

An Old Hebrew Romance of Alexander as One of the Sources for  
the *Conversion of K'art'li*

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**Abstract:** *A Romance of Alexander Mucedon* (Macedon) was created in Hebrew, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. A. D., representing a legendary reflection of the Caucasian campaign of Pompey as it is described in the works by Dio Cassius and Appian.

In the *Romance* the invasion of Iberia by Pompey (in 65 B. C.) appears as the 'march of Alexander to the land of Afriqi'. Later the *Romance* served as one of the sources for the Georgian chronicle "*The Conversion of K'art'li*" (*Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay*) and the story of Alexander in such confused form entered ancient Georgian historiography as a story about Alexander's invasion of K'art'li.

In the *Romance* the main names of the kings of K'art'li are: Azo(n) and Arik. The Hebrew *Romance* contains also the legendary description of two other episodes concerning the battle in Armazi and supposed march of Pompey to Colchis (Egrisi).

**Key words:** *Iberia, K'art'li, Azon, Artag*

**Foreword.** The entire *Chronicle* resembles a treatise on the history of K'art'li [in fact, a history of its kings]. It apparently presupposes the existence of a vast library of sources at the disposal of the compiler. As an anonymous compiler or rather the scribe of the tenth century remarks: "All of the above has been described selectively" [8, p. 149]. The actual literary sources of the composition, however, remained enigmatic [5]. The first passage of the *Chronicle* provides an especially interesting example of this problem. The Georgian *Chronicle* claims that Alexander the Great reached the 'northern [Kedar] land of K'art'li': "King Alexander <...> saw a cruel people <...> settled by the Mtkvari River <...> and these were their settlements: the city of Sarkine, Up'lisc'xe, Urbnisi and Odzraxe" (cf. also 'The appearance of Alexander' in *K'art'lis*

*Cxovrebā*, [8, p. 139], though Alexander of Macedon never invaded K'art'li, while the real invasion of K'art'li by Pompey the Great (which took place in 65 B.C.) is not mentioned at all.

On the other hand, as early as in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. A.D., supposedly in Alexandria, *A Romance of Alexander Mucdon* [Macedon] was created (in Hebrew) which is extant in three manuscripts, from Damascus [4], Modena [10] and Oxford [3]. It is known from medieval manuscripts, yet it is derived from ancient sources [3, p. 491]. The *Romance* resembles the composition of Pseudo-Callisthenes in many respects but does not replicate it [3, p. 498; cf. 9]. In fact the Hebrew *Romance* represents a legendary reflection of the Caucasian campaign of Pompey as it is described in the *Roman History* by Dio Cassius and *Roman History* by Appian. The *Romance* evidently was infused by the Caucasian campaign of Pompey with the personality of Alexander the Great, while the invasion of Iberia by Pompey appears as the 'march of Alexander to the land of *Afriqi*'.

*Afriqi-Iberia*. According to the *Romance*, the march of Alexander begins from Jerusalem: "The king went forth from there and fought against the inhabitants of Antioch <...>. The king went forth from that place and came to the land of Armenia <...>. And Alexander passed through the Dark Mountains <...>. Alexander went forth from that place and came to *Afriqi* <...>. After this the king journeyed to the land of C'art'inia" [3, p. 512-528; 10, p. 143-155; 4, p. 30-38].

So, the land of *Afriqi* in Jewish rabbinical sources evidently means *Iberia*. The name *Afriqi* for *Iberia* finds root in the composition by Dio Cassius. The brief survey which precedes the 37<sup>th</sup> paragraph of Book III reads: "How Pompey fought against the Asiatic Iberians" [2, p. 96]. The Greek original shows the form of the plural accusative, whereas the first sentence of the paragraph relates: "Pompey engaged in warfare with both the Albanians and the Iberians" [plural dative, 2, p. 97-98]. Thus, in both sentences we see the plural form of the ethnonym *Iberians* (not the toponym *Iberia*). The ancient Jewish interpreter evidently took the plural nominative of the ethnonym – *Ibyrikoī*. It is only in this way that the existence of the consonant –q- in the Hebrew form *Afriqi* can be explained, preserving the consonant element of the Greek plural.

The initial form of the Hebrew adaptation of the term might take the form of *Ipiriqi* // *Ifiriqi* // *Ifriqi*. The form *Afriqi* seems to have appeared later, after the original meaning and sound of the word had been forgotten. The initial vowel of this now 'unknown' place name with the *aleph* in anlaut was changed to *ḥ*: *Ifiriqi* > *Afriqi*. So, the transliteration of the Greek form might be assigned to the time and area when and where the final Greek diphthong *-oi-* had changed to *-i-*.

