

Doctoral Dissertation

**Byzantium and the Georgian World c. 900–1210:
Ideology of Kingship and Rhetoric in the Byzantine Periphery**

Sandro Nikolaishvili

Supervisor(s): Daniel Ziemann

Submitted to the Medieval Studies Department,
Central European University, Budapest
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval Studies

Budapest, Hungary

2019

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Aims of the Thesis	2
Methodology and Structure.....	5
Sources.....	10
Hagiography.....	10
Historiographical Texts.....	11
Panegyric Poems	12
Byzantine and Armenian sources.....	13
Chapter One. Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the Georgian World	15
1.1 “A Vessel of Christ”: Constantinople in the Medieval Georgian Imagination	16
1.2 The Emergence of Georgian Monastic Centers and Communities in the Byzantine Empire	20
The Georgian Monastic Center on Mount Athos: the Iviron	21
Georgian Monastic Centers on Black Mountain.....	31
1.3 “Radiant Among the Rulers” and a “Holy King:” The Image and Authority of the Byzantine basileus in the Georgian World	32
Conclusion	47
Chapter Two. Shaping a Royal Image in the Shadow of Byzantium: The Rise of Bagratid Power under Byzantine Tutelage	49
2.1 From Provincial Aristocrats to <i>kouropalatēs</i> : Creating the Image of the Byzantine Emperor’s Subordinate Ruler	49
2.2 A Challenge to Byzantine Domination? The Emergence of an All Georgian Kingdom and a Rift in the Byzantine-Bagratid Relationship	57
The First Rupture between the Byzantine Imperial Court and the Bagratids of Tao-Klarjeti	60
The Consequences of Phokas’ Revolt for the Georgian World	65
“King and <i>Kouropalatēs</i> of the Entire East:” the Royal Image of Bagrat III	67
2.3 From <i>Nōbelissimos</i> to <i>Kaisar</i> : Byzantine Court Titles in the Visual and Verbal Rhetoric of King Bagrat IV and King Giorgi II.....	70
2.4 The Rise of the Seljuk Turks and Shift in Byzantine-Georgian Relations.....	81
2.5 Between the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuks: the Royal Image of Giorgi II.....	86
Conclusion	91

Chapter Three. Casting a Shadow over the Byzantine basileus’ Authority: Constructing an Emperor-like Image of King Davit IV (r.1089–1125)	93
3.1 From High-Ranking Byzantine Dignitary to Independent Sovereign: Davit’s Royal Image in Transition.....	94
3.2 The Byzantine Origins of Georgian Royal Rhetoric.....	103
A New Alexander: The Image of a Soldier-King and an Exceptional Army Commander.....	107
3.3 Davit’s virtues of Piety, Philanthropy, and Justice	116
3.4 The Wisdom of Davit: An Image of a Learned King.....	123
3.5 Guardian of Orthodoxy and the New Constantine: The ecclesiastical policies of Davit IV and Alexios I Komnenos.....	136
The King as a Polemist and Rhetorician.....	151
Conclusion	159
Chapter Four. From Byzantine to Cosmopolitan Kingship: Bagratid Royal Authority in Transition	163
4.1 The Image of the Christian King of Kings.....	164
4.2 Creating the Authority of a Female Ruler in Georgia: A Comparative Approach to the Representation of Queen Tamar (r.1184 –1213) and Byzantine Imperial Women	171
A crisis of succession and a female ruler on “Solomon’s Throne”.....	172
4.3 The Language of Female Authority: Multidimensional Propaganda of Legitimation.....	178
The Authorship and the Audience of the Encomiastic Narratives.....	181
Four Rhetorical <i>Prooimia</i> : Introducing Tamar to the Audience.....	185
<i>Prooimion of the Life of Tamar</i>	189
The <i>Prooimia</i> of the <i>Abdulmesiani</i> and <i>In Praise of King Tamar</i>	190
4.4 Juxtaposing the Literary Portrayal of Tamar and Davit Soslan.....	191
4.5 The sun-like and Christ-like Tamar: Cultivating the sacrality of a Female Ruler.....	201
4.6 A New Constantine: Tamar’s virtues of Piety, Philanthropy, and Justice	206
4.7 “Famous among the Monarchs:” Tamar Exercise of Royal Power	213
Relation with the Army and Celebration of Military Victories	218
4.8 She-Philosopher: The Image of an Erudite Queen.....	230
Conclusion	237
Epilogue.....	241
Bibliography	246

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors Daniel Ziemann and Niels Gaul, for their support and guidance. I am also grateful to my external reader, Stephen H. Rapp, jr. for his feedback and comments. Many thanks to the Central European University for granting me with the Doctoral Research Support Grant, as well as various other travel grants that enabled me to attend conferences and the summer school in Dumbarton Oaks (2013). I also wish to acknowledge the support of the Department of Medieval Studies at CEU.

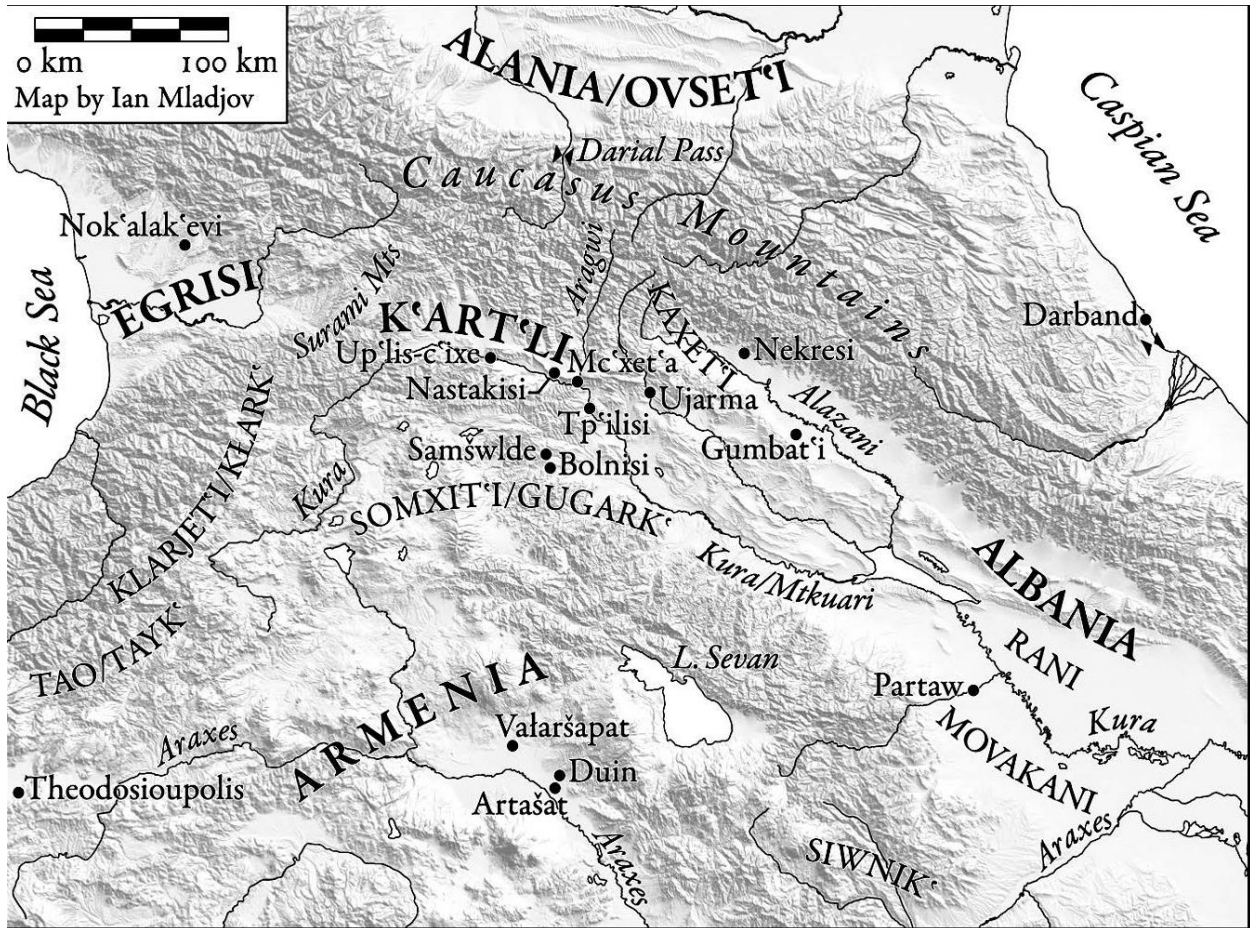
I further offer my thanks to Floris Bernard for his helpful suggestions. My appreciation goes to Ingela Nilsson for hosting me at the University of Uppsala (Department of Linguistics and Philology) and for her feedback and comments on the parts of my dissertation. I am also in debt to Stig Frøyshov and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo for inviting me to spend a challenging and stimulating semester there. My special gratitude goes to New Europe College (NEC) in Bucharest for granting me a five-month fellowship.

