



SMBAT BAGRATUNI

SMBAT BAGRATUNI, distinguished Armenian prince and head of the Bagratid house (see **BAGRATIDS**) at the turn of the 6th to the 7th century (Toumanoff 1963, p. 340, x; idem, 1990, § 14, 12a, p. 111). The main source for his career is the almost contemporary *History* attributed to bishop Sebēos, partially based, in the opinion of R. W. Thomson and J. Howard-Johnson, on a lost, laudatory biography (Ps.S. I, p. lxxvii; II, p. 179), although its chronology is not always reliable. In addition, a newly published seal and five letters to and from Smbat, as well as other documents pertaining to his activities in Armenia, have been preserved in the *Book of Letters* containing the official correspondence of the Armenian Church. Smbat's twofold career, first in Byzantium and subsequently in Persia, has led some scholars to suggest that two figures have been conflated into a single one, but most scholars accept Ps. Sebēos's attribution of both parts to the same person.

Smbat's early years were apparently spent as a commander of the Byzantine forces in the Balkans, until a presumed attempt at rebellion led to his disgrace. At first condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts in the hippodrome, his prowess led to a pardon and his eventual exile as a military commander in Africa (TS, 111.7-8; Ps.S., 20, I, pp. 38-40).

The major part of his career, however, was spent in Persia, to which he went ca. 595 and where he soon became the favorite of Kōsrow II (590/91-628), who honored him with the title of *Kōsrow Šum* "the Joy or Satisfaction of Kōsrow" (Ps.S., 28, I, p. 49). In addition to his many other honors, Smbat was eventually appointed Lesser Minister of Finance and *marzpan* of Gorgān/Vrkan/Hyrkania,



a position he held for eight years (595-99/602-07?). During this time the province prospered, and he was also given the command of Persian as well as Armenian forces, which he led with varying success (Ps.S., 24, 27, I, pp. 43-44, 47-49). In the eighteenth year of Kōsrow's reign, Smbat was sent to Armenia with special powers and the title of "Commander of the army of the lords of houses" (*gund-i-kadag xwadāyag ān framādār*) in "Armin," according to a newly published seal (Gyselen, 2002; cf. Garsoïan, 2003), a dignity supported by the title given to him in the *Book of Letters* "Warrior of the Lords" (BL, pp. 296-98, 322-30; tr. in Garsoïan, 1999, pp. 510-13, 552, 554, 556). Smbat's extraordinary powers allowed him to reaffirm the authority of the Persian crown in Persarmenia, to restore the prestige of the weakened Armenian Church by summoning a council that elected a new katholikos, Abraham I, after a vacancy of three years, and to rebuild the cathedral of the Armenian administrative capital of Duin, overriding the objections of the local Persian authorities (Ps.S., 28, I, pp. 48-49).

In his last years, Smbat again led a Persian and Armenian army to victory over the Hephthalites (Arm. K'ušans), possibly killing their king in single combat (Ps.S., 28-29, I, pp. 449-53). After these signal victories, Smbat was called back to the Persian court, where he died covered with still greater honors in 616 or 617 (Ps.S., 29, I, pp. 53-54). The brilliance of Smbat's career is probably exaggerated by Ps. Sebeos's over-laudatory account, in which he invariably extols Smbat's strength, prowess, piety, and honors, many of which passed to his son Varaz-Tiroc' (Ps.S., 27-28, 40-41; I, pp. 48, 53, 86-87, 92). Nevertheless, both the correspondence of the *Book of Letters* and the newly discovered Sasanian seal bear witness to the importance of his activity, at least in Armenia and on the Persian eastern front.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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See Gyselen (below) for the newly published seal.

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