MONOMACHOS, TORNIKES AND AN UNCHARTED CAUCASIAN ANCESTRY

by Stanford Mōmmaerts-Browne[1]

ABSTRACT

Did Michael Psellos tell us more of the ancestry of his friend and patron, Konstantinos IX Monomachos, than is usually noticed? Careful examination of Psellos' account of the rebellion of Leon Tornikes' may provide a link to the ancient dynasties of Armenia and the Caucasus. Sadly, we do not (yet) have a clear and definite line to the people mentioned by David Kelley in this and the previous issue of *Foundations*.

Foundations (2006) 2 (2): 158-162 *© Copyright FMG*

Many years ago, I came across a reference in Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*, (6:99) (Sewter, 1953), which gives us some little bit of the ancestry of Konstantinos IX Monomachos, Byzantine emperor 1042-1055, upon which we may build. This passage has been cited many times; but seldom is anything extrapolated from it. Most scholars in the fields of history and genealogy, are coming to recognise and accept Konstantinos as the maternal grandfather of Vladimir II Monomakh, Grand Prince of Kiev, from whom numerous descents to the present day can be traced[2].

Another passage (6:99) states, '*The Emperor [Konstantinos Monomachos] had, through his mother, an 'εξανεψιος', called Leon, of the Tornikian family*'. Psellos tells us a great many other things about Leon, (or Leo, or Lev), who, as a troublemaker, malcontent, rabble-rouser, rebel, sower of sedition and a seducer, would naturally have attracted the attention of a chronographer.

Psellos is primarily interested in Tornikes because of the revolt against Monomachos, (Psellos' patron). Leon Tornikes was descended of a princely Armenian family. We shall return to that below. He had been Governor of Iberia, from which position he was deposed and tonsured, for 'revolutionary ideas'. Leon had originally been sent to Iberia to distance him from Euprepia, the younger of Konstantinos' two sisters. There seems to have been an *affair d'amour,* (or at least *de cœur),* between Euprepia and Leon, unseemly in part due to the difference in ages. She was somewhat older than he. As if this were not enough to turn Leon against Konstantinos, he was already upset with the Empire's actions regarding Armenia. The Empire had forced Khachik II, King of Armenia, (and Leon's kinsman), to abdicate, and to alienate the crown thereof to the Empire. Thus ended the royal line of the Armenian Bagratids. Leon revolted in 1047.

---

[1] Stanford Mōmmaerts-Browne is the author of several pieces dealing with the transition from antiquity to the middle ages. He is the list-administrator for RootsWeb.com's Gen-Ancient e-mail list, and facilitator, *inter alia*, of the Yahoo groups Anglo-Saxon_Genealogy, Byzantine-Genealogy, and Oriental_Royalty.

Contact details: FordMommaerts@cox.net

[2] One of the arguments counter to this is that we do not know whether another of Konstantinos' close relatives might have fathered the mother of Vladimir. On the contrary Psellos tells us that Konstantinos was the last of his line, '*He was the last scion of the ancient family of the Monomachoi, in the male line*', (6:14).

This is why Psellos brings Leon into his narrative. But in doing so Psellos inserts a little tit-bit of information, on which I should like to build. That tit-bit, to repeat, is, '*The Emperor had, through his mother, an 'εξανεψιος', of the Tornikian family, called Leon.*' The word *εξανεψιος* is translated by Sewter (1953), as 'second cousin'. However, he also translates '*ανεψια*' as niece, thus confusing and obscuring the Sklerainai genealogy. Granted: *ανεψιος* is cognate to nephew; but so is *nepos*, which can mean 'nephew', 'grandson', 'grandnephew', or 'descendant', and, sometimes, 'younger kinsman [or] cousin'. Properly, *ανεψιος* should be translated and understood as 'cousin'. *εξανεψιος* should be understood as 'cousin german', or 'son of first cousin', *ie* 'first cousin, once removed'[3]. It should be understood that the relationship is typically through males - thus Psellos' clarification, '*through his mother*'.[4]

What this all means is that Emperor Konstantinos IX Monomachos had, through his [Konstantinos'] mother, a first-cousin whose son was Leon Tornikes. It should be noted that the phrasing is '*through his [Konstantinos'] mother*'. Psellos does not say, 'through their mothers'.

Discussing this passage Rupert Willoughby (1991) says that Konstantinos' paternal line extends only to his father, Theodosios. He is right in this, although Psellos does give the tantalizing information that the Monomachoi were an old, very noble lineage; thus hinting that Christian Settipani (1991) may have included some earlier ancestors among his Monomachoi (p.31). I should say that the case is considerably stronger than Willoughby makes out (see footnote 2 above).

Willoughby (independently of myself) arrived at much the same conclusion with regard to Konstantinos' mother. Through her Konstantinos was first cousin of the father of Leon Tornikes. That much is definite. Thus, Leon's paternal grandfather would have been Konstantinos' maternal uncle, making Konstantinos' mother a Tornikaina. Building on this premise, we can posit the ancestry of Konstantinos Monomachos, (and his grandson, Vladimir Monomakh, and all of their descendants), some ways further than has heretofore been accepted.