I would also like to thank my collages, Andras Kraft, Ivan Maric, Peter Bara, Lucas McMahon, Radu Mustata, and Dunja Milenkovic, for their help in reading parts of my dissertation and in providing me with books and articles.

I wish to thank my mother, Maia Kutateladze, for her patience and help. My very special thanks go to Marijana Vukovic for her encouragement and support. This dissertation is dedicated to our daughter, Salome.

List of Maps and Figures

Map. 1. Caucasus in Late Antiquity.....	v
Map. 2. Caucasus themes and Principalities.....	vi
Figure. 1. Coin of Bagrat IV (first issue).....	72
Figure. 2. Coin of Bagrat IV (second issue).....	85
Figure. 3. Coin of Giorgi II (second issue).....	88
Figure. 4. Coin of Giorgi II (third issue).....	89
Figure. 5. Coin of Davit IV (first issue).....	96
Figure. 6. Coin of Davit IV (second issue).....	98
Figure. 7. Copper coin of Davit IV.....	101
Figure. 8. Fresco of Ecumenical Council from Gelati Monastery.....	158
Figure. 9. Icon from Mount Sinai with Davit IV's image	161
Figure. 10. Copper coin of Demetre I.....	165
Figure. 11. Copper coin of Giorgi III.....	169
Figure. 12. Coin of Giorgi and Tamar.....	176
Figure. 13. Coin of Tamar and Davit Soslan.....	198



Map. 1. Caucasus in Late Antiquity¹

¹ S. H. Rapp, jr. *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasian and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), xxvi.



Map. 2 Caucasus themes and principalities ²

² A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A. D to the First Crusade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xviii.

Introduction

Communities in the Caucasus accepted Christianity in the first century, but the Armenian and Kartvelian (eastern Georgian) royal houses did not embrace Christianity until the 320s and 330s. According to medieval Georgian historiography, emperor Constantine the Great played a crucial role in the foundation of the Church in the kingdom of Kartli. After King Mirian III accepted Christianity, he wrote a letter to Constantine requesting that the emperor send high-ranking ecclesiastics, priests and deacons, in order to establish the Christian Church in his kingdom and conduct the liturgy.³ Although the historicity of Constantine's and Mirian III's communication is questionable, it is clear that the Church of Kartli was established with the help of Greek-speaking churchmen and that Greek was the language of the liturgy in Kartli. Despite the Roman empire's contribution in founding the institutional Church in Kartli, surprisingly this did not lead to a re-orientation of the kingdom of Kartli towards the Roman empire.⁴ On the contrary, Kartli and the eastern Caucasus remained an integral part of the Iranian commonwealth until the very end of the sixth century. Consequently, the Kartvelian kingship during Mirian III and his Christian successors was Persian rather than Roman/Byzantine in outlook.

The Kartvelian political and ecclesiastical elite started to look more towards the Byzantine empire only from the very end of the sixth century after Sassanian Persia abolished the kingship in Kartli (523 or 580)⁵ and the Guaramid aristocratic house assumed princely power. The Guaramids were chosen by the Kartvelian aristocratic houses to rule Kartli not as kings but rather as presiding princes, with limited power. Guaram I (r. 588–590), the first presiding prince, received

³ [The Conversion of Kartli] მოქცევაი ქართლისაი. ძველი ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, I. 5th–10th c.] ed I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963), 85-6.

⁴ It is a commonly held belief among the Georgian scholars that the adoption of Christianity by king Mirian III was a threshold that finally sealed the political orientation of Kartli. It is argued that by accepting Christianity, the religion favored in the Roman empire, Mirian allied himself with Rome and thwarted the domination of Sassanid Iran. Close reading of literary and material sources, however, demonstrates the contrary; the adoption of Christianity did not result in political and cultural domination of the Roman empire in Kartli. See S. H. Rapp, jr. *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasian and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 4-5.

⁵ The exact date of abolition of the kingship in Kartli is a subject of debate. Most Georgian scholars assume that it happened in 523, whereas Cyril Toumanoff has argued that Sassanid Iran canceled kingship in Kartli only by the end of the sixth century, in 580. C. Toumanoff, "Caucasia and Byzantium," *Tradition*, 27 (1971), 123; Idem., "Introduction to Christian Caucasian History II: States and Dynasties of the Formative Period," *Tradition*, 17 (1961), 6.

the Byzantine court title of *kouropalatēs* from emperor Maurice (r. 582–602).⁶ Thus, the Guaramid princes became the Byzantine emperors' allies in the Caucasus. But after the advance of Islam, the Byzantine empire lost its foothold in Kartli and the Caucasus, only to regain its positions from the beginning of the ninth century. While the Byzantine empire was recovering from the deep crisis and gradually expanding its frontiers in the east, the Bagratid aristocratic house moved the Kartvelian political center westward from Kartli to Tao-Klarjeti (Map 1). From that time onwards, Byzantine political and cultural influence spread rapidly in the Georgian-speaking lands. The so-called “Byzantinization” of the Georgian world was a consequence of the Bagratid ascendancy in Tao-Klarjeti and later in all of the Georgian-speaking lands.⁷ The creation of the Georgian kingdom coincided with the Byzantine recovery and re-establishment of Byzantine political hegemony and cultural influence in the Caucasus.

Aims of the Thesis

The goal of this dissertation is twofold. The first part discusses the political and cultural relations between Georgia and Byzantium from the ninth century up to the end of the eleventh. I investigate the historical context to better understand the reasons that brought the Georgian-speaking lands into the Byzantine orbit and why the high social strata of medieval Georgia looked towards Byzantium. As shall be demonstrated, the Byzantine and Georgian worlds were well connected and these connections were nourished and maintained by various individuals and social groups. I further investigate the role played by the Georgian monasteries of Byzantium in establishing networks of communication between the two worlds. The Georgian ecclesiastics from the monasteries located in Byzantium were the agents of cultural encounters and contributed to the spread of Byzantine thought and ideas to the Georgian-speaking lands. The growth of Georgian

⁶ According to the *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* (composed around 800), after Sassanid Iran abolished the kingship in Kartli, Kartvelian aristocrats appealed to the Byzantine emperor and asked him to nominate a new king. The *Life of Vaxtang* says: “They sent the envoys to the Greek king and ask that he choose a king among the descendants of the kings of Kartli... then the emperor fulfilled their request and gave them as king the nephew of Mirdat, son of Vaxtang from his Greek wife, who was called Guaram and who governed Klarjeti and Javaxet‘i.” For the English translation of this passage of *Life of Vaxtang*, see R. W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, Original Georgian Text and the Armenian Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 229.

⁷ S. H. Rapp, jr., *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes*, 4-7; Idem., “Caucasia and Byzantine Culture”, in *Byzantine Culture: Papers from the Conference ‘Byzantine Days of Istanbul,’ May 21-23, 2010*, ed. D. Sakel (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 225-26; Idem., “Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past,” Ph.D. dissertation (Ann Arbor, 1997), 507-556.

monastic communities in the Byzantine empire further brought the Georgian world into the Byzantine cultural orbit.

The dissertation also examines the political relationship between the Byzantine emperors and the Bagratid dynasty, who ruled the principality of Tao-Klarjeti (frequently referred to in Byzantine sources as Iberia) and later expended their power throughout the Georgian-speaking lands. I explore the way the Bagratids rose from imperial subjects to the status of imperial allies and later succeeded in projecting themselves as equal to the Byzantine emperor. In this context, it is essential to understand how vital the Byzantine honorary court dignities were for the Bagratid rulers and the way these honorary dignities shaped their royal image and increased their political weight in the Caucasus.

The second focus and the primary goal of this dissertation is a study of Georgian ideology of kingship and the complex mechanisms through which the ruler's image was constructed and conveyed to the audience. I argue here that the Georgian concept of kingship was heavily influenced by Byzantine imperial ideology and political culture, which was a consequence of the Byzantine empire's long and enduring political and cultural domination in the Caucasus. For that particular reason, I contextualize the Georgian kingship and compare it to the Byzantine imperial ideology. It is far from easy to study the Georgian ideology of kingship without investigating why and how medieval Georgians internalized the basic principles of the Byzantine discourse on power representation. Frequent allusions to Byzantine examples serve to illustrate similarities and differences between the Georgian and Byzantine ideas of kingship.

