

## **ANATOMY OF MIRACLES IN MEDIEVAL GEORGIA (ACCORDING TO EUROPEAN NARRATIVES)\***

### **Abstract**

The research focuses on the anatomy of medieval miracles, highlighting the miracles mentioned about Georgia in European sources, particularly in the texts of Hayton, Marco Polo, John Mandeville, Hildesheim, Plano Carpini, and Marino Sanudo.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, Latin-language sources about Georgia primarily provided general information along with semi-mythical and legendary narratives. However, in the subsequent period of Mongol rule during the 13th and 14th centuries, accounts of Georgia began to take on more concrete details. These narratives clarified the political context, landscape, customs, and other cultural-anthropological references, including descriptions of miraculous events.

The objective of this study is to analyze the nature and character of miracles that occurred in Georgia as presented in Western sources, as well as the types of interpretations these texts allow.

**Keywords:** *Miracle, Kingdom of Darkness, Hayton, John Mandeville, Hildesheim, Marco Polo*

In addition to the origins of Christianity, the theme of miracles as manifestations of the supernatural is prominent.<sup>1</sup> Key examples of miracles can be found in the Bible, including the creation of the universe, the birth of Christ, and the resurrection, which are regarded as central miracles. Other significant biblical miracles, such as the resurrection of Lazarus and the feeding of five thousand people, also hold great importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre-André Sigal, « L'Homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale », Cerf-Histoire, Paris, (1987): 349; Francis Dubost, *Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale (XIIe- XIIIe siècles)*, l'Autre, l'Ailleurs, l'Autrefois, Paris, Champion, 2 vol. (1991):1064 ; Claude Lecouteux, Les nains et les elfs au Moyen Age", Imago, (2013):224 ; Benedicta Ward, Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event (1000-1215), Philadelphia, (1982):288-310. Svetlana Louchitskaya, Iulia Arnautova, Dictionary of Medieval Culture, M.; (2003): 575-578 (in Russian).

In Western Christianity, Saint Augustine considered the miracle (lat. *miraculum*) to be an expression of God's power in everyday life, breaking the routine of life. The miracle gave the unbelievers faith and shared a major miracle: the miracle of God's creation of the world. Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Chartres, and other medieval theologians formulated the anatomy of the miracle and believed that there were events in the universe that were attributed to divine power and were considered a miracle, although there were also events that were also God's creation and obeyed natural laws. Ultimately, the system of values of Christianity qualifies the supernatural and connects it to the only source - the Creator God and thus rationalizes the miracle.

It is interesting to analyze how medieval European sources discuss miracles, legends, and motifs when narrating about Georgia and its people. What makes these motifs intriguing? What insights do these narratives provide about Georgia?

The information about Georgia in Western sources is especially relevant in the Mongol era, which is also facilitated by a specific historical context. In particular, the appearance of the Mongols in the XIII century presented a new stage in the development of Western and Eastern relations. The European Crusaders hoped that a possible alliance with the Mongols would strengthen the positions of Europeans in the Near East and contribute to the return of the Holy Land. The Mongols were able to defeat the Turkish-Seljuk and other Muslim countries in the east, conquer all of Central Asia, and bring to the conquered peoples of the so-called *Pax Mongolica* – conditions of peaceful coexistence.

The West was greatly influenced by the Mongol conquests because, from their point of view, they were the main enemies of Islam. Consequently, Europeans' interest in the Mongols and the Far East, Asia in general increased. The inters area of the European Crusaders expanded and moved from the nearby east to the Far East<sup>2</sup>. European travelers, merchants, and missionaries traveled to the Mongol-conquered territories and left us with extensive narratives about Mongol culture and history. In a word, the appearance of the Mongols has made the West's interest in Asian countries more intense.

