov 2013: 63). It should be also noted that the animal looks like more as a goat as outlined by T. Kaukhchishvili (Kaukhchishvili 2000: 263). As for the date, she took into consideration the form of letter (recessed angles, -v without ending, μ- with wide endings) and dated back the inscription by the first centuries in general (Kaukhchishvili 2000: 264). M. Lordkipanidze assumed that the artifact should be dated back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> — 3<sup>rd</sup> cc. and is of local origin<sup>8</sup>.

Vinogradov did not give additional explanation concerning the issue, he did not explain who should be this Bakur of Alania. Bakur of Alania is not known from other sources and therefore it is difficult to take his opinion into consideration. It seems, T. Kaukhchishvili’s reading is more precise.

How did this ring with Bakur inscription end up in Zhinvali, Iberia? This is especially interesting since the influence of the king of Lazica did not cover such far eastern territory of Iberia. However, the Lazi rulers seem to be definitely involved in Iberian royal affairs which is evident from “Life of Kartli”. After the death of Pharasmanes II of Iberia (aka Pharasmanes the valiant) and enthronement of Ghadam/Adam a short period of interregnum and Persian (Parthian) involvement in the affairs of Iberia took place:

“Then came Persians and brought Mirdat and captured Kartli and gave part of it to him. Part of Pharasmanes they took for themselves and left a duke (eristavi) in Armazi. And Pharnavaz spaspespet (commander) brought the wife and son of Pharasmanes the valiant and together they took the refuge to Somkhiti since the wife of Pharasmanes was the daughter of an Armenian king. And Kartli was occupied by Mirdat and eristavi of Persia. And Megrelians (Megri) stayed loyal to the son of Pharasmanes.

Armenians and Greeks were allies at that time. Armenian king brought the troops from the Greeks and went to battle the Persians and Georgians. Megrelians also became their allies and an overwhelming army was gathered. Then Mirdat and eristavi established by Persians brought the Persians. Then Armenians, Greeks and Megrelians embarked in Shida (inner) Kartli and met Persians and Georgians on a river called Liakhvi and the battle was between them on a place called Rekhai. Many died from both sides. Persians and Georgians were defeated alongside with Mirdat including eristavi appointed by Persians and their army was destroyed” (Kaukhchishvili 1955: 53—54).

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<sup>8</sup> Margarita Lordkipanidze gave this explanation to T. Kaukhchishvili verbally and T. Kaukhchishvili mentioned it in her publication however the scholar herself did not publish a separate paper or even a comment about the issue.

Short introduction about the relationship of Mirdat and Pharasmanes is necessary for subsequent scholarly commentary:

According to “Life of Kartli” Mirdat was a spaspes of early Pharasmanes II of Iberia. Leonti mistakenly identifies him as a co-ruler. Later Mirdat took the side of the Parthians and opposed Pharasmanes. Armenians were on Pharasmanes side, while the Parthians supported Mirdat. Pharasmanes defeated Mirdat and consolidated his power. Pharnavaz was appointed as a new spaspes.

Detailed explanation and scholarly commentary on the above-mentioned account would be the following:

After the death of Pharasmanes the valiant, Mirdat tried to usurp the throne with the help of the Parthians and the above-mentioned quote describes his struggle. Mirdat occupied Kartli for a short time. Meanwhile Megrelians (Lazi) who stayed loyal to the son of Pharasmanes and Armenians united. The “Greeks” (i.e. Romans) also aided them and together they defeated Mirdat.

Leonti Mroveli mentioned specific names of Iberian kings while he did not specify the names of other kings or rulers (Megrelians, Armenians, Persians). Interregnum should have existed only for a short time period, anyway, before 161 when Parthians enthroned Pacorus of Armenia. Pacorus was pro-Parthian candidate therefore he cannot be the one who was on the side of the son of Pharasmanes alongside the Romans and the Lazi. Armenian king mentioned in the quote should be Sohaemus, roman client king (144—161).

