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# The “Bun-Turks” in Ancient Georgia\*

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## Abstract

The paper deals with the identification of the so-called “Bun-Turks” that are mentioned in several historical texts as a tribe which settled in Georgia in prehistoric times. On the basis of a thorough comparison of the relevant Georgian and other sources, the term is shown to have emerged from a corruption of the name of the Huns, which occurs in similar contexts, together with other designations of Turkic tribes. The available text materials further suggest that the historical basis for the mentioning of the “Bun-Turks” as settlers in Georgia was the Khazar attacks of the VIth-VIIth centuries, which were secondarily re-projected into prehistoric times.

## Keywords

Bun-Turks, Huns, Qypčaq, Khazars; Kartlis Cxovreba; Mokceva Kartlisa; Alexander Romance; Šāh-nāme

Turkic languages are an integral part of the linguistic landscape of present-day Caucasia, both north and south of the mountain ridge. However, different from the so-called “autochthonous” Caucasian languages, i.e. the languages pertaining to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian), (North-) West Caucasian and (North-)East Caucasian families, both the southern (Oghuz) and the northern (Qypchaq) idioms of Turkic stock are generally believed to have entered the area in relatively recent times. Nevertheless there are explicit indications of ancient contacts between Caucasian and Turkic peoples in historical sources from the area itself. The present paper deals with one of these traditions, viz. that of the “Bun-Turks” mentioned in Old Georgian historiography.

Even though there is good reason to believe that Old Georgian literacy emerged about the same time as that of Old Armenian, by the beginning of the

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Vth c. A.D., Georgian historiography differs from that of its neighbours in that the sources that have come down to us are of a much later origin. As a matter of fact, no Georgian fellow-historians are known of authors such as Koriwn, Agathangelos, Łazar Parpec'i (all Vth c.), Ehišē, Sebēos (VIIth c.), Łewond (VIIIth c.), or Movsēs Xorenac'i (IXth c.). In Georgian tradition, we must wait until the Xth c. for the first noteworthy account of the history of the country to be written down; this is the anonymous text on the "Conversion of Kartli (East-Georgia)", *Mokce-vay Kartlisay*, which contains, beside the legend of the conversion of King Mirian by a captive woman called Nino, a brief chronicle extending from prehistorical times to the IVth c. A.D. The "Conversion", existing in four different versions<sup>1</sup> and representing a compilation of various older sources,<sup>2</sup> was later used by the bishop Leonti Mroveli (Leontius of Ruisi) who in the XIth c. authored the initial parts of *Kartlis Cxovreba*, the Georgian "Chronicle", which was steadily continued until the XVIIth c.<sup>3</sup> Apart from these works, it is only a few hagiographic texts that may be regarded as authentic historical sources of first millenium Georgia.<sup>4</sup>

Within the "Conversion of Kartli", the people called *bun-turkni*, i.e. "Bun-Turks", play a prominent rôle indeed. In the most comprehensive version of the text, that of the Šaṭberd codex of the late Xth c., they are mentioned as inhabitants of East Georgia right at the beginning, in connection with an enigmatical account of a king named Alexander:

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<sup>1</sup> The versions of *Mokce-vay Kartlisay* (MK) are contained in one codex each of Šaṭberd (Xth c.) and Čeliši (XIIIth c., cf. Lerner 2004a), and two manuscripts of St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai (Xth c.). The text of the Šaṭberd codex has been edited in Gigineišvili/Giunašvili (1979: 320-355) and, in parallel with the Čeliši codex, in Abuladze (1963: 82-163); of the two Sinai manuscripts (N48 and N50), only the latter is available via the facsimile edition in Aleksidzé (2001: 73-215). The (fragmentary) second Sinai manuscript (N48) was investigated *in situ* by the present author in 2010; it does not overlap with N50.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gippert (2006) for a discussion of several relevant cases.

<sup>3</sup> For *Kartlis Cxovreba* (KC) cf. the edition Qauxčišvili (1955-9). – The question of the dating of the model used by Leonti cannot be discussed here (the VIIIth c. has recently been proposed in Rapp 1999: 80 and 2006: 175).

<sup>4</sup> These are the legends of St. Šušaniš (VIth c.), St. Evštati of Mxeta (VIth c.), St. Habo of Ṭpilis (VIIIth c.), and a few other ones, all edited in Abuladze 1963.

MK.S 320,2–6:<sup>5</sup>

*odes aleksandre mepeman natesavni igi lotis šviltani çarıkına da šeqadna igini kedarısa mas kueqanasa, ixılna natesavni sasııknı bun-turkni, msxdomareni mdınaresa zeda mıkuarsa mixuevit, otı kalakad, da dabnebi mati: sarıkine-kalaki, kaspi, urbnisi da ozraqe.*

“After Alexander the King (had) conquered the descendants of the children of Lot and dispelled them into the land Kedar (?), he saw the fierce tribes (of) the *Bun-Turks* who resided along the river Kur, in four cities, and their villages (were) *Sarkine-City, Kaspi, Urbnisi and Ozraqe*”.<sup>6</sup>

From Leonı Mroveli’s adaptation of the passage it is clear that the king in question is Alexander the Great, but neither the “children of Lot” nor the “land Kedar” appear here:

KC. L.Mr. 17,6–8<sup>7</sup>:

*aman aleksandre daipqrna qovelni kideni kueqanisani. ese gamovida dasavlit, da ševıda samqrıt, šemovıda çrdilot, gardamovlna kavkasni da movıda kartlad...*

“That Alexander conquered all the edges of the land. He started from the west, and went south, entered northwards, transgressed the Caucasus (mountains) and came to Kartli...”

It is but a vague idea that the “land Kedar” of the “Conversion”, *kedarısa mas kueqanasa*, might have been replaced by the “edges of the land”, *kideni kueqanisani*, in this text,<sup>8</sup> and that the “children of Lot” have their counterpart in the “northward” direction, *çrdilot*, of Alexander’s progression. As both the “descendants of Lot” and a land (or, rather, tribe) named “Kedar” are Biblical *topoi*,<sup>9</sup> it may

<sup>5</sup> MK.S = the text as appearing in the Šatberd version of the legend (here quoted by pages and lines of the edition Gigineiřvili/Giunařvili 1979); of the other versions, none has the initial paragraphs forming the “Primary History of Georgia” (thus the term introduced by Rapp 1999: 82).

