

## SARKINE AS THE HELLENISTIC CITY: AN EXPLORATION OF THE TOPONYM, ITS ETYMOLOGY AND URBAN STRUCTURES

სარკინე, როგორც ელინისტური ქალაქი: ტოპონიმის ეტიმოლოგიისა და ურბანული  
სტრუქტურების შესწავლა

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### ABSTRACT:

Toponyms, or place names, typically possess clear motivations that allow for easy deciphering of their origins and meanings. However, certain toponyms, despite appearing to have established etymologies, can invite alternative interpretations. One such example is 'Sarkine,' a name referring to a location on the left bank of the Mtkvari River, situated 8.5 kilometers west of Mtskheta, nestled between the Savaneti Range and the 'Long Meadow.' Historical sources indicate that 'Sarkine' has been recognized since the middle Ages, described either as a district of Mtskheta or as an independent fortress-city.

The earliest reference to 'Sarkine' can be traced back to Leonti Mroveli, who recounts the arrival of the Bun-Turks, a group of foreign refugees, in Kartli. In his narrative, he mentions how these newcomers settled in a place west of Mtskheta, among the cliffs, fortifying it and designating it as 'Sarkine.' Notably, this account diverges from Mroveli's usual linkage of 'Sarkine' to iron or metal production, highlighting its historical complexity. In other passages, he refers to 'Sarkine' as a district of Mtskheta, indicating its significance as a bustling urban center.

The text "The Conversion of Kartli" reinforces 'Sarkine's' identity as an independent location, associating it with the Tsikhedidi Fortress. Historical accounts also suggest that during Alexander the Great's campaigns, 'Sarkine' was a fortified site of great strategic importance. Vakhushti Bagrationi notes the construction of a strong city by the Turks, reinforcing the notion of 'Sarkine' as a significant urban settlement.

Scholarship on 'Sarkine' has produced various interpretations. Tedo Zhordania posited that Mtskheta encompassed part of 'Sarkine,' while Leon Melikset-Begi theorized that 'Sarkine' and 'Tsikhedidi' referred to the same locale, casting doubt on the existence of an iron mining site

there. Otar Lordkipanidze argued that 'Sarkine' was initially an independent city that later evolved into an industrial district of Mtskheta, linking its name to metallurgy and iron production.

Andria Apakidze interpreted 'Sarkine' as an industrial district of Mtskheta, likely possessing fertile agricultural lands. He emphasized its connection to iron processing, citing written sources and archaeological findings that hint at this activity, although direct evidence remains elusive. Notably, the Armenian translation of 'The Life of Kartli' explicitly identifies 'Sarkine' as a place for iron extraction, indicating its long-standing significance in metallurgy.

Interestingly, the etymology of 'Sarkine' has sparked debate, particularly in the context of medieval translations that often emphasized its link to iron production. This interpretative shift appears to have influenced Georgian literature by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where 'Sarkine' became synonymous with ironworking, a notion that became widely accepted among researchers.

This raises critical questions about the historical context of 'Sarkine' during the settlement of the Bun-Turks and the potential correlation with the development of iron metallurgy in Kartli. Archaeological evidence of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age settlements and metal workshops in Sarkine suggests that the arrival of the Bun-Turks may have occurred around the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C. Even if the toponym 'Sarkine' is definitively tied to metalworking, Mroveli's account implies that its origins are intertwined with the settlement of foreign invaders.

Moreover, the possibility of a Latin origin for 'Sarkine' emerges, particularly from the word **sarcina**, meaning 'bundle' or 'baggage.' This could suggest that 'Sarkine' referred to a location for nomadic settlers, who, as Mroveli noted, were involved in fortifying the site. The influence of the Roman Empire during this period likely shaped the lexicon and cultural exchanges in Kartli.

Support for this etymological perspective is bolstered by the dominant use of Greek in the late Hellenistic period, which coincided with significant archaeological findings of Greek-influenced artistic monuments near Sarkine. This cultural exchange may have contributed to the development of the Georgian interpretation of the toponym.

Additionally, the term 'Saracen,' often associated with Arabs in medieval Georgian literature, raises intriguing possibilities regarding the application of the word 'Sarkine' to nomadic peoples. If 'Saracen' was indeed used to describe heavily laden nomads, this further supports the idea of 'Sarkine' as a place connected to nomadic cultures.