The European monarchs and Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) are discussing the issue of establishing diplomatic relations with the Mongols and planning to defeat the Mamluks as a result of a possible alliance with them, return to the Holy Land and convert the Mongols to Christianity<sup>3</sup>. It is also in the interest of the pope to find information about Eastern Christian communities and to establish close relations with them, which was due to the alienation caused by the conquest of Constantinople by the Europeans during the Fourth

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les Missions d'Orient au Moyen Age (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> s.)*, Rome, École Française de Rome, (1998): 325; Steven Runciman, *Histoire des croisades*, Paris, Edition Tallandier, (2013): 1279; René Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem*, Paris, Perrin, (1936):564; Claude Mutafian, *Le royaume arménien de Cilicie*, Paris, Éditions CNRS, (1995): 157 ; Gérard Dédéyan (dir.), *Histoire du peuple arménien*, Toulouse, Privat, (2007): 991; Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, *Die "Nationes Christianorum Orientalium" im Verstandnis der lateinischen Historiographie von der Mitte des 12. Bis in die Halfte des 14. Jahrhunderts* (=Kolner Historische Abhandlungen 22), Koln, (1973):98.

<sup>3</sup> Richard, *La Papauté et les Missions d'Orient*, 17-63.

Crusade (1204) by the alienation caused by the conquest of Constantinople by the Byzantine and Europeans.

It was also important for the Pope to strengthen its influence on the churches under the influence of Constantinople, including the Georgian Church, which would therefore weaken the influence of the Church of Constantinople. Therefore, facilitating the papacy's sending of Catholic missions to the East would not only help to gain sympathy for local rulers but also to evangelize the local population. In addition, Catholic Rome would establish its own ecclesiastical representations and dioceses there and be able to get acquainted with local cultures. In addition, in Western Christianity, there was a naïve belief in Asian prosperity and luxury.

In the Latin historical sources of the XIII-XIV centuries describing the Mongol conquests, information about Georgians and Georgia emerges, as Georgia acquired a new meaning due to its geographical significance as it was on the border between the Christian and Mongolian worlds. During the Mongol conquests, Georgia and Georgians were already familiar Christian cultures in the East for Europeans. In the Middle Ages, the interest of European travelers, pilgrims, and missionaries in Georgia emerges from the Crusader era. However, unlike European sources of the 11th-12th centuries, which were largely general, mythologized, recurring information borrowed from one author to another, borrowed from each other<sup>4</sup>, European sources of the XIII-XIV centuries provide more specific and clarified, detailed stories about Georgia.

In this case, the information is based on the stories seen or heard directly by the author at the door of the Mongol Khans. For example, the Dominican monk Simon de Saint-Quentin was directly in Georgia; the Franciscan Rubruck got to know Georgians (family of supporters) at the door of Khan, etc. Among them are passages depicting miracles. Hayton, Rubruck, Marco Polo, John Mandeville, Plano Carpin, Marino Sanudo and others provide interesting references to Georgia in their text.

Hayton of Korikos<sup>5</sup>, tells us about the domination of the great darkness in the province of Hamsen<sup>6</sup>. No one can get in there because they can't get back. The inhabitants of this land tell that they hear the howl of men, the screams of cocks, the whining of horses, and the signs that people really live here. Then they speak of a cruel emperor who persecuted Christians and commanded them to worship idols. Christians prayed to the Lord Jesus Christ for help. Suddenly, a great darkness broke out, blinding the emperor. The Christians,

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<sup>4</sup> Manana Javakhishvili, « La représentation de la Géorgie et des Georgiens dans les sources narratives latines du Moyen Age », *Le Muséon*, vol. 134 (issue 1-2), (2021): 103-128.

<sup>5</sup> Hayton, « La fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient, du prince Hayton », dans Danille Regnier-Bohler dir., *Croisades et Pèlerinages. Récits, chroniques et voyages en Terre Sainte XII<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles* », Paris, Éditions Robert Lafont, (1997): 809-878. Manana Javakhishvili, Hayton of Korikos's western orientation and Georgia, *Medieval researches*, Ilia State University, 1, 2024, 39-46

<sup>6</sup> According to V. Kiknadze, Hamsen should include Samtskhe or Mughan Vake areas (confluence areas of Mtkvari and Arax), Vazha Kiknadze, "Information of Foreign Travelers on Georgia", *Mnatobi*, 6, Tbilisi, (1986): 155-162.

too, were saved and escaped this. But the wicked remained in this darkness and they would be there until the end of the earth<sup>7</sup>.