<sup>6</sup> For the place names concerned cf. the map (by Robert H. Hewsen) in Rapp (1999: 128).

<sup>7</sup> Here quoted by pages and lines of the edition Qauxçiřvili (1955).

<sup>8</sup> Gertrud Patsch in her German translation of the “Conversion” (1975: 290 n. 2, referring to Čikobava 1955: 1120) considers to see Modern Georgian *kedar*- “side, edge” (“Seite, Rand” / “მხარე, კიდე”) here, suggesting that *kedar*- in the “Conversion” might be interpreted as “outlying” (“könnte auch in diesem Sinne als «abseits gelegen» gedeutet werden”). The stem *kedar*- seems not be attested anywhere in Old Georgian, however, so that we should rather assume a corruption of \**kide*- instead. – Old Georgian *kedar*-, the name of the “cedar tree”, can be excluded in the given context as we have an appositive construction “in the land *k*.” in “*kedarısa mas kueqanasa*”, not a genitival syntagm “in the land of the cedar(s)” (\**kueqanasa mas kedarısa*/kedarısa).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Deut. 2,9,19 and Ps. 83,8 (82,9) for the “children of Lot”. Note that in the Old Georgian Bible tradition, it is not *řvil*- “child” but *ze*- “son” that is used in these passages. Cf. below for another suggestion as to the “children of Lot”. – For the “land Kedar” cf. the “tents of Kedar” mentioned in Ps.

well be the text of the “Conversion” that has undergone changes here, rather than Leonti’s which must have relied upon a model quite distant from the Šaṭberd version of the legend.

Different from the “Conversion”, Leonti Mroveli continues not with “Bun-Turks” but with “Kartvelians”, i.e., Georgians, in the present context, and in a very unfavourable manner indeed:

KC. L.Mr. 17,8–11:

... *da p̄ovna q̄ovelni kartvelni uboroṭes q̄ovelta natesavta s̄zulita. rametu col-kmrobisa da siṣvisatws ara učnda natesaoba, q̄ovelsa suliersa čamdes, m̄kudarsa šesčamdes, vitarca m̄qecni da p̄iruṭq̄uni, romelta kcevisa čarmotkma uqm ars ...*

“... and he found all (the) Georgians worse than all tribes by (their) faith. For they did not care of (sanguinal) relations in marriage and matrimony, used to eat everything living and (even) dead, just like beasts and wild animals, whose customs are impossible to describe...”

However, in Leonti Mroveli’s treatise, it is not the Kartvelians alone that are ascribed these raw manners. Immediately afterwards, the author agrees with the “Conversion” again in introducing the “Bun-Turks”, too. But different from the latter text, the term is here combined with another designation of a Turkic tribe, viz. *q̄ivčaṗ*-, i.e., Qypchaqs:

KC. L.Mr. 17,11–13:

*da ixilna ra ese natesavni saṣṭikni čarmartni, romelta-igi čuen bunturkad da q̄ivčaṗad uṇodt, msxdomareni mdinareša mas m̄ṭḡurisasa mixvevit, dauḡwrda ese aleksandres, rametu ara romelni natesavni ikmodes mas.*

“And when he saw these fierce pagan tribes, whom we call *Bun-Turks* and *Qypchaqs*, who resided along the river Kur, Alexander was astonished, for no (other) tribes would do the (same).”

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119 (120), 5; it is this verse that is quoted s.v. *kedari* in the XVIIth c. Georgian lexicon by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani (1965: 367). Saba’s translation “ბნელი სკუმუნავი”, i.e. “woeful dark”, adapted by Pätšch (1975: 290 with n. 2: “das dunkle Land”), is obviously based on an etymological connection of the Biblical name of the tribe of the sons of Ishmael, קֶדָר = *qedār* (Gen. 25,13 etc.) with the root קִדַר = *qdr* “to be dark, darken”. Given that both the Septuagint and the Armenian Bible leave the name of the tribe untranslated in Ps. 119,5 (Κηδαρ / *kedar*-), there is no reason to believe that *kedar*-existed as a common noun meaning “dark” in Old Georgian, even though Saba’s entry seems to be supported by the “Conversion” itself which has the sentence *čarvedit bnelta črdiloyšata mtata mat kedarisata* “go away into the darknesses of the North, into the mountains of Kedar” later (MKS.S 341,42–345,1). This, however, only proves that the etymological connection of the name with Hebr. *qdr* was widespread long before Saba. – The translation “land of midnight” proposed by Rapp with reference to “Khurāsân, the great eastern province of Persia” denoting the “east” (1999: 94) has no basis whatsoever.

Who, then, are the “Bun-Turks” who are reported here to have lived along with Kartvelians and Qypchaqs in East Georgia by the time of Alexander? As a matter of fact, several explanations have been proposed for their name, which seems not to be attested as such outside of Old Georgian sources. The first proposal was made by Marie-Félicité Brosset (1849: 33) who regarded *bun-turk-* as a compound denoting “Turks primitifs”. This assumption is in accordance with the use of the word *bun-* in Old Georgian, esp. of its derivative *buneba-* which is the general term for “basis” or “nature”. It is further supported by two later revisions of St. Nino’s legend<sup>10</sup> which allude to *buneba-* explicitly in the given context, in a sort of *lucus a non lucendo* argumentation:

N.A. 46,15–18:

*ixilna natesavni igi sastiḡni ḡarmartani, romelta čuen aç bun-turkad da ḡivčaqad uḡodt, msxdomareni mdinaresa zeda mḡkurisasa mixuevit, da kalakni matni zlierni da cixeni priad magarni, da cxondebodes igini ḡovlad uḡod ḡacta bunebisagan, vitarca mḡecni da piruḡuni, romelta kcevisa ḡarmotkumay uḡmar ars.*

“And he saw the fierce tribes of the pagans, whom we now call *Bun-Turks and Qypchaqs*, residing along the river Kur, and their strong cities and very firm strongholds, and they lived (in a way) totally deviant from the nature of men, like beasts and animals, whose customs are impossible to describe.”

