

# Phasis From Arabs to the Russian Empire

(Review of the Written Sources)

*Davit Naskidashvili* (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University)

The history antique town of Phasis includes three millennia. Its primary location still is an enigma for Georgian archaeology. The location of the first Hellenic colony is still obscure. We have no researches, which proves the location of Phasis as it was during the period, when Strabo was living, but contemporary researches indicate on the fact that the history of Phasis has been continuous. Fieldworks are mainly focused on the identification of the Antique period Phasis, but most of the publications finish on the Late Antique period. Written sources about the second part of the chronology, which includes the period from VII century AD till XIX century are scattered sporadically and are not unified into a whole research

An important role in the formation of the ecosystem of Kolkheti lowland has the river Rioni and its affluences. River Rioni and its affluences connected the sea and hinterland. It is obvious that such an important artery would not lose its trade economic function during the Middle Ages as well. It is clear that sailing on river Rioni was possible to the direction of the flow, but sailing to the opposite of the flow from Poti to Kutaisi is controversial. Despite the fact that there is a notice to Jean Chardin about the using of Ottoman galleys were used for sailing to the opposite of the flow of river Rioni (**Jean Chardin 1975:241**).

There are several suppositions about the location of Phasis. Gela Gamkrelidze unified all twelve versions, which are more or less reasoned and have the right for existing (**Gamkrelidze 2012**). From them in none of it is mentioned the location of Medieval Ages Phasis (Poti). Telling of history stops on Late Antique-Early Medieval period. And the main aim of this article to promote the history of Phasis from the Arabs till the Russian Empire and gather schematically those written sources, which indicated the geopolitical importance and character of the city from the Arabs till the Russian Empire.

Complex historical and written sources about Phasis are indicated in three different publications, such are: Otar Lortkipanidze, Maqsime Berdznishvili, Gela Gamkrelidze (for addition see: Berdznishvili 1969, Lortkipanidze 2000, Gamkrelidze 2002).

An important notice is marked in the so called „Book of Epistle” (Universal Epistle), in which is reflected confrontation between Armenian Church to Albanian and Georgian churches. An interesting moment is the list of cursed bishops, which might consist of disfigured toponyms as well.

“... your ancestor the bishop of Kartli blissful Gabriel cursed our blissful parsons with their locum tenens and their names are: Theodoros bishop of Portis,..” (**Jafaridze 2015**).

The main publication of the Book of Epistle belongs to Zaza Aleksidze, who mentions and discusses the interpretations of toponym „Porti” by different authors. For example: Ivane Javakhishvili identifies it to Bort, Sargis Kakabadze identifies to Berta (Cheleti), and Korneli Kekelidze identifies this toponym to Ninotsminda/Berta (**Aleksidze 1968:161**).

Above mentioned toponym Porti is obscure and it might not be considered that under this toponym is meant Poti/Phasis. But other upcoming researches might make understandable this task.

An important and interesting piece of information about the toponym of Phasis-Poti gave us Armenian historian Levondi, in VIII century. Besides this, he names the city Poti and a very interesting geopolitical picture might be read in this notice

„After that, when in Armenian country was died out the ancestral of Sanakhararo, inhabitants as sheep, were grabbed to wolves. Evil, trouble and danger was happened to Armenian country and it was caused by the enemy, the inhabitants were disturbed by difficulties and restive life. Their moan was reached to the sky. Sumbat Courapalates and other Nakhara-

ries left their place and asked for another town to the Greek King for living and pastures for their herds. The king gave them Poti in the country of Egrisi, where they were living for six years (**Tsagareishvili 2012:121**).

We can say for sure that in those historical sources which we have, toponym Poti is ancient and is used for the first time.

For the historiography of Poti a very important written source is kept in the life of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli- Head of Monastery of Iverion, about who is told by his pupil, Giorgi Mtsire. According to the supposition of K. Kekelidze, Giorgi Mtatsmindeli might be written in 1066-1068, when the king was Bagrat IV (**Kekelidze 1957:248**).