Georgian-Byzantine relations in the period under discussion have been the subject of inquiry of few scholars, and it is not an exaggeration to say that this topic is far from studied comprehensively.⁸ In addition, the relationship of the Georgian world with Byzantium is far less

⁸ On this topic in English See S. H. Rapp, Jr., "Caucasia and the Second Byzantine Commonwealth," < https://www.academia.edu/15250940/Caucasia_and_the_Second_Byzantine_Commonwealth_Byzantinization_in_the_Context_of_Regional_Coherence_Working_paper_2012 > Last accessed: 25/10/2019; Idem., "Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past," 541-81; C. Toumanoff, "Iberia on the Eve of Bagratid Rule: An Inquiry into the Political History of Eastern Georgia between IVth and the IXth Century," *Le Muséon* 65 (1952): 17-102; Idem., "Christian Caucasus between Byzantium and Iran: New Light from Old Sources," *Tradition* 10 (1954): 109-189; Idem., "The Bagratids of Iberia from the eighth to the eleventh Century," *Le Muséon* 74 (1961): 5-42 and 233-316. In Georgian, see: [V. Kopaliani] ვ. კოპალიანი. საქართველოსა და ბიზანტიის პოლიტიკური ურთიერთობა [Georgian-Byzantine Political Relationship, 970-1070] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1969); [Š. Badridze] შ. ბადრიძე. საქართველოს ურთიერთობები ბიზანტიასთან და დასავლეთ ევროპასთან [Relationship of Georgia with the Byzantine Empire and the Western Europe, X-XIII Centuries] (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1984); [L. Tavadze] ლ. თავაძე. მაგისტროსი საქართველოში და ქართველი

researched than the relationship of Byzantium with Armenia and other neighbors. Even less scholarly attention has been dedicated to the study of the Georgian ideology of kingship and royal rhetoric between 900 and 1210. Scholars in Georgia who have researched Georgian history between 900 and 1210 and written monographs on the reigns of kings Bagrat IV, Giorgi II, Davit IV, and queen Tamar have completely ignored the question of royal rhetoric and ideology of kingship.⁹ These scholars did not move away from political history. Therefore, issues such as the imagery of the Bagratid kings and the way they legitimized themselves or the way they communicated their authority to their subjects have not been addressed. Neither have the encomiastic historiographical texts and panegyric poems that constructed the literary image of Georgian monarchs been scrutinized nor the impact of Byzantine political culture on Georgian kingship. Byzantine political culture was a source of inspiration for the empire's neighboring polities. Throughout the centuries, the Byzantine symbols and language of power diffused through Byzantine "commonwealth." While much space has been devoted to investigating the impact of the Byzantine imperial ideal on the empire's neighbors, medieval Georgia is far less researched. Anthony Eastmond and Stephen H. Rapp, jr. were among the first scholars to draw attention to the growing Byzantine influence on Georgian rulers' imagery after 900. In his monograph, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, Eastmond studied the impact of Byzantine imperial imagery on Georgian rulers' mural representations.¹⁰ Eastmond's monograph focused primarily on the Georgian kings' and queen Tamar's frescoes from various churches and monasteries. Stephen H. Rapp, jr. persuasively argued that the Georgian kingship was Persian/Near Eastern in outlook in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages and only after the Bagratids rose in prominence and moved the Kartvelian political and cultural center from Kartli to Tao-Klarjeti did Byzantine political culture make an imprint on the Georgian kingship. Rapp examined some aspects of

მაგისტროსები ბიზანტიის იმპერიაში [*Magistros* in Georgia and the Georgian *Magistroi* in Byzantium] (Tbilisi: Meridian Publishers, 2016); [Idem.] ბიზანტიური საიმპერატორო ტიტულატურა საქართველოში [Byzantine Court titles in Georgia] Ph.D. Dissertation. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 2012.

⁹ [R. Metreveli] რ. მეტრეველი. დავით აღმაშენებელი. თამარ მეფე [Davit the Builder. Queen Tamar] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2002); [J. Samushia and R. Metreveli] მეფეთ მეფე გიორგი II [King of Kings Giorgi II] (Tbilisi, 2003); [J. Samushia] ჯ. სამუშია. ბაგრატ IV [Bagrat IV] (Tbilisi: Palitra L, 2019); [idem.] ბაგრატ III [Bagrat III] (Tbilisi, 2012).

¹⁰ A. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Idem., "Royal Renewal in Georgia: case of queen Tamar," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, St. Andrews ed. P. Magdalino (Ashgate: Variorum, 1994), 283-293.

Georgian kingship and its representation in narrative sources.¹¹ Rapp's and Eastmond's research opened new opportunities for further and more comprehensive investigation of this topic.

Thus, this dissertation has an ambitious goal. It offers for the first time an in-depth study of the evolution of the Georgian ideology of kingship and royal rhetoric, and particularly the Byzantine impact. I examine some sources that have not been examined previously to study the concept of kingship and offer a different and novel reading of other narratives. In addition, I bring into my discussion additional Byzantine sources and examples to make parallels between the Georgian and Byzantine cases that have not been made so far. While the presence of the Byzantine symbols of power is fairly apparent in Georgian royal imagery, a more complex approach is necessary to trace the Byzantine patterns in Georgian rhetorical narratives.

Methodology and Structure

The dissertation discusses the Georgian royal ideology in a broad political and social context. I make frequent reference to the Byzantine context and offer comparative studies of Georgian and Byzantine ideologies of rulership. My work is based primarily on an analysis of medieval Georgian literary narratives and material sources: encomiastic historical writings, panegyric poems, royal charters, numismatic materials, and epigraphic and mural inscriptions. I argue that through these sources Georgian rulers and their inner circles promulgated discursive messages about the nature of royal power and communicated royal authority to the target audience. Since I am committed to a comparative approach, I often draw close parallels between Byzantine and Georgian textual and visual sources that deal with the representation of royal/imperial power. I seek to see explicit and implicit similarities and differences between the Georgian and Byzantine literary and visual representations of a ruler. Moreover, I juxtapose literary strategies and rhetorical techniques that Byzantine and Georgian narrators employed in their works to portray the ruler's image.

My investigation proceeds on several levels. I apply a methodology of rhetorical analysis to several Georgian encomiastic texts for the first time and examine their genre, content, and language – word choice/vocabulary and metaphors. Afterward, I deal with the rhetorical and

¹¹ S. H. Rapp, jr., "From *bumberazi* to *basileus*: Writing Cultural Synthesis and Dynastic Change in Medieval Georgia (Kartli)," in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, March 1999*, ed. A. Eastmond (New York: Ashgate, 2001), 101-116; Idem., "Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past," 652-678.

argumentative strategies used by the authors of the encomiastic texts to construct an image of the ideal ruler and how they persuaded their intended audience to accept their claims. I argue that the sophistication of Georgian kingship ideology necessitated the invention of new formulas of praise, as a consequence of which Georgian learned men conducted a discourse on the cardinal virtues in their encomiastic texts. Thus, the Georgian kings and a queen in rhetorical narratives written after 1100 appear as embodiments of virtues such as courage, piety, philanthropy, wisdom, and justice. In addition, after careful reading of these laudatory narratives, I contend that Georgian royal rhetoric adopted the idea that Christian virtues transformed the ruler from an ordinary to an extraordinary being. Georgian literati also developed the idea that the display of the virtues was a mark of the king's or queen's correct behavior and the source of his/her ultimate authority. To understand better whether this innovation in Georgian royal rhetoric was a consequence of the reception of Byzantine thought, I examine what role was ascribed to the cardinal virtues in Byzantine rhetorical texts which constructed an idealized image of the emperor. I also analyze the function of Biblical typology and Classical exempla in Georgian encomiastic texts. Particular attention is dedicated to the growing use of the ideals of Old Testament kingship to construct the Georgian ruler's elevated image.

My methodology in dealing with non-textual sources does not differ drastically from the strategy I apply to the narrative sources. I examine the iconography, symbols, and language of authority that conveyed the power and image of the ruler. Royal imagery, coinage, and epigraphic inscriptions targeted a wider audience than the rhetorical narratives and consequently employed different techniques of communication. Royal imagery and coins focused more on the visual aspects of power representation, exploiting visual symbols and short textual utterances. Georgian coins struck from 1000 to 1125 show strong influence of Byzantine iconography, which indicates that medieval Georgia had close political and cultural links with the Byzantine empire. Later, however, the use of Arabic and Islamic conventions on coins reflected an orientation that acknowledged Eastern influences.

Chapter One investigates cross-cultural contacts between the Byzantine empire and the Georgian-speaking lands and discusses the reasons that determined the Byzantine empire's growing political and ideological prestige in the Christian Caucasus from 870 to 1100. After a close inspection of Georgian narrative sources, I argue that the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastic elite viewed Constantinople as a sacred city and the center of Christendom. Consequently, high-

ranking aristocrats and members of the royal houses were drawn to the imperial capital and imperial court. Constantinople was also a cultural hub that allowed a peripheral society to have access to knowledge and education. Some prominent Georgian learned ecclesiastics were educated in Constantinople.

The revival of Byzantine military and political power also increased the prestige of the Byzantine emperor in the eyes of the Kartvelian aristocracy and churchmen. This chapter offers for the first time a study of the Byzantine emperor's image and authority in the Georgian world. As careful reading of hagiography, manuscript colophons, and epigraphic inscriptions shall demonstrate, the Byzantine basileus received favorable treatment in these sources, which indicates that the emperors had a positive reputation in the Georgian-speaking lands. I suggest that the Georgian secular elite and high-ranking clergymen considered the Byzantine emperor as the supreme bearer of authority.