N.B. 79,26–80,3:

*da ixilna natesavni sastiḡni ḡarmartni, romelta čuen açat-bun-turkad uḡest, rametu ixilvebodes igini ḡovlad uḡod ḡacta bunebisagan, vitarca iḡvnes mḡecni rayme sazulvelni.*

“And he saw the fierce pagan tribes, whom we call *Açat-Bun-Turks*,<sup>11</sup> for they looked totally deviant from the nature of men, because they were somewhat ugly beasts.”

Brosset’s proposal was but slightly altered by Nikolai Marr who suggested a translation “коренной турокъ”, i.e., “original” or “old-established Turk”, assuming “корень, основание” (“root, basis”) to be the underlying meaning of *bun-* (Marr 1901: LXII). At the same time, Marr rejected the interpretation published by Ekvtime Taḡaišvili in the first edition of the “Conversion”, according to whom the word might denote Turks as “spear-bearers” (“будет означать турка-копье-носца”) (Takajšvili 1900: 1–2 n. 2). As Marr correctly observed, *bun-* nowhere

<sup>10</sup> N.A. (metaphrastic version by Arsen Beri): ca. XIIth c.; N.B. (anonymous metaphrastic version): ca. XIIIth c.; both quoted by pages and lines after the edition Abuladze (1971).

<sup>11</sup> Note that *açat-* is unexplained. Should this be a corruption of *ḡivčaq-* rather than of *aç* “now” as in N.A.?

means “spear-bearer” nor even “spear” alone; in the combination *bun- horolisa-* appearing, e.g., in the Šaṭberd codex within the Treatise on David and Goliath by Hippolytus (243,26; 244,33) as a quotation from II Kings (II Sam.) 21,19, it is *horol-* which denotes the weapon, while *bun-* designates the “shaft” (“ратовище”) as its “basis” or “handle” (“основание, рукоятка”).<sup>12</sup> Marr was also right in underlining the coincidence with Armenian which has *born getardan* in I Kings (I Sam.) 17,7 as a perfect equivalent of *bun- horolisa-*. And there is hardly any room for doubt that both Armenian *born* and Georgian *bun-* lastly reflect Middle Persian *bun* with its meanings “base, foundation, bottom” as proposed by Heinrich Hübschmann (1897: 123–4), Ilia Abuladze (1944: 085), and Mzia Andronikašvili (1966: 297). Thus the assumption that the term “Bun-Turks” means something like “primeval” or “original” Turkic inhabitants of Kartli seems to be well founded.<sup>13</sup>

However, a different view suggests itself when we consider the information provided in *Mokceṽay Kartlisay* and *Kartlis Cxovreba* in a broader context. As a matter of fact, Leonti’s text strongly reminds of a certain type of medieval legends on Alexander the Great that have come down to us in other languages, viz. Greek, Armenian, and Syriac. As a close parallel we may quote the prose version of the “Christian Legend”, which is preserved in the latter language as an appendix to the Alexander Romance proper.<sup>14</sup> Here, both Alexander’s travels into the Caucasus and the wild appearance of the people living there are described in a very similar way:

CL. 260,15–264,2 / 148,35–151,7:

“And Alexander looked towards the west ... then they went down to the source of the Euphrates ... and they came to the confines of the north, and entered Arme-

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<sup>12</sup> “Šubis ṭari”, i.e. “spear shaft”, is noted as the meaning of *buni* in Sulkhan-Saba’s lexicon (Orbeliani 1965: 124); in a second entry, the same word is translated by “saqelsakmre”, i.e. “(tool) for handicraft” (?; ib.; correspondingly in Čubinašvili 1887: 123).

<sup>13</sup> Marr’s interpretation “original Turk” has recently been sustained by Rapp (1999: 95). According to Culaja (1979: 60 nn. 85 and 89), the term was used in referring to the pre-Hellenic period. – A different solution has recently been published by K. Lerner (2004b: 224) who proposed to see the influence of a “supposed Semitic substratum” here, deducing the term from “Hebrew, bney-Turks = ‘seed, sons of the Turks’”. It seems, however, that the “Old Hebrew Romance” on Alexander Lerner refers to does not contain this notion, and the phonetic reshaping to be assumed in this case is not paralleled anywhere else.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the edition and translation in Budge (1889: 255–275 and 144–158); in the present paper, only the translation will be quoted (as CL). For an account of the Syriac manuscripts containing the Alexander Romance and a summary of the “Legend” cf. Hunnius (1904: 9) and, more recently, Ciancaglioni (2001). The XIIth c. “Book of the Bee” referred to by Rapp (1999: 98) stands farther off.

nia and Âdarbaijân and Inner Armenia ... and he went and encamped by the gate of the great mountain. ... Alexander said, “This mountain is higher and more terrible than all the mountains which I have seen. ... Who are the nations within this mountain upon which we are looking? ... What is their appearance, and their clothings, and their languages?” ... “They wear dressed skins; and they eat the raw flesh of everything which dies of theirs; and they drink the blood of men and animals. ...”

And of course, Alexander’s question as to what nations he is looking at is answered as well:

CL. 263,2–5 / 150,20–24:

“Alexander said, “Who are the nations within this mountain upon which we are looking? ...” The natives of the land said, “They are the Huns.” He said to them, “Who are their kings?” The old men said: “Gôg and Mâgôg and Nâwâl the kings of the sons of Japhet ...”

This parallel suggests off-hand that the name of the “Bun-Turks” might have emerged from a corruption of the name of the “Huns”, which would presuppose a confusion of *h-* and *b-* if Syriac ܠܘܢܘܢ = *hunāyē* as occurring in the given passage (263,4) was the model. The same would hold true if *bun-* should reflect Greek οὐνν- still spoken *hun-* with initial aspiration; this assumption is valid even though none of the existing Greek versions of the legend seems to use this name. The closest parallel we find among these versions is surely that of recension λ of the Alexander Romance ascribed to (Pseudo-)Kallisthenes (cf. the edition in Thiel 1959). This text does agree with the Syriac legend in denoting the “tribes of the North” as descendants of Japhet,<sup>15</sup> thus suggesting that the enigmatical “children of Lot” we found in the Georgian “Conversion” might have emerged from a corruption of “children of Japhet” (\**iapetis švilni*).