There is not much room for Konstantinos' mother, (whom I shall call 'Tornikaina'), in the family of the Tornikes. She had to be close to the beginning. She would have been born in the seventh decade of the eleventh century CE. This would put her in the generation between Nicholas Tornikes, (whom Toumanoff, 1976, p.103, shows as son of Tornik, a patrician, who, by coercion of Krinites, left his domains to the Emperor Roman I), and Toumanoff's (Conto-)Leon Tornikes, (*protospathar katepan* of Bari (1017, 1019) of Kephallenia (1011), Helladik *strategos* (1024), whom Toumanoff would see as Leon's father). Chronology would thus suggest that Nicholas was, in fact, the grandfather rather than uncle of Konstantinos. The domains of the aforementioned Tornik included his portion of Taron, which he governed from 923 to 938, when he was put to death. Tornik was a son of Apuganem, *protospathar* of Taron, c.898, and patrician.

Apuganem had been sent by his brother as a hostage to Constantinople, with Konstantinos Lips, the Imperial Ambassador to Taron. After his brief stint in Taron, Apuganem returned to Constantinople, where he was made patrician, and married the daughter of Lips. She bore him three sons, Smbat, Vahan and Tornik. This is the point where the Tornikes are split from the Taronites, taking their name from Tornik.

---

[3] This last relationship is sometimes loosely and inaccurately designated 'second-cousin'.

[4] I am grateful for support on the linguistic interpretation from Prof Tom Winter, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Krikor, (*magister*, *strategos*, Prince of Taron 898-923), and Apuganem were the sons of Tornik, younger brother of Ashot I (*curopalates*, Prince of Taron 851, 858-878), and of David Arkaiq (Prince of Taron 878-895) - sons of Bagrat I (patrician, Prince of Taron 826-851 and Prince of the Princes of Armenia 830-852), who had married an Ardzrunik princess - probably sister of Hamazasp (*nakharar* of Vaspurakan 771-778, based on chronology, and the fact that Bagrat's sister, Hripsime, married Hamazasp), son of Khachik (768-7??), son of Vahan (705-742), son of Krikor (680-705). The line given here from Bagrat to Tornik, the son of Apuganem, agrees with the history of Taron and of the individuals. It is in accord with Toumanoff (1976) and differs markedly from Justi (1895, p.418).

From Bagrat I to Vasak, Toumanoff and Justi agree. Bagrat was son of Ashot IV 'the carnivorous', *marzpan* of Armenia 806-826. Ashot was son of Smbat VII (*marzpan*, Grand Constable of Armenia 761-772, who died in the battle of Bagravanden) by his wife, a daughter of Samuel II of the Mamikonids. Smbat was the son of Ashot III 'the blind' (*marzpan* 743-761, Prince of Armenia 732-748, deposed and blinded). Ashot was the son of Vasak. Vasak (according to Toumanoff) was the brother, or (according to Justi) the son, of Ashot II (patrician 685-688, [Justi], and Prince of Armenia 686-690, [Toumanoff]).

Toumanoff (p.99) shows Ashot II as father of Smbat I, Prince of Vaspurakan, crucified by the Arabs in 705/6. Justi shows this Smbat as killed in 704 and son of an otherwise unidentified Ashot who died 721. According to Toumanoff, Ashot and Vasak are sons of Smbat V, *Aspet*, (645), and formerly *spatharokandidat drongarios*, by a daughter of Manuel, Prince Aršakuni. Justi shows this Smbat as *curopalates* and *drongarios* 643-654, and married to the daughter of Manuel. Justi however, shows his Ashot as being brother to Smbat, *curopalates* 695-704. Both are sons of one Biurat. Justi's Smbat, *drongarios* 643-654, is son of Varaz-Tirots, *marzpan* and *curopalates* 643, when he died. Toumanoff shows his Smbat V, *Aspet*, as son of Varaz-Tirots II, *Aspet* 616/7-645, Prince of Armenia 645, *curopalates*, and formerly cup-bearer or butler to Khosrow II. 'Biurat' should be read as, 'Varaz'.

Toumanoff shows Varaz-Tirots II to be the son of Smbat IV, 'the very victorious', 'Khosrow's joy', *Aspet c.*595-616/7, Viceroy of Hyrcania 595-602 and adopted son of Emperor Maurice. He is the son of Manuel, son of Varaz-Tirots. He also has this last Varaz-Tirots as the father of Ashot I, *Aspet* 595, father of Pap, c.596. Justi shows Pap as *Aspet* c.596, and son of Ashot, *Aspet*, whom he does not connect to the others. Justi also shows Smbat 'very victorious' and 'Khosrow's joy', as *marzpan* and *curopalates* 643, in which year he died. He notes that Eusebius says 617. Justi does not connect this Smbat with any of the other Bagratids. Neither author has a connected genealogy beyond this point, and I shall not venture further, at this time.

