

= Gubazes II of Lazica =

Gubazes II ( Georgian : ????? II , Greek : ????????? ) was king of Lazica ( modern western Georgia ) from circa 541 until his assassination in 555 . He was one of the central personalities of the Lazic War ( 541 ? 562 ) . He originally ascended the throne as a vassal of the Byzantine Empire , but the heavy @-@ handed actions of the Byzantine authorities led him to seek the assistance of Byzantium 's main rival , Sassanid Persia . The Byzantines were evicted from Lazica with the aid of a Persian army in 541 , but the Persian occupation of the country turned out to be worse , and by 548 , Gubazes was requesting assistance from Byzantium . Gubazes remained a Byzantine ally during the next few years , as the two empires fought for control of Lazica , with the fortress of Petra as the focal point of the struggle . Gubazes eventually quarrelled with the Byzantine generals over the fruitless continuation of the war , and was assassinated by them .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Gubazes was of Byzantine descent through his mother , Valeriana . Tzathius ' marriage to Valeriana seems to be the earliest recorded marriage between the Lazic and Byzantine elites . The custom of marrying Byzantine women , usually from the senatorial aristocracy , was common among the Lazic royalty : his uncle , the " king " Opsites ( it is unknown when exactly he reigned ) , was married to a Byzantine noblewoman named Theodora . It is known that Gubazes had a younger brother , Tzath , who succeeded him on the throne , and an unnamed sister . Gubazes was married and had children , but neither the name of his wife nor of any of his offspring is known . The name of Gubazes 's father is not known from the ancient annals . Professor Cyril Toumanoff , a specialist in Caucasian history and genealogy , has hypothesized that Gubazes was a son and direct successor of the king Tzath I , and that Opsites , his uncle , never actually ruled as a king .

The exact date of Gubazes 's accession is unknown , but it must not have been much earlier than 541 , when he is first attested as king of the Lazi . It is very likely that before his accession he had lived for several years at the Byzantine capital , Constantinople , for he is recorded to have been a silentarius , an influential position at the imperial palace ; alternatively , but less probably , he may have been given the title as an honorary appointment after his accession .

= = = Defection to Persia = = =

Lazica had been a Byzantine client state since 522 , when its king , Tzath I , had rejected Persian hegemony . However , during the rule of Emperor Justinian I ( reigned 527 ? 565 ) , a series of heavy @-@ handed Byzantine measures made them unpopular . In particular , the establishment of a trade monopoly by the magister militum ( general ) John Tzibus , which was regulated from the newly constructed fortress of Petra , drove Gubazes to seek once again the protection of the Persian shah , Khosrau I ( r . 531 ? 579 ) .

In 540 , Khosrau broke the " Eternal Peace " of 532 and invaded the Byzantine province of Mesopotamia . In spring 541 , Khosrau and his troops , led by Lazi guides , marched over the mountain passes into Lazica , where Gubazes submitted to him . The Byzantines under John Tzibus resisted valiantly from Petra , but Tzibus was killed , and the fortress fell soon after . Khosrau left a Persian garrison at Petra and departed the country , but soon , the Lazi grew discontented : as Christians , they resented the Persians ' Zoroastrianism , and they were greatly affected by the cessation of the Black Sea trade with Byzantium . The contemporary Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea reports that Khosrau , who was aware of Lazica 's strategic importance , intended to resettle the entire Lazi people and replace them with Persians . As a first step , the Persian ruler planned to assassinate Gubazes . Forewarned of Khosrau 's intentions , Gubazes switched his allegiance back to Byzantium .

= = = Return to Byzantine allegiance = = =

In 548 , Emperor Justinian dispatched 8 000 men under Dagisthaeus , who together with a Lazic force set siege to the Persian garrison at Petra . As the Persians were well provisioned , the siege dragged on . Dagisthaeus had neglected to keep watch over the mountain passes that led into Lazica , and a far larger Persian relief force under Mihr Mihroe arrived and raised the siege . Yet , the Persians lacked sufficient supplies , and so , after strengthening the garrison at Petra and leaving further 5 000 men under Phabrizus to secure its supply routes , Mihr Mihroe left . In the spring of the next year , Gubazes and Dagisthaeus combined their forces , destroyed Phabrizus 's army in a surprise attack , and pursued the survivors into Caucasian Iberia . In the same summer , they won another victory against a new Persian army , led by Khorianes . The allies failed , however , to prevent another Persian army from reinforcing Petra , and Dagisthaeus was recalled and replaced by Bessas .

In 550 , a pro Persian revolt broke out among the Abasgians , a people that neighboured Lazica to the north . This provided an opportunity for a high ranking Lazic noble , called Terdetes , who had quarrelled with Gubazes , to betray to the Persians an important fort in the land of the Apsili , a tribe under Lazic suzerainty . The Apsili retook the fort , but refused to accept Lazic rule until persuaded to do so by the Byzantine general John Guzes . In 551 , the Byzantines finally took and razed Petra , but a new army under Mihr Mihroe was able to establish Persian control over the eastern part of Lazica . The Byzantine forces in Lazica withdrew west to the mouth of the Phasis , while the Lazi , including Gubazes and his family , sought refuge in the mountains . Despite enduring harsh conditions in the winter of 551 / 552 , Gubazes rejected the peace offers conveyed by envoys from Mihr Mihroe . In 552 , the Persians received substantial reinforcements , but their attacks on the fortresses held by the Byzantines and the Lazi were repulsed .

= = = Death = = =

Over the next two years , the Byzantines increased their forces in Lazica , but failed to achieve decisive success ; Gubazes quarreled with their generals , and wrote to Emperor Justinian accusing them of incompetence following a defeat by the Persians . Bessas was recalled , but the other two , Martin and the sacellarius Rusticus , resolved to get rid of Gubazes . They sent a message to Constantinople accusing Gubazes of dealings with the Persians . Emperor Justinian , intending to question Gubazes himself , authorized the two generals to arrest him , using force if necessary . The two Byzantine generals then ( September / October 555 ) invited Gubazes to observe the siege of a Persian held fort , but when they met , John , Rusticus 's brother , stabbed the king with his dagger . Gubazes fell from his horse , and one of Rusticus 's servants gave him the finishing blow .

After Gubazes 's murder , the Lazi stopped participating in operations against the Persians for a time , leading to the failure of a Byzantine attack against the fort of Onoguris . An assembly of the Lazic people informed Emperor Justinian of the events , requested that an investigation be launched , and asked that Gubazes 's younger brother Tzath , at the time residing in Constantinople , be confirmed as their new ruler . The Byzantine emperor complied with their requests : a " leading senator " named Athanasius ( perhaps the former praetorian prefect of the same name ) was dispatched to investigate Gubazes 's murder , and Tzath was sent to assume the Lazic throne . Athanasius 's investigation cleared Gubazes of any suspicion of treachery ; Rusticus and his brother John were found guilty and executed in autumn 556 , but Martin was simply deposed from his post .