A very interesting passage for us connected to the town Poti looks like so:

„And when we left and reached to Samison, city located near to the sea and where we sold our donkeys and sailed by boats to Abkhazia, and reached to Poti and then by the donkeys reached to Kutaisi” (Giorgi Mtsire 1994:221).

XII century is a very important century for Black Sea region, when started a new colonization. From this time was activated Genoa, which established trade centers in the Black Sea region. The main town, we can say a gatherer one was Kafa (Khappa), same Feodosia (Teodosia), which was located on the south-eastern coast of Crimean Peninsula. Its trade interests were spread to the Western Georgia. Many bookkeeping notices of Genuan and Venetian traders are kept in archives, such are Archivio di Stato di Venezia – ASV, Maggio Consiglio – MC/CM, Archivio di Stato di Genova – ASGe and Archivio Segreto – AS. Unfortunately we have no direct access to those archives, but scientist- Sergei Karpov uses a big part of those notices in his publications. He mainly in his publications reviews notices about the trade by Genuans in Trabzon Empire and Crimea. And it is obvious that in his publications are spread information about Phasis, where he cites documentation. Among them are important notices for us.

In 1380 Crimean Tatars oppressed Genoa traders who were on the peninsula and this fact caused deficit of wheat stock in Ghazaria<sup>1</sup>. And Genoa traders decided to find an alternative way for purchasing wheat. In bookkeeping notice date to 1386 is mentioned that Genoa traders from Phasis (Poti) and Zichia (Cherkessia) purchased 20 modiod and 3 cantari<sup>2</sup> wheat that is about 5,8 tons. For these they paid about 84,5

Trebizond silver aspros. It is also known that the purchase was done by Bartolomeo di Giulio and O. di Finario. After this trade arrangement their winning was about 5 percent. It is also mentioned that purchased wheat was transported by use of Trepizond ships towards Kapa (**Karpov1993:65**).

We have other sources, where are mentioned some trade arrangements from Phasis seaport. More precisely trade with wheat and slaves<sup>3</sup>, but other accounting details are not known, because the research of Sergei Karpov is dedicated to the crisis in Black Sea region in XIV century, which was caused by activate of Mongols in Black Sea region and appearance of Black Death (**Karpov1997:65-77**).

Before positioning of Turkish garrison in Poti, a very important notice is given by Venetian diplomat Ambrozio Contarini, who traveled in the second half of XV century in the Caucasus. His main aim was traveling in Persia, more precisely to become ambassador on Uzun Hasan door (**Shamilidze 2001:86**). Contarini passed and described the coast of Black Sea. From Batumi he went to Guria and Poti, through Samegrelo he went in Kutaisi, Skanda and Shorapani (**Shamilidze 2001:86**). We should mention the fact that Vakhtang Shamilidze certified source published in 1836- „*the journey of Ambrozio Contarini the ambassador of the Venetian Republic to the ruler of Uzun Hasan,- Library of Foreign Writers in Russia, I СПб., 1836*”. But in this source in original one and the other translated into English is mentioned Phasis. It is obvious that in XV century Poti is a Georgian version of Phasis and for Vakhtang Shamilidze those toponyms have equality. Notices about Ambrozio Contarini by Vakhtang Shamilidze is short one, because his monography is more informative, catalogue type about foreign scientists.

Ambrozio Contarini stayed in Phasis for four days and gave us about the social-economic information about Phasis. So it is relevant to give you some passages about city Phasis.

„on 29<sup>th</sup> of June we reached „Varti”<sup>4</sup>, horses were very tired and landed on the coast, from where they were sent to Fasso”.- Fasso in scholium is determined as Phasis (**Ambrozio Contarini 1873:117**). Probability the determination in scholium belongs to the translator from Italian language- William Thomas.