Chapter Two focuses on the political relationship between the Georgian world and the Byzantine empire between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. I discuss the circumstances that helped the Bagratid family from the Byzantine-Kartvelian frontier region of Tao to rise from aristocratic to royal status. The primary focus of this chapter are the early patterns of Georgian kingship and a survey of the role Byzantine court dignities played in establishing the Bagratid rulers' credentials. While the political/ideological importance of the imperial court dignities for the Bagratid rulers has been downplayed, scrutiny of the various media, silver coinage, inscriptions, and charters through which the Bagratids communicated their image demonstrate the contrary. Apparently, honorary dignities (*kouropalatēs*, *nōbelissimos*, *sebastos*, and *kaisar*) had an essential ideological value for the Bagratids because they shaped their authority and made them more powerful. Byzantine court dignities were not infrequently the objects of political competition among the different members of the Bagratid family. This chapter further argues that the Bagratids, in their role as kings of a united Georgian kingdom, started to receive the high-ranking court dignities of *nōbelissimos*, *sebastos*, and *kaisar* after the Byzantine empire faced an external threat in the east and needed military support in the eleventh century. This leads to a discussion of changes in the Bagratid kings' representation in the context of Georgian-Byzantine relations, and against the background of the Byzantine empire's struggles with the Seljuk Turks.

Chapter Three studies new developments in the Georgian ruler's representation in connection with the political and social changes that occurred in the Caucasus around the end of

the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century. This chapter is one of the first attempts to study in greater depth a new discourse on royal power and the sophistication of royal rhetoric during the reign of Davit IV (r. 1089–1125). I closely examine various literary narratives that deal with the idea of rulership, seeking to analyze the purpose of these texts and the messages they convey. I demonstrate that pivotal political/military events transformed the nature of royal authority in Georgia and that a new theory of kingship was crafted based on borrowing and adapting the Byzantine language and visual culture of kingship. This phenomenon was a consequence of Davit's literary patronage and the fact that he invited several Georgian literati from Byzantium. It is possible that the Georgian learned men with Byzantine education enhanced the re-thinking of kingship ideology. An equally important incentive for developing a new royal rhetoric was Davit's impressive military victories against the Seljuks, aided by the decline of Byzantine power in the Caucasus. The use of the symbolic universe of Byzantium – previously a dominant political-cultural entity in the Caucasus and Christian East – had considerable weight in propaganda. By presenting himself in the guise of emperor, Davit questioned the Byzantine basileus's authority and asserted his position as a new powerful monarch in the Eastern Christian world. Davit did not slavishly copy the Byzantine paradigms of rulership, however, but adapted them to the local context.

In this chapter I further argue that there were similarities between Davit IV's and Alexios I Komnenos's styles of kingship. Until now, no one has tried to address this question. Consequently, for the first time, I juxtapose the reigns of Alexios and Davit and argue for certain resemblance between their reforms, ecclesiastical policies, and, more importantly, their contemporary and near-contemporary imperial/royal rhetoric and image-making discourse. Davit IV is the first Georgian king whose literary and visual image bears all the characteristics of the Byzantine emperor.

Chapter Four studies the changes in the nature of Georgian kingship after 1125. The first and concise section of the chapter examines the novelties that were introduced in the representation of king Demetre I (r. 1125–1156) and king Giorgi III (r. 1156–1184). Since no historiographical narratives have come down to us that portray Demetre I's reign, I discuss his royal imagery based on a scrutiny of his copper coinage. When it comes to the study of Giorgi III's kingship, I use numismatic materials and a historiographical narrative, the *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*, written decades after his death. The literary portrayal of Giorgi diverges sharply from

his image on coins and royal charters. While Giorgi is represented in the guise of a Classical and Old Testament hero in the historiographical text, on the coins and in a royal charter he more resembles a Near Eastern/oriental ruler.

The second and larger section studies the complex mechanisms through which the authority of the female ruler, queen Tamar (r. 1184–1210), was constructed and communicated through various literary and visual media in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Georgia. To put it differently, I study Tamar's contemporary/near contemporary discourse on ideal female rulership and royal rhetoric. While Tamar's representation on frescoes has been researched, her royal imagery in literary narratives still awaits a comprehensive survey. First, I discuss the historical context and the difficulties Tamar faced after she was crowned as sole ruler in 1184 and explore various strategies which she applied to overcome obstacles and strengthen her position. It is my conviction that Tamar patronized men of literature in order to present herself in a better light and possibly used the literary output of these learned men to promote her image. The highly rhetorical narratives composed at her court became a vehicle of propaganda which eulogized Tamar as a divinely inspired and capable ruler. Afterwards, I investigate the peculiarities of court rhetoric and the propagation of Tamar's image by taking a close look at encomiastic historical writings (*The Life of Tamar, King of Kings* and *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*) and two panegyric poems (*In Praise of King Tamar* and *Abdulmesiani*). I study these texts for the first time as rhetorical narratives, analyzing the rhetorical technique(s) employed by the authors and the messages they promulgated concerning the nature of Tamar's queenship. I argue that the primary goal of these texts was to portray and communicate the authority of an exceptionally strong and self-confident female ruler. I am of the opinion that each of the texts describing and extolling Tamar's reign was a response to a certain historical circumstance; it is essential to study further the relationship between the text and political and social context. Also, the survey of encomiastic historiography and poems should be discussed in a broad context because I believe that the Georgian texts were inspired to a certain degree by the Byzantine rhetoric of praise. In other words, the motifs of Byzantine imperial rhetoric were carefully refigured in the Georgian literary compositions that glorified queen Tamar. To better understand the context of female rulership in Georgia, I refer to examples of Byzantine empresses and imperial women to see how powerful women were represented in the Byzantine compared to the Georgian sources. Moreover, it is also instructive to

see what kind of methods ambitious Byzantine empresses/imperial women used to gain access to power, increase their authority, and craft their public image.

Apart from literary narratives, Tamar's coinage, epigraphic inscriptions, and a royal charter are also explored. I examine whether her literary image in the rhetorical narratives as powerful and independent ruler contrasts the way she represented herself in other highly communicative media – coinage, inscriptions, and a charter.

Sources

The main corpus of Georgian literary sources on which my study is based are: 1) hagiography, 2) historiographical texts (chronicles and encomiastic histories), 3) panegyric poems, 4) manuscript colophons, 5) royal charters, 6) the acts of an ecclesiastical council, 7) a homiletic poem, 8) numismatic materials, 9) inscriptions, 10) coins and 11) royal charters.

Hagiography

Several hagiographical texts are examined closely in the first and second chapters of the dissertation. These literary works provide rare information about cross-cultural encounters between the Byzantine empire and the Georgian world. Furthermore, one learns a great deal about the emergence of Georgian monasteries and monastic communities all over Byzantium.

The Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti is a concise hagiographical text that describes the execution of the Iberian/Kartvelian aristocrat K'onstanti by the Arabs in the first half of the ninth century.¹² This source is particularly interesting for understanding the scale of authority the Byzantine emperor Michael III and empress Theodora enjoyed in Kartli/Iberia.

The Life of Ilarion can further enrich our understanding of how Kartvelian ecclesiastics perceived the imperial capital, Constantinople, and the way hagiography written in Georgian portrayed emperor Basileios I (r. 867–886). In addition, this hagiography provides crucial information about the ninth-century foundation of one of the first Georgian monasteries near

¹² [The Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti] ცხოვრება და წამებაი კოსტანტისი ქართველისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, I. 5th–10th c.] ed. I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963), 164-172.

Constantinople. This narrative was composed in the ninth century but survives only in the eleventh century Metaphrastic version from the Iviron Monastery.¹³

Giorgi Merçule's *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* (composed in the 950s) describes the revival of monasticism in Tao-Klarjeti. It contains invaluable information about the early patterns of Kartvelian kingship and the Byzantine-Kartvelian relationship. The *Life of Grigol* further reflects how Constantinople became the sacred city and the center of Christendom for Kartvelian ecclesiastics.¹⁴

Eleventh-century hagiographical texts, Giorgi the Hagiorite's *Life of Ioane and Eptvime*¹⁵ and Giorgi Mci're's the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite*,¹⁶ describe the lives of the Georgian monastic communities of Mount Athos. These texts are the most valuable pieces for studying Byzantine-Georgian literary and cultural relations from the end of the tenth until the second half of the eleventh century. One learns essential information about the literary activities of the Georgian monastic communities in Byzantium and the way these communities enhanced the transmission of Byzantine thought to the Georgian world.

Historiographical Texts

Sumbat Davitis-ze's *Life and Tales of the Bagratids*, composed at the Bagratid royal court in the 1030s,¹⁷ is one of the main sources for studying Byzantine-Georgian political relations in the tenth and the eleventh centuries.¹⁸ This concise chronicle narrates the family's genealogical tree and buttressed the legitimacy of the Bagratid dynasty through their alleged Biblical origin.

¹³ [The Life of Ilarion Kartveli] ცხოვრება და მოქალაქეობა ილარიონ ქართველისი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II. 11th-15th c.] ed. I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1967), 9-37.

¹⁴ [The Life of Grigol Xanzteli] შრომაი და მოღუაწეობაი გრიგოლისი არქიმანდრიტისაი ხანცთისა და შატბერდისა აღმაშენებელისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I. 5th-10th c.] ed. I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963), 248-319.