Ps.-Kall. Rec. λ, III,29 (51,10–53,7 ed.Thiel)

Ἐξελθὼν δὲ Ἀλέξανδρος ... ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ πορευθῆναι ἐπὶ τὰ βόρεια μέρη. εὖρε δὲ ἐκεῖ ἔθνη πονηρὰ ἐσθιόντας σάρκας ἀνθρώπων καὶ πίνοντας αἷμα ζώων [καὶ θηρίων] ὥσπερ ὕδωρ. ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἐφοβήθη αὐτούς· ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ τοῦ Ἰάφεθ ἀπόγονοι ... τοὺς νεκροὺς οὐκ ἔθαπτον, ἀλλ’ ἤσθιον αὐτούς. ...

“But Alexander went off ... and it seemed good to him to travel into the northern lands. There he found worthless people eating human flesh and drinking the

<sup>15</sup> The same notion is also found in the parallel passage of two redactions of the Apocalypse by (Pseudo-) Methodius (edited in Thiel 1959: 72-75); here we read: ἔνθα καὶ ἐώρακεν ἔθνη ἀκάθαρτα καὶ δυσειδῆ ἃ εἰσι τῶν υἱῶν Ἰάφεθ ἀπόγονοι / ἔνθα καὶ ἐώρακεν ἔθνη ἀκάθαρτα καὶ εἶδεν ἐκεῖ ἐκ τῶν υἱῶν Ἰάφεθ ἀπογόνους (72, 5-7 / 73, 5-6).

blood of living beings [and animals] like water. When Alexander saw them, he was affrighted, for they were descendants of Japhet ... they did not bury the dead but ate them. ...”

In ending up the account of Alexander’s journey to the North, the same text introduces the ethnonym of the “Turks”, too, thus indicating a possible source for the second part of the quasi-compound *bun-turk-* of the Georgian tradition:

Ps.-Kall. Rec. λ, III,29 (57,4–6 ed.Thiel):

ἐκκαθάρας οἶν τὰ μέρη τοῦ βορρᾶ ἐκ τῶν μιαρῶν ἐκεῖνων ἐθνῶν ἔπιτσα δὲ τοίχον πρὸς ἀνατολὰς πηγέων π' τὸ ὕψος καὶ πηγῶν κ' τὸ πλάτος. καὶ διεχώρησα ἀναμέσον Τούρκων καὶ Ἀρμενίων.

“Having cleansed the lands of the North from the defilements of those people, he built a wall against the north, 70 cubits high and 20 cubits wide, and passed through the Turks and the Armenians.”

The identification of *bun-* with the name of the Huns still hits on two problems. First, the replacement of *h-* by *b-* can by no means be motivated phonetically,<sup>16</sup> and we must assume some sort of paleographic confusion instead. This assumption is equally hard to prove but not improbable. If the replacement took place within Georgian, we must presuppose that the script involved was the ancient majuscule script, Asomtavruli, as only in this script the letters <b> and <h> are similar enough to be confusable;<sup>17</sup> cp. the two letters in VIIIth c. Asomtavruli (Ϡ vs. Ⴀ), XIth c. minuscule script (Nuskhuri: Ⴁ vs. Ⴃ), and Modern Mkhedruli script (ზ vs. ჰ). It must be admitted in any way that a common prototype of the “Conversion of Kartli” and Leonti Mroveli’s account was written in Asomtavruli majuscules, given that similar confusions must be assumed for other passages of the “Conversion”, too.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> A. Vovin (personal communication of 2005) drew my attention to the Greek ethnonym φρυγ- which occurs in Strabo’s Geography (11,11,15) and denotes a people in the neighbourhood of the Chinese (σηρ-) and Bactria; this might represent an older variant of the name of Huns (< \**hwrung*) and underlie Georgian *bun-*. The sound substitution involved (\**fr* > *b*) would be unparalleled, however, even though Old Georgian does possess examples of Middle Iranian *fr-* being substituted by *br-* (e.g., \**frazēn* “wise” > *brzen-i*, cf. Gippert 1993: 223-4 and 267-8) as well as *hr-* being substituted by *pr-* (e.g., *prom-* “Rome” vs. *hrom-* “id.”, via \**fr-*; cf. Blake 1923: 84-7; Peeters 1926: 76-7).

<sup>17</sup> “A conflation of the designations Hun (Honi) and Turk (T’urk’i)” was also considered hesitatingly by Rapp (2003: 149 n. 185) but rejected on paleographic grounds.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gippert 2006: 114-6 for an example. – Note that the Sinai manuscript N48 (cf. note 1 above) is peculiar for the fact that it contains various lines written in Asomtavruli letters in an otherwise Nuskhuri-Khutsuri based context (cf. Gippert 2010, n. 23), thus proving that older versions of the “Conversion” written in Asomtavruli letters may well have existed.

The second problem consists in the fact that the name of the Huns does occur in Old Georgian sources in a different form, viz. *hon-*. As a matter of fact, this form is met with in the “Conversion” itself, side by side with *bun-turk-*, in the continuation of the passage treated above:

MK.S. 320,7–16:

*dauḡwrda aleksandres da cna, rametu ieboselta natesavni iḡvnes: ḡovelsa ḡorcielsa ḡamdes da samare mati ara iḡo, mḡudarsa šeḡḡamdes. da ver ezlo brzolay mati mepesa da ḡarvida. mašin movides natesavni mbrzolni, kaldeveltagan gamo-sxmulni, honni, da itxoves bun-turkta uplisagan kueḡanay xarḡita. da dasxdes igini zanavs. ... da ḡemdgomad raodenisa-me ḡamisa movida aleksandre, mepē ḡovlisa kueḡanisay, da daleḡna samni ese kalakni da cixeni, da honta dasca maxwli.*

“And Alexander was astonished and realised that they were descendants of the Jebusites: they used to eat all (kinds of) meat and had no cemeteries, (because) they used to eat the dead. And the king could not fight against them and went away. Then came martial tribes, an offspring of the Chaldees, Hons, and they asked the ruler of the Bun-Turks for tributed land. And they settled in Zanavi. ... And after some time, Alexander, the king of all the land, came (again) and destroyed these three cities and fortresses and defeated the Hons with the sword.”