„1st of July, 147 we arrived at the confluence of river Fasso, and along which are populated Megrelians, which act like crazy. From ship we moved into the boats and then we sailed to the island about which is

1 Ghazaria-Khazareti. Latin name of Crimea

2 Modioi and Cantari- Byzantine capacity of weight and litres

3 About Genoa traders' colonies see the newest publication by Khvalkov (Khvalkov 2017:3) (PL.V)

4 Varti- Batumi

said that is was ruled by king Areta, father of poisonous Medea. We spent this night there and were disturbed by mosquitos and could not deal with it" (Ambrozio Contarini 1973:118).

„on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> July we sailed by boats to the town, called Asso<sup>5</sup>, which is located on the river and is surrounded by the forest. The width of the river is about two shooting distance of arbalest. When we arrived we met Nicolo Capello from Modoni, who settled here and got Islam, Cherkessian woman Marta, who was the slave of Genoans; sister was Genoan as well, who was married and settled here. I was sheltered by Marta, who take care of me until 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Fasso belongs to Megrelians and the head of them was Bendiani (Dadiani). It has no big territories, only three days are necessary to see it. Here are many forests and mountains. Men are very rude, they shave off their hair like Franciscanium monk. Here are many quarries, they produce small amount of cereals and wine, which has low quality. Habitants are poverty, they eat millet porridge. A little amount of wine and salted fish is imported from Trabzon and salt is imported from Kappa. They produce with little amount of wax and fabric. If they were hardworking they should have enough fish for them. They are Christians and follow to the rules of Greek church, but they have many heretical (Ambrozio Contarini 1873:118).

### Ottoman archive notice date to 1582.

„Repair of Poti fortress.

I order to the Beylerbey that:

Poti fortress, which is located on the sea coast and is built by the wooden materials and after a very long rains is was seriously damaged, that is the reason why I requested its repair and restoration. your request was considered admissible and I order:

After arriving this order, you will go to the Poti fortress and will study the condition. After this you will repair necessary places and will make a restoration. Moreover, another notice reached to me that the enemy raids in this side, be on the alert!

I warn you, not to make an offender step of my country caused by negligence!" (ildiztash 2012:89).

### Ottoman archive notice dates to 1584

„for repair of demolished Poti fortress.

You informed me that Poti fortress, which was built by wood and clay was damaged and it is necessary to be built by the stones. I order:

After arriving the order, above mentioned fortress should be repaired with the help of military forces." (ildiztash 2012:93)

Above mentioned two Turkish archive, report like notice is the direct statement that before stone built fortress, there was a wooden fortress, which was demolished after heavy rains. Presumably the ruler of Batumi Beylerbey reported to the sultan Murad III (1574-1595).

We can say that in this wooden fortress was Ambrozio Contarini in XVI century.

### THE MAP OF PIRI REIS

Except an Ottoman archive notices, in the same context will be interesting to be discuss compass like map (Portalan) of Black Sea created by the Turkish traveler Piri Reis, dates to 1525. And it is obvious that the map is earlier notice than the archive sources. It is interesting that on this map toponym/hydronium is mentioned with the name of Pasha. As it seems name „Pash" was a common name before Ottoman intervention. (Piri Reis 1525: Map of Black Sea) (Pic.1). the map is created to the northern direction, but the inscriptions indicated to the eastern Black sea region is marked inside out. From south to the north is clear Turkish inscriptions with Arabic transcription: „Batum", „Pash", „Kamkhal"<sup>6</sup> and „Ankel". We should mention the fact that on this map is also to see the delta of river Rioni, which subdivides in two branches and among them might be an island.

5 There might be a mistake in the translation of William Thomas and might be meant Fasso

6 Revaz Papuashvili identifies Kamkhal to Khulevi. For addition see his publication. Except this, the author indicated the notices of French trader Jean Chardin (Papuashvili 2017:16-77)

## NOTICE ABOUT THE FORTRESS PASHI DATES TO 1578

One more interesting notice dates to 1578. In it is mentioned Mustafa Lala Pasha who commanded the campaign against to Safavid dynasty and he sends notice in Istanbul, where he describes that in Guria are located two towns, Pashi and Batumi (Aidin 1986:69).