¹⁵ [The Life of Ioane and Eptvime] ცხოვრებაი იოვანესი და ეფთვიმესი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II. 11th-15th c.] ed. I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1967), 38-207. English trans. T. Grdzeldze, *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos: Two Eleventh-century Lives of the Hegoumenoi of Iviron* (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2009), 53-96.

¹⁶ [The Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite] ცხოვრებაი გიორგი მთაწმიდელისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II. 11th-15th c.], English trans. T. Grdzeldze, *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 97-162.

¹⁷ S. H. Rapp, jr. has proposed that the source was written around ca.1030 instead 1060 See S. H. Rapp, Jr., *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 339.

¹⁸ [the Life and Tales of the Bagratids] ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატიონთა. ქართლის ცხოვრება (the Life of Kartli 1) ed. S. Khaukchishvili (Tbilisi: Saxelgami, 1955), 372-386.

The anonymous' *Chronicle of Kartli*, written in the 1070s, is another important source for studying the dynamics of the Byzantine-Georgian relationship in the tenth and the eleventh centuries.¹⁹ The author of this text, in contrast to Sumbat Davitis-ze, is anti-Byzantine and blames the empire for undermining Bagratid power and provoking internal instability in the Georgian kingdom.

While the *Life and Tales of the Bagratids* and the *Chronicle of Kartli*, are less concerned about kingship and bear characteristics of chronicles, historiographical narratives composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are excellent literary pieces for examining the evolution of kingship ideology. The anonymous' *Life of Davit, King of Kings*,²⁰ the anonymous' *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*,²¹ and Pseudo-Basil's *Life of Tamar, King of Kings*,²² demonstrate rhetorical sophistication and employ high-style discourse on ideal kingship. The authors of these texts remain yet unidentified and it is unknown precisely when these narratives were composed.

None of these Georgian historical narratives survives in a separate manuscript, but came down to us in the corpus of *Kartlis Cxovreba/Life of Kartli*, often referred to in the English-speaking world as the *Georgian Royal Annals*. This voluminous work contains ten historiographical texts that narrate the history of the Georgian kingship from the fourth century B.C. to the fourteenth century.

Panegyric Poems

In Praise of King Tamar is a one-hundred-and-twelve strophe panegyric poem written in twenty-syllable meter.²³ The poem is dedicated to queen Tamar, but other subjects of praise are also her second husband, Davit Soslan, and their son, Giorgi-Laša. *In Praise of King Tamar* is believed to have been composed during queen's reign by Grigol Čaxruxaze, sometime between

¹⁹ [The Chronicle of Kartli] მატანე ქართლისა. ქართლის ცხოვრება [the Life of Kartli 1], 249-317.

²⁰ [The Life of Davit, King of Kings] ცხოვრებაი მეფეთ-მეფისა დავითისი, ed. M. Shanidze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1992), 157-224; English trans. R. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, Original Georgian Text and the Armenian Adaptation* by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 309-353.

²¹ [The Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs] ისტორიანი და აზმანნი შარავანდედთანი. ქართლის ცხოვრება (The Life of Kartli) ed., R. Metreveli (Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2012), 377-482; English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2014), 227-286.

²² [The Life of Tamar, King of Kings] ცხოვრებაი მეფეთ-მეფისა თამარისი. ქართლის ცხოვრება [The Life of Kartli] ed., R. Metreveli (Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2012), 377-482; English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2014), 227-286.

²³ [In Praise of King Tamar] ქება მეფისა თამარისი. ძველი ქართველი მეხოტბენი (Old Georgian Panegyrists I) ed., I. Lolashvili (Tbilisi: Georgian Academy of Science Press, 1957), 181-216.

1195 and 1210. Čaxruxaze’s biographical details are poorly known and therefore scholars have speculated about his position at the royal court. Some assume that Čaxruxaze was a secretary at the royal court and that he was educated in the Byzantine empire.²⁴ The fact that the author of *In Praise of King Tamar* was acquainted with Classical literature and philosophy, which is evident from his poem, has led scholars to believe that he had a Byzantine education.

The *Abdulmesiani* [Slave of the Messiah] is another court poem similar to Čaxruxaze’s *In Praise of King Tamar*.²⁵ This poem was written by Ioane Šavteli, Tamar’s contemporary court intellectual and her poet. Tamar and her husband, Davit, are the subjects of eulogy in this rhetorical text and several strophes are also dedicated to prince Giorgi-Laša. The *Abdulmesiani* is approximately the same length as *In Praise of King Tamar* and composed in the same encomiastic/exalted style and the same twenty-syllable meter.²⁶ The exact date of its composition is unknown; it was probably written during the reign of queen Tamar and the earliest texts preserved are in a late eighteenth-century manuscript.

Byzantine and Armenian sources

I base my study on Byzantine texts as well. In the first chapter of the thesis, I use a tenth century historiographical text composed by unknown author, often referred in scholarship as Theophanes Continuatus. This narrative contains relevant information about the arrival of the Kartvelian ruler, Adarnase II *kouropalatēs* in Constantinople. In the second chapter, I refer to *De Administrando Imperio* and *De Ceremoniis*, the authorship of which is ascribed to emperor Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenitos.²⁷ *De Administrando Imperio* contains relevant information about the sacred genealogy of the Bagratids family, while *De Ceremoniis* is a crucial source for studying the ceremonial setting that elevated a person to the ranks of *kouropalatēs*, *nōbelissimos*, and *kaisar*.²⁸ *De Ceremoniis* also confirms that the imperial court had frequent communication with the rulers of Tao-Klarjeti and kingdom of Apxazeti. The narrative account of the twelfth-

²⁴ [K. Kekelidze] კ. კეკელიძე, ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორია (History of Georgian Literature II) (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press 1958), 221.

²⁵ [Abdulmesiani] აბდულმესიანი. ძველი ქართველი მეზობეზენი (Old Georgian Panegyrist II) ed., I. Lolashvili (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1964), 117-152.

²⁶ D. Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 84.

²⁷ G. Moravcsick, ed. and R. Jenkins, trans. *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De Administrando Imperio* CFHB (Washington, D.C; Dumbarton Oaks).

²⁸ J. J. Reiske, ed., *Constantini Porphyrogeniti de Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 2 vols (Bonn 1830); English trans. A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, 2 vols. (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2012).

century historian, Ioannes Zonaras, is of particular significance when it comes to investigating the main reason for the war between emperor Konstantinos and king Bagrat IV.²⁹

In the third chapter, I discuss the image of Alexios Komnenos, and his ecclesiastical reforms based on the account of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*.³⁰ Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*,³¹ and George Tornike's funeral oration for Anna Komnene are addressed in Chapter Four. These two Byzantine texts shed light on the way eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine intellectuals portrayed and treated powerful imperial women. In addition, the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene remains an important text for studying the image of influential Komnenian imperial women.

When it comes to Byzantine-Georgian relations and Byzantium's Caucasian policy, Armenian sources are often more informative and reliable than the Georgian. They complement the Georgian texts and provide relevant information about essential matters that shaped the Caucasian political map. In this dissertation, I use the narrative accounts of the tenth and the eleventh century Armenian authors: Movsēs Xorenac'i,³² Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i (d. 923-24),³³ Step'anos Tarōnec'i,³⁴ and Aristakes Lastiverc'i.³⁵ In addition, the twelfth-century Armenian historian, Matte'os Urhaec'i (Edessa)'s *Chronicle* is a crucial text for studying the royal image of king Davit IV and the way a Georgian king was perceived by his non-Georgian subjects.³⁶

²⁹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome Historiarum*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, vol. 3 (Bonn: Weber, 1897).

³⁰ Anna Komnene, *the Alexiad*, ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, CFHG XL (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2001). English trans., E. R. A. Sewter and P. Frankopan, ed., *Anna Komnene. The Alexiad* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

³¹ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. D. R. Reinsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), English trans. E. R. A. Sewter, *The Chronographia of Michael Psellos* (London: Penguin Classics, 1966).

³² Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians*, tr. R.W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³³ Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, trans. K. Maksoudian (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987).

³⁴ T. Greenwood, trans., *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i, Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* Greenwood, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁵ [The History of Aristakes Lastiverc'i] *Повесть о владении варданета Арустакэса Ластиверци*, trans. I. Yuzbashyan (Moscow, 1968).

³⁶ A. E. Dostourian, trans., *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993).