Later an *Old Hebrew Romance* of Alexander served as one of the sources for the Georgian chronicle (*Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay*) and the story of Alexander in such confused form entered ancient Georgian historiography. At the same time the compiler of the Georgian *Chronicle* not only was acquainted with the Hebrew *Romance* but he also interprets this name, *Afriqi*, in its initial true meaning, *Iberia*.

By the way, such a 'correction' – replacing the initial vowel *-i-* with *-a-* became possible since the fifth century A. D. when vowel diacritics had been introduced in the Hebrew script by the literary school in Tverias. So, the ancient Georgian reader was acquainted with a previous version of the work preserving the initial pronunciation of the name in question.

Remarkably, the author of an *Old Hebrew Romance* seems to have been acquainted with the country's Georgian name also – *C'art'inia* // *K'art'li*, which is not found in the ancient Greek-Roman sources, and among them in the compositions by Dio Cassius and Appian. Indeed, if *Afriqi* means *Iberia*, then *C'art'inia* points to *K'art'li*. In other words, in the Hebrew *Romance* we come across two designations for the same country: i) the name according to Greek and Roman tradition, *Iberia* (i. e. Hebrew *Ifiriqi* // *Afriqi*); and ii) the local term, *K'art'li* // *C'art'inia*. The last term cannot be explained by the influence of the Greek source.

At the same time one of the episodes in the *Old Hebrew Romance* testifies to the evident connection between the lands of *Afriqi* and *C'art'nia*: Alexander marries the wife of the king of *C'art'nia*, who dies soon after. Another wife is found for him in the land of *Afriqi* [3, p. 530].

Obvious confirmation of our hypothesis linking the narrative of Dio Cassius, and the *Old Hebrew Romance* about Alexander with

the ancient Georgian *Chronicle* can be found also in the two personal names from the Georgian *Chronicle*.

**Azo(n) – Ason.** *The Conversion of K'art'li* states that the first king in K'art'li was a deputy of Alexander of Macedon, named *Azo*: "And Alexander was accompanied by Azo, son of the king of Arian-K'rt'li and he bestowed upon him Mc'xet'a for residence <...>. And he was the first king in Mc'xet'a" [8, p. 139-140]. *K'C'* gives the character the name of *Azon* and provides a different genealogy: "Alexander spared the tribes descended from K'art'los and left over them a patrician, one *Azon* by name, son of Jaredos, a relative of his from the land of Macedon" [13, p. 25-36]. The story concerning *Azo* // *Azon* in Georgian historiography is usually regarded as an echo of some oral legend which existed in former times in Georgia [5, p. 106-107]. On the other hand, G. Kavtaria regards *Azon* as a real person whose "activities were involved with the War of Diadochos" [6, p. 71]. Nevertheless, this proper name, doubtless, represents a legendary personage who has the same literary source discussed above.

This name seems to have been borrowed from the *Old Hebrew Romance* of Alexander: "There reigned over the land of Egypt a man named Pilippos. The name of his wife was Glophira <...>. A certain man lived in the land of Egypt whose name was Bildad, son of *Ason*" [3, p. 499; 10, p. 142; 4, p. 11]. Harkavi even proposes a Hebrew etymology for the name: *Ason* < *ason* 'danger, catastrophe', [4, p.46]. According to the legend, this Bildad seduces Glophira [i.e. Cleopatra] who later gives birth to Alexander. Thus, *Azo* appears to be the grandfather of Alexander.

A similar development is observed in the Greek *Romance of Alexander* by Pseudo-Callisthenes, yet there *Nectanebo* is identified as Alexander's father, while *Ason* does not appear in the work at all: "Nectanebo, the Egyptian king's wizard and reputed father, as represented by the literary traditions of Pseudo-Callisthenes, is replaced here [in an *Old Hebrew Romance* – C. L.] by a simple magician who bears the biblical name of Bildad" [3, p. 492].

The personal name *Ason* // *Azo* // *Azon* is not found in any biography of Alexander [14]. Hence, a Hebrew version of the legend could have served as a source for the Georgian *Chronicle*. Evidence from the *K'C'* in this regard is remarkable: "Alexander became

prominent in the land of the Greeks, in the country which they call Macedon; he was the son of *Nectanebo*, an Egyptian, as the account of him is written in the book of the Greeks. This Alexander conquered all ends of the world. He came from the west, entered from the south, went up by the north, crossed the Caucasus and came to K'art'li" [13, p. 23; in the recent new Georgian publication of the *K'art'lis C'xovreba* this dynastic name of Egyptian Pharaohs-Nectanebo- is substituted by the vague name of Kacnobi ?].

