

« Among the Chosen Cities: Tbilisi in the Shi'i Tradition ». *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1, 2, 2008, p. 206-217.

Giorgio Rota



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- 1 A tradition ascribed to the 6th Shiite Imam, Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādeq (d. 765) states that Tbilisi is one of God's three "chosen cities" together with Qom and Kufa. The earliest work recording this tradition is Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Ḥasan b. 'Abdo'l-Malek Qomī's *Tārīḥ-e Qom*, a Persian translation of an earlier and now lost history of the city written in Arabic by Ḥasan b. Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Qomī at the end of the 10th century. The tradition was then recorded in several works of different nature until the early 20th century. Beradze puts this unusual and unexpected piece of information in the larger context of the history of the Muslim emirate of Tbilisi. He shows that several members of the Alid family as well as Shiite scholars (usually disciples or followers of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādeq) were present and active in the predominantly Christian and Sunni Tbilisi of the 8th and 9th centuries. He also points to the claims to *seyyed* status by and what seems to be the Shiite leanings of at least some members of the Banū Ja'far dynasty that ruled the emirate between ca. 880 and 1122 (of course, the name of the dynasty itself seems to suggest a pro-Shiite or pro-Alid stance). Admittedly, smoking-gun evidence concerning the precise circumstances that gave rise to this tradition is still lacking, but Beradze correctly states that "irrespective of whether it is authentic [...] or a figment of later imagination, [this tradition] acquires the significance of a highly valuable piece of evidence on the religious-political history of medieval Tbilisi" (p. 209). The article shows that Tbilisi must have played an important role in early Shiism, a role which was later forgotten, and it confirms the traditional place of the Georgian capital as the political and cultural metropolis of the Caucasus region: briefly, it is a very useful contribution to the knowledge of a Muslim state whose history is still largely unknown to Western scholars.
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Thèmes : 7. Islam

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