Chapter One. Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the Georgian World

The Arab conquests in the seventh century cardinally changed the Caucasian and Byzantine political maps. After the Arabs occupied the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire, the eastern Georgian kingdom known as Kartli/Iberia, fell under the dominion of the caliphate. Although the Arab rule in Kartli was not that harsh at the beginning and the region remained stable, things started to change by the end of the seventh century, when civil war erupted in the caliphate. The Kartvelian political elite, with the help of the Byzantine empire, exploited the political turmoil in the caliphate and succeeded in challenging the temporary Arab domination in Kartli. When Abd al-Malik came to power, however, he managed to regain control in the Caucasus and thwarted the Byzantine influence in Kartli. To further consolidate power and disable the Byzantine empire to manipulate the Kartvelian political elite and Guaramid princes who looked towards Constantinople, the caliphate established direct rule in Kartli and appointed an Arab *emir* in Tpʼilisi (Tbilisi). In this way, the caliph crippled the power of the Guaramid princes and speeded up to the disintegration of Kartli. The situation was exacerbated further after the caliphate and the Khazars engaged in a bloody war to dominate the eastern Caucasus, as a result of which Kartli suffered from frequent invasions and became a battleground.³⁷ At the same time, the conflict deepened between the political elite of Kartli and the Arab officials and the caliphate initiated successive punitive campaigns in the 730s in order to affirm its supremacy in the region.³⁸

The instability and economic decay forced the local lay and ecclesiastic elite as well as the population in general to migrate from Kartli towards multicultural Tao and Klarjeti, regions remote from the Arab-dominated areas and in proximity to the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire. As has rightly been pointed out Tao-Klarjeti was the birthplace of medieval Georgia and the Georgian church.³⁹

The Kartvelians probably hoped that in the wake of Arab domination of Kartli when the Christians felt threatened by the Muslims, the proximity to the Byzantine empire was a guarantee of their safety. The transfer of the Kartvelian center from Kartli towards Tao and Klarjeti brought the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite into the Byzantine political and cultural orbit.

³⁷ D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2012), 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁹ S. H. Rapp, jr. "Caucasia and Byzantine Culture," 225.

Though the Arab invasions weakened the Byzantine empire's positions in the Caucasus, the imperial court kept attempting to regain its position in the region through allying with the local Christian elite, providing them with military and financial aid in their fight against the Arabs. When the Byzantine empire recovered and gradually reconquered lost territories in the east, the basileus' authority and imperial court's prestige was reasserted in the eyes of the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite. From the ninth century, Byzantium regained its status of a supra-regional power and dominated Caucasian power politics until the 1070s. Consequently, the political and cultural impact of Byzantine empire on Georgian polities from the ninth to the end of the eleventh century comes as no surprise.

This chapter studies the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction between the Byzantine empire and the Georgian world in that period. I explore why the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite looked towards the Byzantine empire, and what motivated Kartvelian monks to establish monasteries in different parts of the empire. I also discuss the role these monasteries and monastic communities played in the transmission and dissemination of Byzantine culture to the Georgian world. Lastly, I examine image of the Byzantine emperor in Georgian inscriptions, hagiography, and manuscript colophons and argue that the basileus enjoyed immense authority among the Kartvelian elite, both lay and ecclesiastical.

1.1 “A Vessel of Christ”: Constantinople in the Medieval Georgian Imagination

After the Byzantine empire regained its influence in the western Georgian states of Tao-Klarjeti and Apxazeti, the Kartvelians became more attached to the empire and its capital, Constantinople. The growth of the Byzantine influence in the region intensified the movement of different groups of people and opened a new channel of communication that brought the Georgian and the Byzantine worlds closer. Trade, diplomatic communication and pilgrimage to Constantinople enhanced cross-cultural encounters and enabled the Kartvelian world to better acquaint itself with the Byzantine culture. As has been pointed out, cross-cultural encounters were remarkable agents of influence in the pre modern world.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ J. H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchange in pre-Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4.

Commerce and trade between the western Georgian kingdoms and Byzantium facilitated the movements of valuable commodities, artistic objects, manuscripts, and ideas. Although the economic relations between Byzantium and the Georgian world have not yet received scholarly attention, we know that Byzantine merchants exported silk fiber, valuable commodity, from the Black Sea region and Georgia particularly.⁴¹ The other type of interaction between these two regions was maintained by the members of Kartvelian ruling and aristocratic houses, and high-ranking ecclesiastics who traveled to Byzantium for different reasons. These people would have had an opportunity to participate in elaborate court and church ceremonials, learn a great deal about imperial and patriarchal court cultures and then transmit their knowledge and experience back home. Some members of royal/princely and aristocratic houses spent years at the imperial court of Constantinople either as hostages or in exile. In 888, Nasre Bagratid killed his cousin, Davit I *kouropalatēs*, in order to assume power in Tao-Klarjeti, but after suffering a debacle and failing to secure the throne for himself he escaped to Constantinople and found shelter at the imperial court.⁴² Several years later, Nasre, with support from the emperor, returned from Constantinople to assume power in Tao-Klarjeti but did not succeed. In 922/3, Adarnase *kouropalatēs*, another ruler of Tao-Klarjeti, visited Constantinople for a diplomatic purpose. The imperial court organized a ceremonial reception in his honor; “At that time the Iberian *kouropalatēs* happened to be in the city; and he walked through the decorated *meze* to the *agora*, where he was welcomed warmly. Afterwards, he was taken to Hagia Sophia so that he could see with his own eyes its magnificence, beauty and decoration.”⁴³ Hagia Sophia was decorated earlier and when Adarnase *kouropalatēs* entered the church he is said to have been mesmerized by the splendor of the building.⁴⁴

Another channel of communication between Byzantium and Georgia was maintained through the exchange of embassies, which probably happened frequently because the Byzantine emperors used to confer imperial court titles on the rulers of Tao-Klarjeti and Apxazeti. For instance, *De Ceremoniis* contains a detailed account of how a chrysobull written to a ruler of Tao-

⁴¹ D. Jacoby, “Constantinople as Commercial Transit Center, Tenth to Mid-Fifteenth Century,” in *Trade in Byzantium. Papers from Third International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, eds., P. Magdalino and N. Necipoğlu (Istanbul: Koc University Press, 2016), 200.

⁴² *The Life of Kartli*, 259.

⁴³ *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB (Bonn, 1838) 402; τῆνικαῦτα δὲ καὶ κουροπαλάτης Ἰβηρ ἐν πόλει παρεγένετο, καὶ διὰ μεσης τῆς ἀγορᾶς διελθὼν, κεκοσμημένης λαμπρῶς, μετὰ δόξης πολλῆς καὶ τιμῆς ὑπεδεχθῆ· ὄν καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγία τοῦ θεοῦ σοφία ἀπήγαγον, τό κάλλος αὐτῆς καὶ το μέγεθος θεασασομενον καὶ τόν πολυτελεῖ κόσμον.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 402.

Klarjeti by the Byzantine emperor had to look; the emperor was supposed to use a specific vocabulary when addressing the *kouropalatēs* of Iberia, and the golden bull attached to the chrysobull had to be worth two *nomismata*.⁴⁵ Such imperial chrysobulls were carried from Constantinople to Tao-Klarjeti by imperial envoys, whose task was to confer upon the candidate an honorary court dignity with insignia, annual *rhoga* and valuable gifts. The reception of the Byzantine envoys probably took place during a carefully staged public ceremony.

The rulers of Tao-Klarjeti also sent often envoys to Constantinople in order to maintain contacts with the imperial court and secure access to court dignities.⁴⁶ Without a doubt, the frequent travel of embassies/envoys between the Byzantine center and Georgian periphery enhanced and deepened cross-cultural interaction between the two worlds because the arrival of each embassy was followed by an exchange of ideas, gifts, and rare (art) objects.

Like other neighbors of the Byzantine empire, the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite had great reverence for Constantinople, a medieval megapolis and the political center of the eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁷ Kartvelians started to perceive Constantinople as a holy city and “new Jerusalem” after Jerusalem and the Holy Land were lost to the Arabs and travel to these places became a difficult enterprise. Travel to the imperial capital for pilgrimage became as crucial as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Constantinople turned into a place of attraction not only for the Kartvelian ecclesiastics but for the secular elite and members of the royal/princely houses as well. The Byzantine empire, notably Constantinople, offered a great opportunity for Georgians who wanted to receive an education. Many medieval Georgian literati who earned names as great translators, theologians, and men of literature owed their knowledge to the Byzantine monastic and secular schools.

The anonymus’ *Life of Ilarion* (henceforth *LI*) is a rare hagiographic narrative that tells the intricate story of the sacred topography of ninth-century Eastern Christendom and the rising prestige of Constantinople.⁴⁸ The main protagonist of this text, Ilarion, an aristocrat by birth, spent a great part of his monastic life in different parts of the Byzantine empire. Ilarion became a monk

⁴⁵ A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos: The Book of Ceremonies II*, 687-88.

⁴⁶ The political and ideological importance of the Byzantine honorary court dignities for the Bagratid kings will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁷ C. Rapp, “A medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its Foreign Inhabitants”, in *Alexander’s Revenge: Hellenistic Culture Through Centuries*, eds., J. Asgeirsson, and N. Van Deusen, (Reykjavik: The University of Iceland Press, 2002), 153; J. Bogdanovic, ‘The Relational Spiritual Geopolitics of Constantinople: the Capital of the Byzantine empire,’ In *Political Landscapes of Capital Cities*, eds, Christie, Bogdanovic, 107.