This notion seems to imply that the *hon-ni* and the *bun-turkni* cannot be the same people. Leonṡi Mroveli’s account is not helpful in this context at first glance as it mentions only the “tribes of the Chaldees”:

KC. L.Mr. 17,14–16:

*aramed mas ḡamsa ver uzlo, rametu povna cixeni maḡarni da kalakni zlierni. ḡualad gamovides sxuani natesavni kaldevelni, da daeḡennes igini-ca kartls. ḡemdgomad amissa ganzlierda aleksandre da daiḡḡra ḡoveli kueḡana, da aḡmovida kueḡanasa kartlisasa. da povna cixe-kalakni ese zlierni ḡua-kartl: ... urbnisi, ḡaspi ... sarḡine, da zanavi, ubani uriata ...*

“But at that time, he was not able (to fight against them), because he detected (their) firm fortresses and strong cities. (And) again, other Chaldean tribes came, and they, too, settled in Kartli. After this, Alexander gained strength and conquered all the land, and he came to the land of Kartli. And he found these strong fortified cities in Inner-Kartli: ... Urbnisi, Ḳaspi ... Sarḡine, and Zanavi, the quarter of the Jews ...”

We must note, however, that Leonṡi’s text contains another type of information that might be decisive here. Based on his equation of Zanavi with a “quarter of the Jews”, Ekvtime Taḡaiḡvili proposed to read *ho~nni* as an abbreviated form of “*ჰეპრთაბნო*, т.е. еврей” in the Conversion (Takajḡvili 1900: 5 n. 1). As the Georgian Jews are generally believed to be of Babylonian provenance, this

explanation seems to have a good deal in its favour,<sup>19</sup> even though it does not account for the double *n*, the plural nominative of *huria*- “Jew” being *huriani* throughout.

On the other hand, this explanation will not work for the dative plural form *honta* appearing at the end of the passage, as the corresponding form of *huria*- would be *huriata*, with no *n* at all. What is more, there can be no doubt that Old Georgian did possess a stem *hon*- denoting the “Huns”. This is attested, e.g., in the legend of St. Šušaniḡ,<sup>20</sup> allegedly an authentic report of the late Vth or early VIth century written by a contemporary of the Saint, and generally assumed to be the oldest extant non-translated literary text in Old Georgian. Here, the people named *hon*- are the adversaries of the vicegerent (*piṭiaxši*, *vitaxa*) of Kartli:

Šuš. VII: 19,2-5:

*da man mrkua me: “uḡḡia, xuces, me brzolad ḡarval honta zeda. da čemi samḡauli mas ara dauṭeo, odes igi ara čemi coli ars – ipoos vinme, romelman ganḡapos igi.” ... da vitar moiḡia aḡvsebisa oršabati da movida piṭiaxši brzolisa miḡgan hontaysa, ešmaḡi txrida gulsa missa.*

“And he (the *vitaxa*) told me: ‘Do you know, priest, I am going to fight against the Huns, And don’t leave her my jewellery as long as she isn’t my wife – someone will be found who will wear it out.’ ... And as Easter Monday came and the *vitaxa* returned from the fight against the Huns, the devil was stirring (lit. digging) his heart up.”

There can be no doubt that the “Huns” here referred to are the same as those mentioned, under the same name, *hon*-, in Armenian historiographic texts such as Agathangelos’ History of the Armenians:<sup>21</sup>

Agath. 19: 16,6–10:

*... sksanēr Xosrov t’agaworn Hayoc’ gownd kazmel ... gowmarel zzōrs Ałowanic’ ew Vrac’, ew banal zdrowns Alanac’ ew zČoray pahakin, hanel zzōrs Honac’, aspatak dnel i koḡmans Parsic’, aršawel i koḡmans Asorestani, minč’ew i drowns Tisboni:*

“... Xosrov, the king of the Armenians, began to assemble an army, ... to take together the troops of the Albanians and the Georgians, and to open the gates of the Alans and the guard of Čor (Derbent),<sup>22</sup> to extract the troops of the Huns,

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bielmeier (1990: 32) who connects the name *Zanavi* with the Hebrew place name *zānūḡ* (Zanoah) appearing in the Old Testament (Jos. 15,34 etc.).

<sup>20</sup> Here quoted by pages and lines of the edition in Abuladze 1963.

<sup>21</sup> Here quoted by paragraph numbers, pages and lines after the edition Tēr-Mkrtčean/Kanayanc’ (1909).

<sup>22</sup> Note that the historical setting of St. Šušaniḡ’s legend agrees with that of Agathangelos’ History in mentioning Derbent under the name Čor-: *xolo piṭiaxši čord ḡaremarta da žožik, žmay misi,*

make an attack into the regions of the Persians, to invade the regions of Assyria up to the gates of Ktesiphon.”

Unfortunately, the XIIIth c. Armenian translation of the Georgian Chronicle, *Patmowt’iwn Vrac’*, does not contain any information on the “Bun-Turks” or “Huns” in the passage corresponding to Leonṭi Mroveli’s treatise on Alexander’s journey, its text being abridged in the present context as elsewhere:

PV 24,1–25,3:<sup>23</sup>

*Yaynm žamanaki ambarjaw mecn Atek’sandr... Sa ekn yarewmtic’ ar hiwsisiw, ew šrjeal and arewels, emowt i cmakayin erkirn. ew ēanc’ and Kovkasow leārñ yašxarhn Vrac’. ew hiac’aw and zazir keans noc’a: Ew zi etes amroc’s bazowms, ew ašxateac’ zzawrs iwr amiss vec’ yañnowln znosa’ zCownda, zXert’wis, ZOwnjrxē, kařowc’ealn and k’arin Ladasoy, zT’owłars i veray getoyñ Speroy, or asi Čorox, zOwrbnis, zKašb, Owplisc’ixē, or asi Teañn-berd, zMc’xet’a – zt’atk’n’ or Sarkina koč’ec’aw, zC’ixēdid, or ē berd mec, ew Zawanoy t’aln Hrēic’ ...*

“At that time, the Great Alexander arose... He came from the west to the north, and having travelled through the east, he entered the land of the shadow.<sup>24</sup> And he went from Mt. Caucasus into the land of the Georgians. And he was astonished about their disgusting life. And as he saw many strongholds (there) and he was busy for six months with his troops (trying) to conquer them, (viz.) Čunda, Xertvisi, Ozrqe which was built at the rock of Ladasi, Tuğarisi above the river Šperi, which is (also) called Čoroxi, Urbnisi, Kašpi, Upliscixe which means Fortress of the Lord, Mcxeta – (its) quarters which are called Sarqine, Cixedidi, which means Big Fortress, and Zavani (= Zanavi!), the quarter of the Jews ...”