Leonti Mroveli reveals his familiarity with different sources. 'The book of the Greeks' evidently refers to one of the versions of the Pseudo-Callisthenes romance [7, p. 48-49]. Such details like 'son of *Nectanebo, an Egyptian*' as well as an account of Alexander's marches surely may be rooted in the work by Pseudo-Callisthenes, yet the latter tells us almost nothing about Macedonia. According to the Greek romance, Alexander was the 'king of Egypt'. Moreover, the work by Pseudo-Callisthenes could not have served as a source for the name, *Azon*, and for the statement concerning the 'coming of Alexander to K'art'li'.

The name, *Azon*, as well as his coming to K'art'li, in Leonti Mroveli's work, comes from the corresponding statements of *The Conversion of K'art'li* [5, p. 95-96]. The latter reflects the version of the legend about Alexander of Macedon which was elaborated in the above-mentioned *Old Hebrew Romance*, while Leonti Mroveli knows also the work of Pseudo-Callisthenes and some other historiographic works concerning Alexander the Great.

Another confirmation of the *Old Hebrew Romance* about Alexander as a source for *The Conversion of K'art'li* gives the name of King Arik.

**Arik - Artokes - Artag.** According to the *Conversion of K'art'li*, the seventh king of K'art'li was called Arik: "And Arik was king, he who erected the inner fortress in Armazi" [8, p. 140]. No other Georgian source would mention a king with such an unusual name. *K'C* shows the real name of the king, Artag: "This King Artag reigned only for two years. In the second year of his reign the Persian army came" [13, p. 99].

In Georgian historiography, the name Arik has been perceived as a scribal error (Arik instead of Artag ?). In an *Old Hebrew Romance*, however, we find an explanation for this name:

after the march to the land of women in *Afriqi* "Alexander journeyed to the land of *C'art'inia*, were they received the king with great honours. The name of the king was *ArDOS*, he brought him to his residence, the name of which was *Arik*" [3, p. 526; 10, p. 153; 4, p. 56]. Thus, *ArDOS* is the king of *C'art'inia*, whereas the capital of the country is called *Arik*. The interpretation of these names has been an obstacle for scholars. As A. Harkavi puts it, the single occurrence in the *Romance* "of the name of the capital, *Arik*, does not help in the least to clarify the geographical localization of the land [of *C'art'inia*]; the name of the king of the land, *ArDOS*, is of no help either" [4, p. 60].

Yet the person who is definitely referred to here as *ArDOS* is the king of Iberians called *Artag* [*Artokes* of the Greek sources] who reigned in *K'art'li* during the time of Pompey's Caucasian campaign. Appian's description of the campaign reads: "Pompey pursued Mithridates as far as Colchis <...>. All the neighboring tribes accompanied Pompey on his exploring expedition. Only Oroses, king of the Albanians, and *Artokes*, king of Iberians, placed 70,000 men in ambush for him at the *Cyrtis*" [1, p. 435].

Dio Cassius knows the king of Iberians under the same name, *Artokes*, yet Dio's account provides also an explanation of the name *Arik*: "Now it was with Iberians that he was compelled to fight first <...>. *Artokes*, their king, fearing that Pompey would direct his course against him too, sent envoys to him on a pretence of peace. Pompey invaded the territory of *Artokes*. Thus *Artokes*, panic-stricken crossed the river, burning down the bridge. Pompey subjugated all the territory on this side of the river [*Kura*]. *Artokes* becoming afraid, *fled away* to the *Pelorus*, another river that flowed through his domain. Thus he first drew on, and then *ran away* from the enemy" [2, p. 99-100].

The Greek original in the context shows *apolilrasko* // *apolilraskon*, i. e. 'run away, escape' (12) and in Hebrew: 'arik - deserter, defector' [11]. The name of the 'capital' of *C'art'inia*, *Arik* (with the 'ayn' in anlaut) turns out to be a Hebrew semantical interpretation of the Greek word meaning 'run away', while in the Georgian *Chronicle* one can see a transliteration of the Hebrew form.

Thus, the reference to King Artokes ['fled away, run away', in Hebrew - *arik*] had been transformed, in the Hebrew *Romance*, into the name of the capital of a country [with initial *ayn*], while in the Georgian *Chronicle*, it becomes the king's name. The chronicler is not familiar with the original name of the king, *Artokes // Artag*, because, apparently, he does not know the Greco-Roman sources under discussion. Again, an *Old Hebrew Romance* could have been a source for the *Chronicle*, as far as the transliterated name of the capital, *Arik*, does not appear in other versions and thus could not be borrowed from any sources other than the Hebrew text in question.

The battle with the "Wild Beasts". From the standpoint of supposed connection between the romance about Alexander the Great and the works by Dio Cassius and Appian, another episode seems to be significant. According to the *Old Hebrew Romance*, after meeting the king of C'art'inia, Ardos, the troops of Alexander came to a forest where terrifying five-horned animals lived. The animals hid among the trees and attacked Alexander's soldiers: "It came to pass after this the king journeyed with all his camp and arrived at a certain very large forest. At that place there ran against the army strange beasts with five horns, which destroyed a great part of the army. On seeing this the king said to his men, 'Take fire <...> and burn the forest'. They accordingly hastened to burn the trees of the forest, and the wild beasts ran away – thus the king and the army were saved" [3, p. 530; 10, p. 155; 4, p. 29-30].