⁴⁸ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 9-37.

in Tao-Klarjeti and after serving in the local monastery he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Saint Sabas. Later, he decided to travel to Byzantium: “and Saint Ilarion guided by holy spirit reached the mount Ulumbo [Olympus], he found a small church in desolated area, entered and stayed there.”⁴⁹ After spending five years at Mount Olympus, Ilarion traveled to Constantinople. “He with his disciple went to the royal city to venerate the True Cross and visit all the holy churches ... and when he entered Constantinople, he kissed the True Cross and saints’ relics.”⁵⁰ In Constantinople, Ilarion decided to continue his pilgrimage to Rome to venerate the relics of saints Peter and Paul. After he spent two years in Rome, Ilarion finally decided to go back to Constantinople. The *LI* explains Ilarion’s decision in the following way:

And after he spent two years in Rome ... he went to the royal city. God wished this great city to be eternal, and the city and its adjacent lands held a multitude of relics of the saints. And for this reason, Ilarion went back to the city in order to be able to venerate these relics and be close to these places.⁵¹

The anonymous author of *LI* states explicitly that Constantinople’s special position in Christendom determined the Georgian monk’s choice to spend the rest of his monastic life close to the imperial capital. Ilarion however, never reached Constantinople and died in Thessaloniki.

This hagiographic narrative reveals much about the sacred topography of the eastern Christian world and the places which were considered worthy of a visit and pilgrimage in the ninth century. At the time, the narrative was composed, Constantinople was becoming one of the holiest cities in the Christendom. The Byzantine emperors’ active policy of enriching the imperial capital with saints’ relics and the zeal to found and patronize churches and monasteries was one of the main reasons for Constantinople’s growing prestige as a sacred center of Christendom.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 19; და ნებითა ღმრთისაითა წარემართა სამეუფოდ ქალაქად კონსტანტინოპოლედ ... და მიიწია წმიდაი ილარიონ წინამძღურობითა სულისა წმიდისაითა ულონზობისასა და პოვა მცირე ეკლესიაი დაგილსა უდაბნოსა, შევიდა და იყოფებოდა მას შინა.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22; და თანა წარიყვანა მოწაფეც ერთი სახელით ისაკ, და წარვიდა კონსტანტინოპოლედ თაყუანისცემად პატიოსანსა ჯუარსა და ყოველ[ა] წმიდათა ეკლესიათა... და ვითარცა შევიდა ქალაქსა სამეუფოდ, თაყუანის-სცა სურველსა თვსსა ძელსა პატიოსანსა და ამბორ-უყო სურვილით ნაწილთა წმიდათასა

⁵¹ Ibid., 24; და ვითარცა დაყო ჰრომეს შინა ორი წელი მალლითა და საკვირველითა მოქალაქობითა, ამისა შემდგომდა აღძვრითა ზეგარდამოითა მოუხდა გულსა, რაითა კულად წარვიდეს სამეუფოდ ქალაქად კონსტანტინოპოლედ, რამეთუ ენება ღმერთსა, რაითა არა ხუებულ ყოს დიდებული ესე ქალაქი, რომელსა შეუკრებიან სიმრავლენი ყოველთავე წმიდათანი თავსა შორის თვსსა და გარემოის ყოველთავე სანახებათა თვსთა, და რაითა ამისთაცა ნაწილთა ღირს იქმნას შეწყნარებად ვრცელთა მათ და დიდებულთა წიაღთა შინა თვსთა.

⁵² S. Mergiali-Sahas, “Byzantine Emperor and Holy Relics: Use, and Misuse of Sanctity and Authority,” *JÖB* 51 (2001): 41-60; P. Magdalino, “Constantinople=Byzantium,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*. ed. L. James (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 43-54.

A great reverence for Constantinople is reflected in another Georgian hagiographical text, the *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* [henceforth *LG*]. Composed in the first half of the tenth century by Giorgi Merčule, *LG* narrates the life of the ninth-century monk Grigol, who revived the monastic life in Tao-Klarjeti. While the *LI* called Constantinople a “royal city,” the *LG* uses more enthusiastic epithets like “vessel of Christ” and “second Jerusalem” to denote the elevated position of the imperial capital.⁵³ Like Ilarion, Grigol also traveled to Constantinople and “other beautiful/marvelous places of Greece for prayer and pilgrimage.”⁵⁴ The text claims that Grigol and his peers in the imperial capital venerated the True Cross and other relics and “with great joy they visited other holy places.”⁵⁵ The fact that Constantinople had a great repute in the eyes of medieval Georgian society is also corroborated by manuscript colophons, which usually refer to the imperial capital as the “royal city of Constantinople”, and “Constantinople, a new Rome.”

1.2 The Emergence of Georgian Monastic Centers and Communities in the Byzantine Empire

After Byzantium regained its lost position and influence in the Christian Caucasus, Georgian monastic communities gradually grew in different parts of the empire. Between the ninth and the tenth centuries, a few Georgian monasteries and many more monastic communities emerged all over Byzantium. Georgian monastic communities were engaged in literary activities and translated a vast number of Byzantine/Christian texts into Georgian. From the ninth century, Georgian ecclesiastics were more attracted by the Byzantine monastic and literary centers than by Near Eastern counterparts.

Romana was one of the first Georgian monasteries in the Byzantine empire built on the outskirts of Constantinople in the second half of the ninth century. The Romana was founded by disciples of Ilarion Kartveli with the help and support of the imperial court and the emperor Basileios I (r. 867–86).⁵⁶ The *Life of Ilarion* does not specify the exact location of the monastery and tells only that Romana was built on the outskirts of Constantinople in a wild and deserted

⁵³ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 264.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁵⁶ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 32-33.

place.⁵⁷ What is known for certain is that the monastic community of Romana was engaged in literary activities and translated a number of manuscripts from Greek into Georgian.

Despite the fragmentary evidence, it appears that another Georgian monastery existed on Mount Olympus in the ninth century. The Georgian monastic community of Mount Olympus was also engaged in literary activities and several manuscripts translated there have come down to us.⁵⁸

The colophon of the earliest surviving manuscript from Olympus tells the following story:

I poor Michael ... the most chosen among the priests, translated the Acts of Paul by order of my tutor Giorgi and with the help of Ioane ... this was written on the holy mountain of Ulumbo, at the place of saint Kosmas and Damiane in the time when Polyeuctus was patriarch in Constantinople and during the kingship of Nikephore [i.e., Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–69)].⁵⁹

The Georgian Monastic Center on Mount Athos: the Iviron

Although Georgian lay and ecclesiastic communities were present permanently in Constantinople and other parts of the empire, the foundation of Iviron monastery on Mount Athos particularly brought the Byzantine and Georgian worlds closer. Soon after its foundation, Iviron became a center of learning and manuscript production and a significant number of translated manuscripts were disseminated to the Georgian-speaking lands. In this way, the monks of Iviron contributed to the spread of Byzantine intellectual traditions in various parts of Georgia. It has been rightly argued that the revival of Georgian literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was enhanced by the reception of the intellectual legacy of the Iviron Monastic School.⁶⁰

The foundation of Iviron was closely linked with the turbulent events that took place in the Byzantine empire in the 970s. Had it not been for Davit of Tao's [i.e., Davit III *kouropalatēs*] military aid to Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII during Barda Skleros' rebellion, Iviron might not have emerged on Athos. Ioane Tornike, a Kartvelian aristocrat from the Čordvanieli family and former Byzantine official who had held the positions of *patrikios* and *synkellos*, received a vast

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ [L. Menabde] ლ. მენაბდე, ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის კერები (The Georgian Literary Centers, II) (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1980), 179-80.

⁵⁹ T. Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 171.

⁶⁰ [K. Kekelidze] კ. კეკელიძე, ეტიუდები ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორიიდან (Studies in Old Georgian Literature, vol. 2) (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1945), 218.

amount of wealth after the Byzantine army, with the help of the Iberian troops under Tornike's leadership, won a decisive victory against Skleros in 979.

After Tornike had routed Skleros and returned [to Athos] with innumerable goods and wealth because the treasure alone exceeded 12 *kentenaria* together with some other fine things, he gave everything to his spiritual father Ioane, and denied himself completely, not keeping even smallest thing in his possession.⁶¹

The establishment of Iviron was not without imperial consent and support. As an outcome of Ioane-Tornike's negotiation with Basileios II, Georgians got permission to acquire the land and erect the monastery on Athos. Basileios granted three further monasteries to Ioane-Tornike: Leontia in Thessaloniki and Kolobou in Ierissos. The third monastery was located outside of Athos with sizable estates and other dependencies in Macedonia. In return, the emperor requested that the Georgian monastery of Romana near to Constantinople and the monastery of St. Phokas in Trebizond be relinquished.⁶²

Soon after the foundation, Iviron attracted Georgian ecclesiastics from all over Byzantium and the Georgian world. Ioane-Tornike, *ktetor* and the founder of Iviron, enlarged the community of the newly founded monastery by bringing Georgian monks and orphans from Tao-Klarjeti. Ioane, the first *hegoumenos* of Iviron, did his best to invite prominent churchmen into the monastery; he succeeded in persuading Ioane Grzelize and Arsen Ninoc'mindeli to leave the desert of Ponto and move to Athos. As it happened, these two monks were scribes, and Ioane thought to use their skills to turn Iviron into a center of manuscript production. In one of the manuscript colophons Ioane Grzelize and Arsen Ninoc'mindeli claim: "By order of God ... we poor sinners Arsen Ninoc'mindeli and Ioane Grzelize and Chrysostom copied holy books translated from Greek to Georgian by our holy illuminator father, Eptvime."⁶³

Iviron under Ioane's leadership became a wealthy and self-sustaining monastery with a good library thanks to the donations received from Ioane-Tornike and other donors. If one believes

⁶¹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 50; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos* 60: ხოლო თორნიკე, ვინაითგან იოტა სკლიაროსი და კულად აქავე მოიქცა ურიცხვთა საფასითა და განძითა, - რამეთუ უფროს ათორმეტისა კენდინარისა მოილო განძი ოდენ, სხუათა ტურფათაგან კიდე, - რომელი-იგი ყოველივე მამისა თვისისა სულიერისა იოვანეს ხელთა მისცა და თავი თვისი სრულიად უარ-ყო და არაცა თუ მცირედი რაიმე დაუტევა ხელმწიფებასა ქუეშე თვისსა ...