In another passage, however, the *Patmowt’iwn Vrac’* does use the term *hon-*. This passage is concerned with King David the Builder (Davit Ağmašenebeli) and his wife Guaranduxt, and the period in question is the XIth–XIIth century A.D.:

PV 244,3–9:

*Ew kin nora Gorandowxt dowstr ēr Kivč’atac’ glxaworin, aysink’n Honac’ At’rakay. ew noc’a awgnowt’eambn hnazandeac’ zt’agaworsn Awset’oy. ew ar patands i noc’anē, ew arar xalatowt’iwn i mēj’Awsac’ ew Honac’.*

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*ara daxuda, odes sakmē ese ikmna čmidisa šušaniķis zeda* “But the *vitaxa* had moved off to Čor, and Žožiķ, his brother, was not present when this affair happened to St. Šušaniķ” (ch. X: 22,11–12). For other peculiarities of the Old Georgian legend agreeing with features of Old Armenian cf. Gippert 1991: 82–84.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the edition in Abuladze (1953), here quoted by page and lines (as PV).

<sup>24</sup> *Cmakayin erkir* is a literal translation of \**kueqana- črdiloysa-*, lit. “land of the shadow”, the term underlying Georgian *črdiloet-i* “North”.

“And his wife Gorandowxt was the daughter of the head of the Kipchaks, i.e., the Huns, Atʿrakay. And with their help, he subdued the kings of Ossetia. And he took hostages from them, and he made peace between the Ossetes and the Huns.”

Equating the *hons* with the *kiwčʿats*, i.e., the Qypchaqs, the Armenian text differs considerably from its Georgian model, the chapter on Davit Aġmašenebeli of *Kartlis Cxovreba*,<sup>25</sup> which uses only the term *qivčaġ*- here:

KC. D.A. 336,4–18:

*moeġvana sanatreli da qovlad gantkmuli siġetita guaranduxġ dedopali, švili qivčaġta umtavresisa atraka šaraġanis zisa ... amistws-ca çaravlinna kaçni sarçmunoni da mouçoda qivčaġta da simamrsa twssa. ševides ovsets da moegebnes mepeni ovsetisani da qovelni mtavarni matni, da vitarca monani dadges çinaše missa. da aġixunes mzevalni ortagan-ve, ovsta da qivčaġta, da esret advilad še-aertna orni-ve natesavni. da qo šoris matsa siġuaruli da mšwdoba vitarca zmata.*

“He had married the blessed and very beautiful queen Guaranduxġ, a child of the leader of the Qypchaqs, Atraka the son of Šaraġan ... Therefore he sent out faithful men and invited the Qypchaqs and his father-in-law. They entered Ossetia, and the kings of Ossetia and all their leaders approached them and stood like servants in front of them. And they took hostages from both the Ossetes and the Qypchaqs, and in this way he easily reunited them. And he made happiness and peace between them like brothers.”

On the other hand, it is just this equation which is reminiscent of the “Bun-Turks” and “Qypchaqs” being named side by side in Leonti Mroveli’s account of Alexander, and it is highly probable that the two passages are linked to each other, given that King David is explicitly compared with the Greek emperor right before:

KC D.A. 335,16–336,1:

*da msgavsad aleksandressa kmna ... amistwsca aman meoreman aleksandre ganiz-raxa sivrcita gonebisata, rametu sxuaebr ara iqo ġone, dauçqoda řetilad qivčaġta natesavisa simravle ...*

“And he acted similarly to Alexander ... and therefore this second Alexander considered with the width of (his) wit that there was no other means, (for) he knew the size of the tribe of the Qypchaqs well ...”

In this way, even the later text tradition supports the assumption that the term *bun-turk-* of the “Conversion of Kartli” and its adaptations emerged from a contamination of the ethnonyms of “Huns” and “Turks” appearing in a legend on

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<sup>25</sup> The chapter is entitled *Cxovrebay mepet-mepisay davitisi*; for a special edition cf. Šaniže 1992: 182-3.

Alexander that must have been its source. This assumption implies the misreading or misspelling of the former term in an Asomtavruli manuscript source of the "Conversion" and its spread into all later text variants (as secondary attestations); all this may well have been facilitated by popular etymology associating *bun-* with notions of "nature", "ground", or "origin(ality)". At the same time, the term *hon-* in the Šatberd-version of *Mokcevoy Kartlisay* may be regarded as being re-introduced into the legend on the basis of a parallel source, possibly as an (interlinear) gloss. As to the coexistence of *hon-* and *\*hun-*, we should keep in mind that the latter stem was partly homonymous with that of *hune-* "horse", which might have led to confusion; cf. the text on the destruction of Jerusalem in 614 A.D. ascribed to a certain Antiokhos Strategos, where the form *honebi* appears instead of *huneebi* "horses" in an allusion to the submersion of the Pharaoh's troops in the exodus of the Israelites' (Ex. 14,18–28):

Ant.Strat. Exp.Ier. V,18<sup>26</sup>:

*da merme, odes žer učnda ġmertsā damqobay mati, eṭlebi ġi da honebi mati daiqsna da sparazenebay aġčurvilta matta daintka.*

"And then, when it seemed appropriate to God to destroy them, their chariots and horses were dissolved and the equipment of their armed (forces) was swallowed."