This passage evidently resembles the corresponding episode from the accounts of Appian and Dio of the battle between Pompey and the Albanians and the Iberians. According to Appian, this battle took place *before* the invasion of K'art'li by Pompey: "Only Oroses, king of the Albanians, and Artokes, king of the Iberians, placed 70,000 men in ambush at the river Cyrtis, which empties into the Caspian Sea. Pompey discovered the ambush, bridged the river and drove the barbarians into a thick wood. These people are skilful forest-fighters, taking cover and attacking without showing themselves. So Pompey set it on fire and pursued the fugitives" [1, p. 435- 437].

In Dio's words, in this battle, in 66 B.C. (on the border between Armenia and Albania, on the south bank of the Kura River – C.L.), only the king of the Albanians participated, while 'skilful

forest-fighters' and 'setting the trees on fire' are not mentioned at all: "Oroses, king of the Albanians, dwelling beyond the Cynrus, made an expedition against them <...>. Pompey (not bridging the river-C.L.) did not overtake him, however, since Oroses had fled <...> but he seized many of the Albanians near the crossing of the Cynrus" [2, p. 93-95].

On the other hand, according to Dio, the 'battle in the forest' occurred later, in 65, in the capital of K'art'li, Armaz, and against the king of Iberians, Artokes: "Thereupon Artokes crossed the Pelorus and fled, burning the bridge over this stream too; of the rest some were killed in conflict, and some while fording the river. Many others scattered through the wood and survived for a few days, while they shot their arrows from the trees, which were exceedingly tall; but soon the trees were cut down under them and they also were slain <...>. So, Artokes again made overtures to Pompey, and sent gifts" [2, p. 101].

Thus, on the one hand, the *Old Hebrew Romance* in this case follows the narration by Appian (the wood has been set on fire), while nevertheless the episode itself appears to be connected to the king of C'art'inia, which points to the work by Dio Cassius, yet in the latter the trees were cut down.

The march to the 'Land of Hagar'. After crossing the Mountains of Darkness and the land of Afriqi "the king journeyed, with all his army, in the direction of the land of *Hagar*. The king of Hagar had set out to fight against him <...>. He sent messengers to the king of Hagar <...>. The king of Hagar replied to the messengers of the King Alexander <...>. They accordingly prepared their implements of war <...>. But the king of Hagar anticipated this, and commanded to dig pits and hollow caves throughout the whole land. It appeared dangerous to Alexander. He sent word a second time and the king of Hagar came to him with the choicest of his men and with very precious stones. The king, on receiving them, departed from this land" [3, p. 521-522; 10, p. 151; 4, p. 47-48].

All the legendary narration seems to be a contamination of the two subsequent episodes of Pompey's Caucasian campaign. On the one hand, it bears a resemblance to the parley between Pompey and the king of the Iberians, Artokes, and to a result of the warfare with Iberians: "Artokes fearing that Pompey would direct his course

against him sent envoys to him on a pretence of peace. Pompey, learning of this, invaded the territory of Artokes on this side of the river. Thus Artokes crossed the river, burning the bridge. Artokes sent to him requesting peace and promising to yield the bridge to him <...> and to furnish him with provisions. So Artokes again made overtures to Pompey and sent gifts. At last he sent his children to Pompey and concluded a treaty" [2, p. 101].

On the other hand, it depicts the narration by Dio Cassius relating that Pompey first intended to invade Colchis via Iberia but then abandoned his plan: "Pompey, learning now that the Phasis was not far distant, decided to descend to Colchis and thence to march to Bosphorus against Mithridates. He advanced as he intended, traversing the territory of the Colchians and their neighbors<...>. But perceiving that the route on land led through many unknown and hostile tribes, he ordered the fleet[which stood at the mouth of the River Phasis- C. L.] to blockade Mithridates while he himself directed his course against the Albanians. He did not take the most direct route, but first turned back to Armenia" [2, p. 101-103].

Thus, in Dio's words, Pompey refused to enter Colchis, yet the name of the country, according to the *Old Hebrew Romance*, was *Hagar*. In this case the anonymous author once more (as in the instance of C'art'inia // K'art'li) reveals his acquaintance with the local Georgian name of the country, *Egrisi*: Eger > Agar (as like, Ifiriqi > Afiriqi).

Thus, 'the land of Hagar', in the *Old Hebrew Romance*, undoubtedly means *Egrisi*, i. e. Colchis, which once more stresses the connection with *Roman History* and the name of Pompey.

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