In conclusion, the complex historical, linguistic, and archaeological dimensions surrounding the toponym 'Sarkine' underscore its multifaceted identity. The examination of its

etymology reveals a rich tapestry of cultural influences, suggesting that 'Sarkine' was not merely a static location but a dynamic site that reflected the socio-economic interactions of various peoples throughout history. The findings not only contribute to our understanding of the historical geography of the region but also illuminate the broader narratives of cultural exchange and transformation in ancient Georgia.

**KEYWORDS:**

Sarkine; Iberia; Iron production; Hellenistic-Roman period; Customs terminal; Urban Development; Roman Architecture; City Planning; Civic Structure; Ancient Settlements; Historical Geography; Fortress-Cities.

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**აბსტრაქტი:** ტოპონიმები, ანუ გეოგრაფიული სახელები, ძირითადად უკავშირდება ადგილმდებარეობის ფუნქციას, რომელიც მას გარკვეულ ისტორიულ ეპოქაში ჰქონდა, რაც მათი წარმოშობისა და მნიშვნელობის აღქმას გვიადვილებს. თუმცა, ზოგიერთი ტოპონიმი, მიუხედავად მათი დადგენილი ეტიმოლოგიისა, შესაძლოა სხვა მიზეზებით იყოს განპირობებული. ერთ-ერთი ასეთი მაგალითია „სარკინე“, ქალაქი (თუ უბანი), რომელიც მცხეთის მახლობლად, მტკვრის მარცხენა ნაპირზე მდებარეობს, სავანეთის ქედსა და „გრძელ მინდორს“ შორის.

„სარკინეს“ ყველაზე ადრეული ხსენება გვხვდება ლეონტი მროველის თხზულებაში „ცხოვრება ქართველთა მეფეთა“, საიდანაც ვიგებთ ბუნ-თურქების, უცხოელ დევნილთა ჯგუფის, ქართლში ჩამოსვლის შესახებ. წყაროში აღნიშნულია, რომ ამ ახალმოსულებმა მცხეთის დასავლეთით მდებარე ადგილას დაიდეს ბინა, კლდეებს შორის, გაამაგრეს იგი და ამ ადგილს ეწოდა „სარკინე.“ აღსანიშნავია, რომ ეს მონათხრობი განსხვავდება მროველის ჩვეულებრივი მითითებებისგან „სარკინეს“ ლითონის წარმოებასთან დაკავშირებით. სხვა მონაკვეთებში მროველი „სარკინეს“ მოიხსენიებს

როგორც მცხეთის უბანს, რაც მის მნიშვნელობას მჭიდროდ დასახლებულ ურბანულ ცენტრად ავლენს.

„მოქცევაი ქართლისაი“ „სარკინეს“ დამოუკიდებელ ქალაქად იხსენიებს და მას უკავშირებს ციხედიდის ციხესიმაგრეს. ისტორიული წყაროები მიუთითებს იმაზეც, რომ ალექსანდრე მაკედონელის ლაშქრობის დროს „სარკინე“ მნიშვნელოვან სტრატეგიულ მნიშვნელობას ფლობდა, როგორც გამაგრებული ადგილი.

„სარკინეს“ შესწავლა სხვადასხვა ინტერპრეტაციებს გვთავაზობს. თედო ჟორდანიას ვარაუდობდა, რომ მცხეთის ნაწილი მოიცავდა „სარკინეს“, ხოლო ლეონ მელიქსეთ-ბეგი მიიჩნევდა, რომ „სარკინე“ და „ციხედიდი“ ერთი და იმავე ადგილს აღნიშნავდნენ და გამთქვამდა ეჭვს, რომ ეს ორი ერთი და იმავე ადგილის სახელწოდებებია. ოთარ ლორთქიფანიძემ კი ივარაუდა, რომ „სარკინე“ თავდაპირველად დამოუკიდებელი ქალაქი იყო, რომელიც შემდგომში იქცა მცხეთის ინდუსტრიულ უბნად, ხოლო მისი სახელი დაკავშირებულია მეტალურგიასთან და რკინის წარმოებასთან.