The notice about invasion of Poti fortress by Ottomans is given by Jean Chardin in his journey. Except this, we have some idea about the landscape on the lower flow of river Rioni in XVII century.

*„at the confluence of this river is located one rounded shaped island covered with the forest that hampers of sailing big ships, which are forced to stop at the distance of three or four miles from the confluence. From these islands on one of them that is much bigger than others, from the western side is visible remains of the fortress, which was built by Ottomans. It was built in 1578 under the order of sultan Murad III. More precisely this fortress was built by the commander of the army Mustafa, during the war between Ottomans and Persians. The emperor of Ottomans intended to conquest northern and western sides of the Black Sea, but it was impossible. He ordered the galleys<sup>7</sup> to sail up to Phasis, but the king of Imereti on this place, where the river is narrow ambushed and injured Murad's galleys. One of them was sank and others were escaped. In 1640 the fortress of Phasis was conquest by the united armies of Imereti, Guria and Samegrelo and was destroyed to the ground.” (Journey of Jean Chardin 1975:241).*

At the same time was built fortress by Ottoman Empire as it is mentioned in Turkish archive notice and dates to 1578 and which was discussed above. We can suppose that the reconstruction of the fortress organized by Mehmed Aga in 1723 might connect to the destruction happened in 1640, but about this task is necessary to look for other sources as well.

A big importance has also two maps date to the first half of XVIII centuries, which were published by Alan: Map A and B<sup>8</sup>.

Map A consists of the regions of Abkhazia, Guria and Samegrelo, which has no a specific gradation (calibration) characterized for the map, but Map B is a realistic copy of Map A, which is kept in France in the Bibliotheque Hydrographique de la Marine (Alan 1953:99). Map is bilingual, it is fulfilled as in French as Georgian-Mkedruli inscription. In some cases map also has

7 Galley- wooden spaded military ship (dictionary of unknown words)

8 Conditional divide of the map is given by the author-Alan

Russian inscriptions, it depends on how important the territorial unit is described.

Above mentioned map except the cartographic information, is a very important historical document. We should emphasize the inscriptions written on the legend of Poti fortress. The fortress is square-shaped, but the corner towers are subdivided like contrefort from the general corner. There is an inscription on inner perimeter of the fortress: fortress of Poti, in Georgian is called Fassu, was an old town. Here sits Pasha with double Tugh<sup>9</sup>: built it in 1723, 50 guns located: 50<sup>10</sup> (Alan 1953:114). In 1723 the reconstruction was undoubtedly made by an architect Mehmed Aga<sup>11</sup> (Aidan 1986:71-72).

On the plan of the fortress is clearly remarked three gates, on which are Georgian inscriptions: on the eastern gate- „Georgia Gate”, on the western gate, to the sea- „Istanbul Gate”, and on the northern gate had an exit to the seaport and we can call it Seaport Gate (Alan 1953:114) (pic.3).

### RUSSIAN INSCRIPTION:

*город Потиско в которм Дву-бунчуской туретскоы Паша и построен в 1723 годы, а до тово времени на оном месте била древная милитинскаиа. а в том городе 200 человек янчар и 50 пушек - translation- „Town Potisko , which ruled by Pasha with double tugh and was built in 1723, and old Milethian [town] ... and in this town are 200 janissaries and 50 cannons”.*

### FRENCH INSCRIPTION:

*La vile de Potinsk dans laquelle il y a un bacha de boucousouche.* Translation- town Poti where is Pasha with double tugh.

So, we can say that Pasis/Poti has a many century-old history, which has not lose actuality during the Medieval Ages. I think that researches to this direction will give us a crucial information about Phasis.

9 Double Tugh- an Ottoman high rank, which was only given to Beylerbeys'

10 Alan was helped to read and interpret Georgian texts by David Jafaridze (Alan 1953:101)

11 About the journey of Mehmed Aga and the reconstruction of the fortress is discussed in the paragraph of the plan and architecture of Poti fortress