It depends on the reliability of the alleged sources then, i.e. the Alexander Romance and its derivatives, whether the existence of "Hunnic Turks" in Southern Caucasia can be assumed for the time of the Macedonian emperor. As a matter of fact, it is anything but certain that we have reliable historical information here. Instead it is highly probable that the items concerning the "Huns" were integrated into the Alexander tradition not earlier than the year 515 A.D., possibly even about a hundred years later, in 628 A.D., when there were actual "Hunnic" or, rather, Khazar attacks in the Caucasus. At least for the Syriac "Christian Legend" there are clear indications of its having been compiled by that period.<sup>27</sup> The connection of "Huns" with Alexander's conquest thus remains a mere anachronism, and it is by far not the only anachronism we find in the "Conversion of Kartli"<sup>28</sup> or Leonti Mroveli's chronicle. And indeed, there is at least one more coincidence that must be dealt with in this context.

<sup>26</sup> Thus according to both editions: Garitte 1960: 13, 24-26; Marr 1909: 11, 3-5.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hunnius (1904: 31) in dispute with Nöldeke (1890); Ciancaglini (2001: 138) accepts the latter date.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Gippert (2006: 108-114) for several anachronisms in the legend.

Different from the “Conversion”, Leonti begins his account of the history of Georgia not with Alexander but in much earlier times. After speculations about the descendance of the Caucasian peoples from Targamos, i.e. the Biblical patriarch Togarmah, a grandson of Japhet (Gen. 10,2–3; I Chr. 1,5–6), he deals *in extenso* about prehellenic times, and it is within this context that he first introduces the “Turks”:

KC. L.Mr. 14,13-14:

*da šemdgomad amissa raodentame çeliçadta ucalo ikmna kekaþos, mepe sparsta, rametu içço brzola turkta.*

“And several years after that Keþaþos, the Persian king, became busy, for he began to struggle against the ‘Turks’.”

In the passage in question Leonti is declaredly referring to a source he used, viz. a text styled “The Life of Persia” which must be some prototype of Firdausi’s Šāhnāme, and the “Turks” mentioned must be the “Turanians” of the Iranian tradition (Culaja 1979: 58 n. 79):

KC. L.Mr. 14,21-23:

*šemdgomad amissa mciredta çelta kualad gamogzavna amanve kekaþos zis-çuli misi, ze šioš bednierisa, romeli moiþkla turkets, vitarca çeril ars çignsa sparsta cxovrebisasa.*

“A few years after that, the same Keþaþos sent away his grandson, the son of Šioš the Lucky, who was killed in the Turks’ country, as it is written in the book of the Life of the Persians.”

It is obvious that the persons named here are the Iranian heroes *Kai Kawūs*, his son *Siyāwuš/Siyāwaxš* (Abuladze 1916: 3 n. 2), and his grandson *Firōd*,<sup>29</sup> all figuring in Firdausi’s Šāhnāme<sup>30</sup> as Iranian kings who were involved in struggles with the Turanians under *Afrāsyāb*.<sup>31</sup> The reason why this episode is quoted in Leonti Mroveli’s chronicle is that it contains the report about another son of

<sup>29</sup> For the death of Firōd cf. Šn. 13, 843 [830/426] ff. (references to verses of the Šāhnāme are here given in accordance with the system used in Wolff 1935; corresponding verse numbers of the editions Bertel’s 1960-1971 and Khaleghi-Motlagh 1988-2009 are added in square brackets). – The epithet *bednieri* “lucky” should refer to Firōd rather than to his father Siāvuš as he is named *farrux Firōd* e.g. in Šn. 13, 913 [892/486].

<sup>30</sup> In its chapter on Alexander, the Šāhnāme does contain the episode on Yāğūğ and Māğūğ = Gog and Magog (20, 1450 [1421] ff.), but in a much divergent form and without mentioning the name of the “Huns”.

<sup>31</sup> Cp. str. 791-2 of the Middle Georgian metrical adaptation of the Šāhnāme (ed. Abuladze 1916: 210) where *kekaoz* = *kekaþos* = *Kai Kawūs* and *aprasioþ* = *Afrāsyāb* are mentioned side by side in connection with the birth of *roštom* = *Rostam*.

*Keķaṗos/Kai Kawūs*, viz. *Paraboroṭ* = *Farīburz*,<sup>32</sup> who was sent out by his father into a struggle against the Caucasian peoples, Armenians, Georgians, and “all the descendants of Targamos”:

KC. L.Mr. 14,14-20:

*šemdgomad amissa raodentame çeliçadta gamogzavna keķaṗos, sṗarsta mepe-man, ze misi, romelsa erkua paraboroṭ, sṗita didita somexta da kartvelta da ṗovelta targamosianta zeda. xolo šekṗbes ese ṗovelni targamosianni, miegebnes da daeçevnes adarbadagans, da ioṭes paraboroṭ, da mosres sṗa misi.*

“Some years after that Keķaṗos, the king of the Persians, sent his son, who was called Paraboroṭ, with a big army against the Armenians and Georgians and all the descendants of Targamos. But all these descendants of Targamos gathered, moved off to Azerbaijan and ravaged it, and they drove Paraboroṭ away and defeated his army.”

This episode may well refer to the defeat of the Iranians under Farīburz by the Turanians reported in the *Šāhnāme* (13, 1343 [1314/905] ff.). In a similar way, the Georgian text alludes to another grandson of *Kai Kawūs* struggling against the “Turks” = Turanians, viz. *Kaixosro* = *Kai Xosrow*; here, the “Turks” are even reported to have entered Mcxeta, the capital of Georgia:

KC. L.Mr. 15,5-17:

*da šemdgomad amissa raodentame çeliçadta ucalo ikmna kaixosro mepe, da içṗo brṗolad turkta, eziebda sisxlsa mamisa matisasa. da ṗoves žami somexta da kartvelta, ganudges sṗarsta da mosrnes eristavni sṗarstani, da gantavisupldes. xolo masve žamsa movides turkni, oṭebulni misve kaixosrosgan, gamovles zṗua gurganisi, aḡmoṗves mṗkuarsa da movides mçxetas saxli ocdarva. ezraxnes mamasaxlissa mçxetisasa, aḡutkues šeçevna sṗarsta zeda. xolo mamasaxlisman mçxetelman auçṗa ṗovelta kartvelta. inebes damegobreba mat turkta, rametu akunda šiši sṗarsta, da šemçeobisatws daimegobrnes turkni igi gamosxmulni, da ganiṗvanes ṗovelta kalakta šina. xolo umravlesni matganni movides da ṗoves adgili erti mçxetas, dasavlit ķerzo ḗldeta šoris gamoḗuetili, ḡrma, da moitxoves adgili igi mçxetelta mamasaxlisisagan. misca da aḡašenes igi, mozḡudes mṗḗiced, da eçoda mas adgilsa sarḗine.*