ანდრია აფაქიძე „სარკინეს“ მცხეთის ინდუსტრიულ უბნად მიიჩნევდა. მან ტოპონიმის ეტიმოლოგია დაუკავშირა რკინის დამუშავებას, და წერილობითი წყაროებისა და არქეოლოგიური მონაპოვრის დამთხვევებზე გაამახვილა ყურადღება. აქვე, აღსანიშნავია, რომ „ქართლის ცხოვრების“ სომხური თარგმანი პირდაპირ მიიჩნევს „სარკინეს“ რკინის მოპოვების ადგილად, რაც მეტალურგიაში მისი დიდი ხნის მნიშვნელობის მანიშნებელია.

საინტერესოა, რომ „სარკინეს“ ეტიმოლოგიამ გამოიწვია დავა, განსაკუთრებით შუა საუკუნეების თარგმანებში, რომლებიც ხაზს უსვამენ მის კავშირს რკინის წარმოებასთან. ეს გარემოებები გახდა საფუძველი XIX საუკუნის ქართული ლიტერატურისათვის, სადაც „სარკინე“ გახდა რკინის დამუშავების სინონიმი. ეს მოსაზრება ფართოდ იქნა გაზიარებული შემოდგომი დროის მკვლევარებს შორის.

ჩვენს კვლევაში დავინტერესდით „სარკინეს“ ისტორიულ კონტექსტზე ბუნ-თურქების დასახლების დროს და რკინის მეტალურგიის განვითარების პოტენციურ კავშირზე ქართლში. არქეოლოგიური მონაცემები გვიან ბრინჯაოს და ადრეული რკინის ხანის დასახლებებისა და მეტალის სახელოსნოებისა „სარკინეში“ მიუთითებს, რომ ბუნ-თურქების მოსვლა შესაძლოა ქრისტემდე II-I საუკუნეებში მოხდა. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ ტოპონიმი „სარკინე“ საბოლოოდ შეიძლება მჭიდროდ იყოს დაკავშირებული ლითონის დამუშავებასთან, მროველის თხრობა ცხადყოფს, რომ მისი წარმოშობა უცხოელ დევნილთა დასახლებასთანაა დაკავშირებული.

დასაშვებად მივიჩნიეთ „სარკინეს“ ლათინური წარმომავლობის არსებობა, განსაკუთრებით სიტყვიდან „sarcina,“ რაც ნიშნავს ტვირთს ან ბარგს. ეს შეიძლება მიუთითებდეს, რომ „სარკინე“ ნიშნავდა ადგილს მომთაბარე მოსახლეობისთვის, რომლებმაც, როგორც მრეველი აღნიშნავს, გაამაგრეს იქ დასახლებული ტერიტორია. რომის იმპერიის გავლენა ამ პერიოდში, სავარაუდოდ, განაპირობებდა ლექსიკონსა და კულტურულ გაცვლებს ქართლში.

ამ ეტიმოლოგიურ პერსპექტივას მხარს უჭერს ელინისტური პერიოდის ბოლოს გავრცელებული ბერძნული ენის დომინირება, რაც თანხვედბა „სარკინეს“ მიმდებარედ ბერძნული გავლენის არქეოლოგიური ძეგლების მნიშვნელოვან აღმოჩენებთან. კულტურულმა და პოლიტიკურმა ურთიერთობებმა ელინისტური პერიოდის საბერძნეთთან და, შემდგომში რომთან, შესაძლოა, ხელი შეუწყო ტოპონიმის გავრცელებას.

გარდა ამისა, ტერმინი „სარკინოზი,“ რომელიც, შუა საუკუნეების ქართულ ლიტერატურაში, ხშირად გამოიყენებოდა არაბებთან მიმართებაში, საინტერესო შესაძლებლობებს გვთავაზობს „სარკინეს“ მომთაბარე ხალხებთან კავშირის აღნიშვნასთან. თუ „სარკინოზები“ მართლაც გამოიყენებოდა მძიმედ დატვირთული მომთაბარეების აღსაწერად, ეს კიდევ უფრო ამყარებს იდეას „სარკინეს“ მომთაბარე კულტურებთან კავშირთან დაკავშირებით.