I have compiled a partial and tentative *Ahnentafel* for Tornikaina, stopping at the bottle-neck of the late fourth century CE:

1. [Tornikaina]
2. [Nicholas] Tornikes?
4. Tornik, patrician *c.*923
8. Apuganem, *protospathar*, patrician, d.c.900
16. Tornik, captive of Caliph, in Baghdad, *fl.* 858
32. Bagrat I, Gr. Ishkhan Taron 826-851, Pr. Prs. Armenia 830-851

33. Arçruni
34. Konstantinos, patrician, *protospathar*

64. Ashot IV, 'the valiant', 'the carnivore', Pr. Armenia 806-826, *marzpan* 780-820

66. Khachik I, K. Vaspurakan 785-???

68. Lips

128. Smbat VII, 'the confessor', Gr. Const. Armenia 761-772, d.Bagravanden, 25 Apr. 772
129. [Mamikonia]

132. Hamazasp I, Pr. Vaspurakan 762-785, martyred 6 Jan. 785

256. Ashot III, 'the blind', Pr. Armenia 732-748, d.761

258. Shmuegh II, Pr. Mamikonids c.750-772, d.Bagravanden, 25 Apr. 772

264. Khachik, d.762

512. Vasak

516. Dawith, *nakharar* 732-744 [5]

528. Vahan I, Pr. Ardzrunik, *fl.* c.700

1024. Smbat V, *Aspet*, *drongar*, *fl. c.*645
1025. [Aršakunik]

1032. Hrahat, *koms*, (*comes*)

2048. Varaz-Tirots II, *Aspet*, *curopalates*, Viceroy of Armenia 628-*p.*631, Pr. Armenia 645

2050. Manuel, Pr. Aršakuni, *magister*, Pref. Egypt 634

2064. Mušegh III, *sparapet*, *fl.* 693-701
2065. [Karin-Pahlavi][6]

4096. Smbat IV, 'the very victorious', *Aspet*, Viceroy of Hyrcania 595-602

4128. Hamazasp III, *curopalates*, *marzpan*, Pr. Armenia 655-657, 657-658
4129. [Rštuni]
4130. Narseh II, *curopalates*, Pr. Armenia 689/90-691

8192. Manuel

8256. Dawith, *vardapet*?, *v.*c.600

8258. Theodor I, Pr. Rštuni

8260. Vahan II, Pr. Kamsarakan mid-7th century

16384. Varaz-Tirots

16512. Vahan II, 'the wolf', Pr. Taron c.593-606 [7]

33024. Mušegh II, *nakharar* 555, *marzpan* ? 591-3, *strategos* in Thrace

---

[5] Settipani (1991, p.53, item #29) explains why Toumanoff's reconstruction of Shmuegh II's place in the family is the only possibility.

[6] Settipani (1991, p.50, n.7)

[7] Settipani (1991, p.47, item #11)

66048. Hmayeak[8]

132096. Vard, *marzpan* 505-509 [8]

264192. St. Hmayeak, d.Ordjnahal 451

264193. Dzoyk Arçruni

528384. Hamazasp, *sparapet*, Gr. Constable of Armenia 387-???, d.c.414/6/32 (Justi 414, Settipani c.416, Toumanoff 432.). His distaff ancestry can be traced to the Princes of Siunik, who may have been descended from the kings of Commagene.

528385. Sahakanoyš Suren-Pahlavi - She was the heiress of the Gregorids, hereditary heads of the Church of Armenia, descended from St. Gregory 'the illuminator', a Parthian prince of the ruling family of Seistan, (*i.e.* Sakastan), in NW India. Her great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother were princesses of the Armenian branch of the Arsacid, (Aršakunik), dynasty of Parthia, Armenia, Iberia and Albania.

Any blanks that readers could fill would be welcomed.

References

Justi, Ferdinand (1895). *Iranische Namenbuch*, Marbourg.

Sewter, E R A (1953, translator). The *Chronographia of Michael Psellus*.[9] Yale University Press [reprinted Harmondsworth, 1966].

Settipani, Christian (1991). *Nos Ancêtres de l'Antiquité: Études des possibilités de liens généalogiques entre les familles de l'Antiquité et celles du haut Moyen-Age européen*, Paris, Editions Christian.

Toumanoff, Cyril (1976). *Manuel de Généalogie et de Chronologie pour l'histoire de la Caucasie chrétienne*. Rome.

Willoughby, Rupert (1991). The Golden Line - Byzantine, Arab and Armenian Ancestry of the Russian Ruriks'. *Genealogists' Magazine*, **23** (9): 321-327; and **23** (10): 369-372.

Additional reading

Adontz, Nicolas (1936). Les Taronites à Byzance. *Byzantion*, XI, pp. 21-42.

Runciman, Stephen (1929). *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and his Reign*. Cambridge, esp. Table III.

Toumanoff, Cyril (1963). *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*. Washington DC, Georgetown University Press.

---

[8] Settipani (1991, p.43, item #7)

[9] The full text of this edition is available online at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/psellus-chronographia.html