The specific place of the battle is also interesting. It is mentioned as located near the river Liakhvi, close to the village Rekhai. Village Rekhai was located on the banks of Lekhura, somewhat distant to Liakhvi. This village is mentioned many times in “Life of Kartli” (Gamkrelidze, Mindorashvili, Bragvadze, Kvachadze 2013: 418). Population of this village decreased in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. as mentioned by S. Makalatia, the Korinteli settled here and the village was renamed as “Sakorintlo” (Makalatia 1964: 42). The specific place is in Shida Kartli and is not very distant from Zhinvali.

Carnelian engraved gem with the name of Bakur seemed to end up near Zhinvali during this expedition. Whether it is a gift, a booty from the battlefield or an accidental acquisition, it is difficult to judge. The most important is that connection of Pacorus of Lazica with Iberian royal affairs is evident from the sources and therefore it is possible to connect carnelian engraved gem with him.

Silver cup discovered in Maikop in 1934 is also interesting. It was unearthed from one of the burials dated back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> — 3<sup>rd</sup> cc. (Trever 1953:242—245). As outlined by K. Trever different theatrical scenes are depicted on it and the inscription is stamped not engraved. The text is as follows: “Παρά βασιλέως Πακόρου” — “from the king Pacorus”. K. Trever identifies him with Pacorus of Armenia (Trever 1953:242—245). There are some arguments which would undermine this claim:

Pacorus of Armenia ruled Armenia only for a short time period, before Lucius Verus’ Parthian expedition, therefore he was not supposed to claim such an authority to send so many stuff on a wide territory with such proud inscriptions.

Geographically, Maikop cup is more possible to be connected with Western Georgian ruler rather than with Armenian ruler.

Style of the inscription and content, also the technique of performing inscription looks like Achmarda cup inscription and what is the most interesting they are performed on the same type of

wine vessel (oinochoia) and both are of the same material — silver<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, it is not difficult to connect these two cups.

Additional counterargument against Armenian Pacorus is provided by A. Vinogradov (see above), when he underlined the fact that Parthian candidate on Armenian throne would not use Greek in international diplomacy.

Therefore, the account of the reign of king Pacorus/Bakur based on the evidences of “Scriptores Historiae Augustae” and three epigraphic materials which give us the chance to connect them with the account of “Life of Kartli” should be reconstructed as follows:

Roman emperor Antoninus Pius “gave Pacorus as a king” to the Lazi. This should have happened in 138—161 during his reign. Pacorus/Bakur united substantial part of western Georgia under his rule. He was also supposedly involved in royal intrigues of Iberian kingdom. After the death of Pharasmanes II of Iberia, Mirdat, his spaspespet was fighting against the successor of Pharasmanes with Parthian support. He is opposed by Pacorus of Lazi, Sohaemus of Armenia supported by romans and by other officials loyal to Pharasmanes’ successor in Kartli. Pacorus of Lazi alongside with the others defeated Mirdat and at about 161 Ghadam/Adam took the throne<sup>10</sup>.

Pacorus of Lazi sent to his subjects living near Gagra a silver sup with a proud inscription. One such cup also ended up in Maikop. Since Maikop cup mentions only “from king Pacorus” but not “to my sheep” thus not to my subjects, this cup which in every other aspect looks like Achmarda cup, should be a gift send to this territory. It seems not only cups but other stuff was also made with the name of Pacorus, for example, engraved gems. One of such carnelian engraved gem finally ended up in Zhinvali, supposedly as a result of an expedition when king of Lazica was involved in royal intrigues of Iberian kings, namely after the battle at river Lekhura, near Rekhai.

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<sup>9</sup> About the similarity of the styles of these two cup see a detailed account in: (Chologauri 2016).

<sup>10</sup> For detailed narrative about the list and line of inheritance see: (Ingorokva 1941).

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