დასკვნის სახით, ტოპონიმ „სარკინეს“ გარშემო არსებული კომპლექსური ისტორიული, ლინგვისტური და არქეოლოგიური განზომილებები ხაზს უსვამენ მის მრავალმხრივ იდენტობას. მისი ეტიმოლოგიის შესწავლა ავლენს კულტურული გავლენების მდიდარ ქსოვილს, რაც მიუთითებს, რომ „სარკინე“ არა მხოლოდ სტატისკური ადგილი იყო, არამედ დინამიკური ადგილი, რომელიც ასახავდა სხვადასხვა ხალხების სოციალურ-ეკონომიკურ ურთიერთობებს მთელი ისტორიის მანძილზე. ეს აღმოჩენები არა მხოლოდ რეგიონის ისტორიული გეოგრაფიის გაგებას უწყობს ხელს, არამედ ნათელს ჰფენს უძველეს საქართველოში კულტურული გაცვლისა და ტრანსფორმაციის მრავალმხრივ შესაძლებლობებს.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** სარკინე; იბერია; რკინის წარმოება; ჰელენისტურ-რომაული პერიოდი; საბაჟო ტერმინალი; ურბანული განვითარება; რომაული არქიტექტურა; ქალაქის დაგეგმარება; სამოქალაქო სტრუქტურა; უძველესი დასახლებები; ისტორიული გეოგრაფია; ციხე-ქალაქები.

**Introduction.** Most toponyms generally have clear motivations and, as they are easily deciphered, neither their origin nor their meaning is typically disputed<sup>1</sup>. However, at times, a toponym that appears to have an unquestionably established etymology may offer room for alternative interpretations. An example of this is the toponym 'Sarkine'—the name of a location situated on the left bank of the Mtkvari River, 8.5 kilometers west of Mtskheta, between the Savaneti Range and the 'Long Meadow<sup>2</sup>.'

According to historical sources, the toponym 'Sarkine' has been known since the Middle Ages, where it is mentioned either as a district of Mtskheta or as an independent fortress-city (Monuments, 1990), p. 307).

The earliest source to mention 'Sarkine' is the work of Leonti Mroveli<sup>3</sup>. In his account of a group of foreign refugees, referred to as the Bun-Turks, arriving in Kartli, he writes: “*Most of them came and found a place west of Mtskheta, carved out among the cliffs, and requested this place from the elder of Mtskheta. It was given to them, and they built upon it, fortified it strongly, and the place was named Sarkine.*”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, this is the only instance where Leonti Mroveli does not link 'Sarkine' to iron or metal production. In other cases, he considers Sarkine as a district of Mtskheta: “...a large

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<sup>1</sup> Gambashidze, N. (2024) Sacred Crossroads of the Cults of Metallurgy and Agriculture: Exploring the Mythic Saga of Pirqushi and its Indoeuropean Parrallels. Science Journals – History, Archaeology, Ethnology.pp. 323-358

<sup>2</sup> Under the toponym “Long Meadow” we mean Sarkine's Urban Area - Long Meadow. The Long Meadow is an area of the Sarkine urban settlement. Sarkine is located 8 km west of Mtskheta, along the road to Shio-Mgvime, from the Hell Gorge to the Ksani River, between the Savaneti Ridge and the Long Meadow. According to historical sources, Sarkine is referred to as a city and a significant district of Mtskheta. Sarkine was studied from 1946 to 1980. West of the complex, on the riverside terrace, the so-called Long Meadow was excavated from 1954 to 1976. The remains of the Sarkine structures can be divided into two groups: the ruins of a fortress primarily located on the Savaneti Ridge and the remains of workshops confirmed in the Long Meadow. However, both areas contain evidence of workshops and residential buildings. Both areas of Sarkine revealed the ruins of iron smelting facilities, a metalworking workshop consisting of several sections, and a blacksmith's workshop. Artifacts found in this workshop included iron axes, iron spades, arrowheads, spearheads, stone tools for weapon making, and various bronze items. The artifacts discovered here demonstrated that the city worked with iron, copper, and lead. The Long Meadow is situated west of the fortress, west of the Shio-Mgvime road. Here, parts of a wall, a tower, and remnants of workshops were excavated. In the 1950s, a metalworking workshop with several sections was studied here. Architectural details made of limestone were also uncovered, including a two-arched column capital, fragments of an ornamented column, a half-column, and a lavgardani. (Dighmelashvili, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> **Leonti Mroveli** (Georgian: ლეონტი მროველი) was the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian chronicler, presumably an ecclesiastic. Mroveli is not his last name, but the adjective for the diocese of Ruisi, whose bishop he probably was. Hence, another modern English transliteration of his name is Leontius of Ruisi. (Rapp, 2003. pp. 156-163)