“And some years after that, Kaixosro the king became busy, and he began to struggle against the Turks, seeking (revenge for) the blood of their (!) father. And the Armenians and Georgians grasped the opportunity (lit. found the time), rebelled against the Persians and defeated the generals of the Persians and freed themselves. But at the same time came the Turks (who had been) defeated by the

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<sup>32</sup> The Georgian form of the name is likely to have been influenced by another name frequent in the *Šāhnāme*, *Farāmarz*, as in the Persian manuscript tradition itself.

same Kaixosro, crossed the Sea of Gurgan (i.e., the Caspian Sea), went up the Kur and came to Mcxeta, 28 families (lit. houses). They negotiated with the mayor (lit. housefather) of Mcxeta (and) promised to help him against the Persians. And the mayor of Mcxeta informed all Georgians (telling them that) they should want to become friends with those Turks, because he was afraid of the Persians, and because of the help (they had offered) they made friends with those Turkic refugees, and they distributed them over all the cities. But most of them came and found one place in Mcxeta, in its western side, deeply enclosed in the rocks, and they asked the mayor of Mcxeta for that place. He gave it to them and they built it up, encircled it with a strong wall, and that place was called Sarqine.”

This report – though not identifiable as such within the *Šāhnāme*<sup>33</sup> – strongly reminds us not only of the settlement of “Chaldean Huns” thematised in *Mokce-vay Kartlisay*, but also, in mentioning Mcxeta and Sarqine, of the “Bun-Turks” and their dwelling places along the Kur river.<sup>34</sup> The identification of “Huns” and “Turks” as presupposed by the latter designation may thus reflect two projections of the same historical event, the Khazar attacks of the VIth–VIIth centuries, into two different periods of prehistory. This view is corroborated by the fact that in *Kartlis Cxovreba*, the chapter in question is entitled *gamoslva xazarta*, i.e., the “Coming of the Khazars”. And indeed, Leonti Mroveli’s chronicle deals with Khazars and their attacks in both its “pre-Alexandrian” and “Alexandrian” parts:

KC. L.Mr. 11,1 ff.: “The coming of the Khazars”

*mas žamsa šina ganžlierdes xazarni da dauçqes bržolad natesavta leķisata da kavķasiosta ... amissa šemdgomad xazarta ičines mepe ... da gamovles zjws-ķari, romelsa ač hkwan darubandi. ... da šemusrnes qovelni kalakni araratisani da masisani da črdilosani da daurčes cixe-kalakni tuxarisi, samšwlde da mṭueris-cixe, romel ars xunani, šida-kartli da egrisi. da išcaves xazarta orni-ve ese gzani, romel ars zjws-ķari darubandi da aragws-ķari, romel ars dariala. ...*

“At that time, the Khazars gained strength and began to fight against the descendants of Leķ and Kavķasios ... after that the Khazars chose a king ... and passed through the sea-gate which is now called Daruband ... and they destroyed all cities of the Ararat and Masis and of the North, and (only) the fortified cities of Tuxarisi, Samšwlde and the fortress of Mṭueri, which is Xunani, Inner-Kartli and

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<sup>33</sup> Most probably, the episode in question is adapted from the story of the defeat of Afrāsyāb by Kai Xosrow (Šn. 13g); the crossing of the “sea of Gurgan” may reflect the crossing of the river Ğeyhūn by Afrāsyāb’s troops (13g, 345 [330/336] ff.).

<sup>34</sup> Note that it was M. F. Brosset (1849: 33 n. 3) who first equated the “Bounthourki” with the “Touraniens”.

Egrisi persisted. And the Khazars usurped both these ways, viz. the sea-gate (of) Daruband and the Aragvi-gate, which is Dariala(n). ...”

KC. L.Mr. 19,2–10:

*da çarvida aleksandre. xolo aman azon moarğwvna zğudeni kalaksa mcxetas sapužviliturt ... da daiğqra kartlsa zeda egrisi-ca, da moxarqe įvna osni, leğni da xazarni.*

“And Alexander went off. But that Azon destroyed the walls in the city of Mxeta with its foundation ... and after Kartli, he took over Egrisi, and he laid Ossetes, Lezgians and Khazars under tribute.”

It is another autochthonous hagiographical text, the VIIIth c. legend of St. Habo of Tbilisi, which provides final evidence of the Khazar attacks of the first millennium A.D. being the background of the Georgian “Bun-Turks”, as it uses the same epithets for the former as those assigned to the latter in the Alexander Romance:

Habo 2: 58,1-11:

*da iğo dğeta mat šina řualad ganrisxebay qelmçipeta mat sarğinoztay nersē erivšisa zeda da ivłoda igi ... da ganvlo man řari igi ovsetisay, romelsa darialan erkumis. da mat tana-ve iğo sanarēli-ca ese monay kristęsi habo. xolo nerse ... ševida kueğanasa mas ėrdiloysasa, sada igi ars sadguri da sabanağē zeta magogistay, romel arian xazarni, řac velur, sašinel řirita, mğecis buneba, sisxlis mçamel, romelta šžuli ara akus, garna ġmertı xolo šemokmedi ician.*

“And in those days, the rulers of the Saracens became angry again about Nersē, the leader (of Kartli), and he fled ... and transgressed the gate of Ossetia, which is called Darialan. And the blessed servant of Christ, Habo, was with him. But Nerse ... entered the land of the north, which (lit. where) is the abode and dwelling place of the sons of Magog, who are the Khazars: wild men, terribly looking, (with) the nature of beasts, blood eaters, who have no faith except for knowing a God-Creator ...”

We may conclude that the information on pre-Christian times provided in the “Conversion of Georgia” and in Leonți Mroveli’s chronicle has no historical value as such. Nonetheless, with the equation of Huns, Turks-Turanians, Khazars and, lastly, Qypchaqs, the medieval Georgian sources do give us remarkable insights into the late first millennium perception of ethnic strata of Turkic stock in and around Caucasia.

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