In one edition of Hayton's book and also with John Mandeville there mention a name of the emperor-Saporé, which should suggest Shabur II of Iran (309-379)<sup>8</sup>. Shabur II is considered a persecutor of Christians for the purpose of converting to Zoroastrianism.<sup>9</sup>

John Mandeville (XIVs.)<sup>10</sup>, as well as Johannes von Hildesheim<sup>11</sup> (1310-1375) and Marino Sanudo<sup>12</sup> (1260-1338) actually repeat the same story about this miracle. The topos of the Kingdom of Darkness as a Christian miracle are mentioned in a number of European sources.

In general, in the texts of medieval travelers we often find legendary, exotic, mystical or fabulous stories to feed readers' imagination and arouse interest. However, often these legends reflect real countries and real political or social conditions. According to German scientist Anna Von den Brinken, the legend of the Great Miracle is related to a similar story told by Plano Carpin and Marco Polo, where people hid the cruelty of Chingiz Khan in the dark. In Georgia's case, we are dealing with the era of Mongol domination<sup>13</sup>. The Great Miracle, in this case, expresses the fear of this domination and, therefore, the fear of losing its religious identity. Most of the Latin authors of this period refer to the presence of Georgians under the yoke of the Mongols and, at the same time, their struggle for independence and disobedience.

As for Marco Polo's text about Georgia, the miracle of the Leonard Monastery is told here, where a large number of fish are found in the lake in the days of Lent. The basis of this legend is probably the miracle given in the Gospel, when the apostles caught a lot of fish. Also, Marco Polo mentions Gelakun Lake, the same Caspian Sea, clarifying to Europeans the information about the Caspian Sea, which significantly expanded their sight in the eastward direction<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, the European authors of the Mongol era (Hayton, Mandeville, Hildesheimel) tell us about the fear introduced by the evil forces (Mongols) in Georgia and the refusal of

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<sup>7</sup> Hayton, *La fleur des histoires*, 815.

<sup>8</sup> Kiknadze, "Information of Foreign Travelers", 158; Alexandre Tvaradze, *Georgia and the Caucasus in European Sources*, 169; Bezhan Javakhia, "Information about Georgia and Georgians in the Books of Medieval Western European Travelers: (Benedict Polish, Jean de Mandeville)", *Historical Collection: Annual Suite*, vol. 1. Tbilisi, (2011):181.

<sup>9</sup> Kiknadze, "Information of Foreign Travelers", 158

<sup>10</sup> Christiane Deluz, *Livre de Jehan de Mandeville, une géographie au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Université Catholique de Louvain, coll. « Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales. Textes, études, congrès » (no 8), (1988): 511.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes von Hildesheim, Aleksandre Tvaradze, *Georgia and the Caucasus in European Sources: Based on Historical and Cartographic Material of the XII-XVI Centuries*, Tbilisi, (2004): 166-67.

<sup>12</sup> Marino Sanudo, Aleksandre Tvaradze, *Georgia and the Caucasus in European Sources: Based on Historical and Cartographic Material of the XII-XVI Centuries*, Tbilisi, (2004):160-61.

<sup>13</sup> Den Brincken, *Die Nationes Christianorum Orientalorum*, 117. Javakhia, "Information about Georgia", 182.

<sup>14</sup> Marco Polo, *The description of the world*, Trans. By N. Ladaria, Tbilisi, (2007): 15.

Christianity in favor of idolatry, which should be related to the atrocities against the background of the Mongol conquests in Georgia, as well as the disobedience and struggle of Georgians against the Mongols. It is this context that should be the reason for the construction of the Great Miracle - the Kingdom of Darkness, where the discontent against a foreign conqueror is primarily due to the loss of religious identity, the main marker of medieval identity.