<sup>4</sup> Mroveli, 1955. p. 181

city and its districts, Sarkine, Tsikhedidi, and Zanavi, the district of the Urians.”<sup>5</sup> In the same passage of the text, Sarkine is referred to as a city: “*The Bun-Turks insulted the king in Sarkine. Alexander was angered and... besieged the city of Sarkine, but not a single man escaped.*”

**Results and discussion.** 'The Conversion of Kartli' also presents Sarkine as independent from Mtskheta and associated with the Tsikhedidi Fortress: “*With this strength, Alexander grew mightier and conquered all the lands. He came into the land of Kartli and found these mighty fortress-cities in central Kartli: Tsunda, Khertvisi on the Mtkvari, Odzrkhe clinging to the stiff cliff, Tukharsi on the river Speri (which is called Chorokhi), Urbnisi, Kaspi, and Uplistsikhe, the great city of Mtskheta and its districts, Sarkine, the Great Fortress, Zanavi, the district of the Urians, Rustavi, and Deda-tsikhe (Mother Fortress) at Samshvilde, and Mtveri's Fortress, which is Khunani, and the cities of Kakheti. In all these fortress-cities, he found people fierce in battle. He divided his army and surrounded all these fortress-cities, and he himself stayed in Mtskheta. He stationed his forces on both sides, above and below, and he himself stood by the Ksani river, at a place called Nstakisi.*”<sup>6</sup>

Vakhushti Bagrationi also mentions 'Sarkine' in connection with the arrival of the Bun-Turks, noting that west of Mtskheta, “...where the Turks built a strong city, during the arrival of Alexander the Great, they pierced the mountain towards Skhaltba and fled through the Caucasus.”<sup>7</sup>

Tedo Zhordania believed that Mtskheta was part of Sarkine (Zhordania, 2004. p. 3). Leon Melikset-Begi believed that 'Sarkine' and 'Tsikhedidi' referred to the same place. The only thing he doubted was whether there had ever been an iron mining site in Sarkine near Mtskheta. As a result, he associated the toponym with the tribal name of the Saka (Sarkine < Sak-i-ne) and considered it the residence of the Saka (a Scythian tribe)<sup>8</sup>.

Otar Lordkipanidze believed that Sarkine was originally an independent city, which later became an industrial district of Mtskheta<sup>9</sup>. He also connects its name with metallurgy, namely iron production (Lordkipanidze, 1989. p. 335).

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 515.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Vakhushti Bagrationi, 1973. **Life of Kings of Kartli**. The text has been established based on all the major manuscripts by S. Kaukhchishvili. pp. 502-5

<sup>8</sup> Leon Melikset-Beg discusses this issue in his article: **L. M. Melikset-Bekov** "On the Scythian Problem, in Connection with the Question of the Sakas, Caspians, and Ber" (pages 519-548), in the book: **Institute of Language, History, and Material Culture** (1937). *Materials for the history of Georgia and the Caucasus: Part VII. Georgian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, named after Academician N. Marr.* (Melikset-Bekov, 1937). pp.

<sup>9</sup> **Lordkipanidze, O.** (1959). Remeslennoe proizvodstvo i torgovlya v Mtskheta v I-III: K izucheniyu ekonomiki gorodov Iberii antichnoi epokhi [Craft production and trade in Mtskheta in the 1st-3rd

Andria Apakidze considered Sarkine to be an industrial or workshop district of the capital (Mtskheta), likely possessing significant agricultural land (Agara)—possibly referring to the irrigated vineyards of Nastakisi. He firmly linked the toponym to iron production or processing: “*Written sources and archaeological data provide indications of this... but there is no direct evidence preserved. The Armenian translation of 'The Life of Kartli' contains a direct reference. Professor I. Abuladze notes: 'When it came time to translate the name 'Sarkine,' the Armenian translator not only transcribed 'Sarkine,' but also provided a gloss, explaining it as a place 'for extracting iron.'*” However, Apakidze points out a certain inaccuracy, stating: “*It seems that the translator of the ancient Sarkine attributed the meaning of the feudal-era Sarkineti to it. This is an important note for the study of iron production in the feudal period. Historical sources distinguish between the ancient Sarkine and the feudal-era Sarkineti. Ancient Sarkine was an iron workshop district, while feudal Sarkineti appears primarily to be an iron ore (iron stone) extraction site. The confusion between the names 'Sarkine' and 'Sarkineti' is a later phenomenon. The chronological sequence of the names is as follows: Sarkine, then Sarkineti*” (Apakidze, 1963, p. 207).

What is particularly noteworthy is that the need for an etymological interpretation of the toponym 'Sarkine' arose when it was translated into a foreign language (in the Middle Ages). For some reason, all translators emphasized the connection between the city of Sarkine and iron production, while Georgian authors of the same period referred to it as a place granted to the Bun-Turks. The interpretation of 'Sarkine' that emerged from medieval translations eventually spread into Georgian as well, and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its etymological connection to [*Rkina*]‘iron’ had become a traditional view, accepted as natural and unquestionable by all researchers.

**In reconciling and summarizing the viewpoints expressed in written sources and scientific literature, a question arises: If the place of interest to us was called 'Sarkine' during the arrival and settlement of the so-called Bun-Turks (or another nomadic ethnic group), and its interpretation is linked to 'iron' (its extraction and processing), then it is probable that iron metallurgy in Kartli, particularly around Mtskheta, is also associated with their arrival.**

To assert that this assumption is incorrect, among other reasons, is supported by the discovery of Late Bronze to Early Iron Age settlements and metal workshops found on the territory of Sarkine (in the 'Long Meadow'). This clearly indicates that the arrival of the Bun-Turks in Kartli is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.!

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centuries AD: Towards the study of the economy of the cities of ancient Iberia]. Dissertation. (Lordkipanidze, 1959). p. 65.



On the other hand, even if the toponym 'Sarkine' were definitively connected to a metal workshop (with the furnaces and workshops discovered there), Leonti Mroveli still associates the origin of the toponym 'Sarkine' with the settlement of foreign invaders in the 'Long Meadow': *"...and it was given to them, and they built upon it, fortified it strongly, and the place was named Sarkine."* If the Bun-Turks had settled in a location that was previously called 'Sarkine' due to the presence of metalworking artisans in earlier centuries (similar to the 'Sarkineti Mountain' in Lower Kartli), it is likely that the author would have stated, *"in that place which is called Sarkine," as he does for Zanavi: "...and it was given to them to settle at the upper source of the Aragvi, which is called Zanavi and which was subject to their tribute and was called Kherk for their tribute."* (Life of Kartli. 161-163).

An alternative version of the toponym 'Sarkine's' etymology is also possible. It is known that the turn of the Common Era is considered the late Hellenistic, or Roman, period in Georgian history. The political and cultural influence of Rome during this time on Georgian society was quite strong, and this influence must have naturally been reflected in the Georgian language (Gambashidze, 2023).

In terms of lexicon, the Latin word **Sarcina**, **ae** means: a) a bundle or baggage; b) a soldier's personal equipment. It can be hypothesized that the toponym 'Sarkine' might have originated from this Latin word, and could refer to a place of settlement for nomadic settlers who 'relocated' (or 'set up camp') at this site, and whom Leonti Mroveli referred to as 'Bun-Turks.' It is well known that to this day, there is no clear definition of their ethnic identity.

This hypothesis faces some challenges, but there are also arguments in its favor. Specifically:

a) It is known that in the late Hellenistic period, as in other eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, the dominant language in Georgia was Greek—the official language of the state chancellery was Greek. Greek was also used in theonymy: the god of wine and viticulture, Bacchus, is referred to by the Greek name Dionysus, and numerous depictions of him (statues, masks, and reliefs) have been discovered in the vicinity of Sarkine (see Tab. #168,169, and 170, Dionysus and Ariadne, Dionysus statue, mask<sup>10</sup>). In general, the artistic monuments from this period, found through archaeological discoveries, are clearly of Greek character.

Incidentally, when describing the pre-Christian history of Kartli, Leonti Mroveli once again leans towards the Greek influence, stating that "Alexander (i.e., the Great) gave the

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<sup>10</sup> Lordkipanidze, (1989). pp. 332-334.

Mtskhetians 'the law.'" Today, it has been confirmed that Alexander the Great (or any of his generals) did not campaign in Georgia. However, what is particularly interesting is the ideological tendency that Georgians considered their culture and religion to have been received from the Greeks (and not the Latins). It is quite possible that this trend dates back to the Christian era—during the time of ecclesiastical conflicts—or even from the period when Kartli was Christianized, at a time when Christianity had already become the state religion of Byzantium, while it was still being persecuted in Rome.

b) In the middle Ages, the term 'Saracen' became established in Georgian as a synonym for 'Arab.' The 8<sup>th</sup>-century writer Ioane Sabanisdze, in describing the martyrdom of the Christian Abo, says: "*Born of Abraham's seed, of the sons of Ishmael, of the **Saracen people**... not born of foreign seed, not born of a concubine, Arab seed.*" This raises the question—if the literary Georgian language of that time knew the ethnonym 'Arab,' could it be that the word 'Saracen' derived from the Latin **Sarcinosus**, a, um—meaning 'laden' or 'burdened with baggage'? In Greek, the word σάρκινοϛ has several meanings, one of which is 'large' or 'heavy.' It is plausible that the word 'Saracen' entered Georgian with the meaning of **'heavily laden with baggage,' as a synonym for 'nomad.'**

Typically, hagiographical works refer to foreigners by their nationality and religion—Shushanik is the *'daughter of the Armenian spahpet,'* Eustathius of Mtskheta is *'a man from Persia, from the village of Arshaketi, son of a magus, and he was a pagan,'* and Abo is *'of the Saracen people, entirely of Arab seed.'*

**If this is the case, it can be assumed that the word 'Sarkine' was known to the Georgian language long before the Middle Ages, and thus the word 'Saracen' ('heavily laden with baggage' or 'carrying baggage') was applied to nomadic Arabs<sup>11</sup>.**

The idea that 'Saracen' in Georgian should indeed mean 'nomad' (one who carries all his possessions with him) is supported by the fact that the Turkish-Seljuk (||Seljuk|| Saracens) were later called the same, which also should imply 'nomad.' It is possible that the word 'Turk' entered Georgian as a synonym for 'Saracen,' meaning 'nomad,' and that Leonti Mroveli's compound 'Bun-Turk' means 'nomad by descent.'

There is yet another factor that supports our hypothesis regarding the etymology of the toponym "Sarkine." As mentioned earlier, the arrival of Leonti Mroveli's "Bun-Turks" in Kartli is clearly dated to the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> -1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC. By that time, it is known that Mtskheta, the

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<sup>11</sup> Gambashidze, (2021)

capital of the Kingdom of Kartli, was a large city, possessing all the structural elements and functional parts characteristic of a city in the late Hellenistic period. It was also a key point along a major transitory caravan route. It is only natural that the city would have had an important section, which in modern terminology could be referred to as a “cargo” or customs terminal.

Given that Rome was the principal political, cultural, and commercial dominant power influencing the life of the Kingdom of Kartli during this period, it is also logical that the primary direction of the transit route would have been from west to east, and that the terminal would have been located to the west of Mtskheta. If we also take into account that the Greek-Latin word **sarcina, ae** means “cargo” or “load,” it is plausible that the location in question was named with the meaning “cargo storage area,” especially considering that the field directly across from Sarkine, on the right bank of the Mtkvari River, is called "Bargiqaria," a Georgian name expressing this very meaning.

#### **Conclusion:**

The existence of such structural elements in Georgian cities during the feudal era is evidenced in *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*: a resident of the merchant city Gulanasharo informs the newly arrived Avtandil that every merchant must present samples of their goods to the chief of merchants to determine the permissible prices in the city before they can trade.

During the feudal era, when Tbilisi became the capital, the change in the political situation seemingly shifted the priority of the transit routes. A corresponding terminal was already established to the southeast of the capital, known as "Kurkuta" (meaning "waiting area," i.e., today's Phonichala).

It is possible that an important structural part of the capital, such as this customs terminal, was protected by the "Tsikhe Didi" (Great Fortress), which Leonti Mroveli also associates with Sarkine. The fact that both the Savaneti ridge and Sarkine belonged to the owner of Tsikhe Didi in the early feudal era (see *The Life of Shio of Mgvimeli*) supports this theory.

When this area lost its function as part of the capital's structural system, the Greek-Latin word was adopted into Georgian: in one instance, the meaning of the word was retained but the word itself changed, hence the field on the right bank of the Mtkvari was named “Bargiqaria”; in another case, the word was preserved but its meaning evolved, thus the name of the field on the left bank became “Sarkineti.”

In summary, we can conclude that the fields located on both banks of the Mtkvari River, northwest of Mtskheta—“Long Meadow” and “Bargiqaria”—were part of the late Hellenistic city

of Mtskheta's structural system, functioning as a customs terminal, and were known by the name “Sarkine.”

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