⁶² *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 29.

⁶³ [I. Pantsulaia] ი. ფანცულაია, ათონის ივერიის მონასტრის ქართულ ხელნაწერთა კატალოგი [Catalogue of the Georgian Manuscripts from the Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, vol. 4, Collection A] (Tbilisi, 1954), 76-84.

the account of the *Life of Ioane and Eptvime*, Iviron was able to give financial and material support to other monasteries on Athos.

These honorable and beloved fathers of ours distributed the treasures and fine things to the Great Lavra and other monasteries on the Holy Mountain which then were poor and not populated as now. Many fine things and treasure were given to the common monastery, which is a gathering-place for the whole Mountain ... To the Great Lavra they gave ... a chrysobull for the treasure of 224 drahkani that John Tzimiskes offered John Tornike ... and they also gave an island, called Neos, granted to John Tornike by emperor Basil with a yearly income of 14 or 15 and sometimes even up to 20 *litrai*. They also offered Great Lavra a golden treasure in cash of 25 *litrai*, a piece of Life-giving Cross in a silver box, two large silver chalices ..., and a silver box for relics – all coated with gold... two books – *The Pearl* of Chrysostom, the book by Ephrem the Syrian, the books of *Catechesis* by Cyril of Jerusalem, also the books of the Old Testament, the prophets and the Maccabees, the Festal *Menaion*, the Gospel decorated with *stavra*, a silver button, and a cross. A processional silver cross coated with gold and decorated with the icon of velizmage; a large encaustic icon of the Crucifixion to the value of 100 drahkani; another large icon of the Deesis and one of the Deposition, which was a gift of the Emperor Nikephoros Phokas.⁶⁴

The thriving of intellectual activities at Iviron is associated with Eptvime the Athonite's name, who became the second *hegoumenos* of the monastery after his father, Ioane's, death.⁶⁵ Eptvime, with his peer intellectuals, turned Iviron into a Georgian literary and translation center. Unlike his father, Ioane, Eptvime had an excellent Byzantine education and knew Greek even better than Georgian. Eptvime was a boy when he was sent to Constantinople by his father Ioane after the

⁶⁴*Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 52-3; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 61-2: ამათ ღირსთა და სანატრელთა მამათა ზუნთა დიდნი საფასენი და მრავალნი ტურფანი შეწირნეს დიდსა ლავრასა და ყოველთა მონასტერთა მთაწმიდისათა, რომელნი იგი მას ჟამსა წუთელა გლახაკნი იყვნეს და არა განმრავლებულ ესეოდენ. და საშოვალსა, რომელ არს ყოვლისა მთისა შესაკრებელი, ფრიად სახმარნი და მონაგებანი მისცნეს... დიდსა უკუე ლავრასა მისცეს, ვითარცა ვთქუთ, ოქრობეჭედი განმისა ორას ორმეოცდა ოთხისა დრაჰკნისაი, ჩიმიშკისა ბომბეული იოვანესდა, და ესე ყოველთა წელთა აქუს პალატით ლავრასა, და კუნძული, რომელსა ნეოს ეწოდების, ბასილ მეფისა ბომბეული იოვანესდავე, რომლისაგან გამოვალს გამოსავალი ყოველთა წელთა ი~ დ ლიტრაი, გინა ათხუთმეტი და ოდესმე ოციცა. და კუალად მისცეს ოქროი განმად ათუალული კ~ ე ლიტრაი და ძელისა ცხოვრებისა ნაწილი ვეცხლისა ბუდითა და ორნი ბარძიმნი დიდი ვეცხლისანი და ფეშხუემი კოვზითურთ და ბრწყლით და ნაწილის შთასასუენებელით ვერცხლისაით. და ესე ყოველნი ოქროცურვებულნი... ორნი წიგნნი ოქროპირისანი - მარგალიტნი, სხუაი წიგნი წმიდისა ეფრემისი, სხუაი წიგნი, რომელსა სწერიან ყოველნივე ძუელნი წიგნნი, და საწინასწარმეტყველოი და მაკაბელთაი, სხუაი წიგნი სადღესასწაულოი საჩინოთა წმიდათაი, ოთხთავი სტავრაითაი შემოსილი და ვეცხლისა ღილოკილოთა და ჯუართა. ჯუარი სალიტანიე ვეცხლისაი ოქროცურვებული მელაზმაგისა ხატებითა, ჯუარს-ცუმისა ხატი ცვლოიანი დიდი, ას დრაჰკანად ფასებული; სხუაი დიდი ხატი ვედრებისაი, სხუაი ხატი გარდამოხსნაი, ნიკიფორ მეფისა ნიჭებული...

emperor Basileios requested hostages from Davit of Tao. Ioane was a close associate of Davit of Tao and felt obliged to send his son to the imperial capital with the other aristocratic children. The Byzantine emperors often asked for hostages from the rulers of Tao-Klarjeti in order to guarantee and secure their loyalty and obedience to the imperial court. At the imperial court, a Kartvelian aristocrat took the boy Eptvime under his patronage and secured a good education for him. Tenth-century Constantinople, with its rich libraries and schools was one of the few places in Christendom where a person could receive an excellent education.⁶⁶ Travelers, scholars, and students from the Mediterranean and Latin Christendom journeyed to the Byzantine capital to access the libraries and buy manuscripts.⁶⁷ From the tenth century Constantinople witnessed a further growth of the web of schools run by lay *maïstorses* and private (lay) schools run by *grammatikoi* (grammarians).⁶⁸

Since Eptvime was a hostage at the imperial court, he was likely educated at the palace school, but one should not rule out the possibility that a *maïstor* also instructed him. Whatever the arrangements, Eptvime received a brilliant education that turned him into a prolific translator and *litteratus*. When Ioane came to Constantinople several years later to secure the release of his son from captivity, he realized that Eptvime had become an intellectual with great potential for translating. The first *hegoumenos* of Iviron decided to use his son's skills and ordered him to translate texts from Greek into Georgian.

'My son the land of Kartli is in a great need of books for they lack many of them. I see what God has granted to you so make sure that with your efforts you multiply your gifts from God.' Because Euthymios was obedient by nature, *he at once followed his instruction and started translating, and everyone was amazed because such translations...have neither been made in our language nor, I think, will be made* [my emphasis].⁶⁹

⁶⁶ K. Ciggaar, *Western Travelers to Constantinople*, 73-74; N. Gaul, 'Rising Elites and Institutionalization—*Ēthos/Mores*—'Debts'and Drafts: Three Concluding Steps Towards Comparing Networks of Learning in Byzantium and the 'Latin' West, c.1000–1200 in *Networks of Learning: Perspective on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c.1000–1200* (Byzantinistische Studien und Texte, 2014), 245-6; R. Browning, "Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries." *Past & Present*, N. 69 (Nov. 1975), 4.

⁶⁷K. Ciggaar, *Western Travelers to Constantinople*, 74.

⁶⁸ N. Gaul, "Rising Elites and Institutionalization—*Ēthos/Mores*—'Debts'and Drafts,'" 248-9.

⁶⁹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 61; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 67: ეტყვიან მამაი იოვანე ვითარმედ 'შვილო ჩემო, ქართლისა ქუეყანაი დიდან ნაკლულევან არს წიგნთაგან და მრავალნი წიგნნი აკლან, და ვხედავ, რომელ ღმერთსა მოუმადლებია შენდა. აწ ილუაწე, რაითა, განამრავლო სასყიდელი შენი ღმრთისაგან.' და იგი, ვითარცა იყო ყოველსავე ზედა მორჩილი, მოსწრაფედ შეუდგა ბრძანებასა მისსა და იწყო თარგმნად და ყოველნივე განაკვრვნა, რამეთუ ეგევითარი თარგმანი, გარეშე მათ პირველთასა, არღარა გამოჩინებულ არს ენასა ჩუენსა და ვჰგონებ, თუ არცაღა გამოჩინებად არს.

In one of the manuscript colophons Eptvime admits that he translated John of Sinai's *Ladder* at his father's order: "I, poor Eptvime, on the order of my father Ioane translated this."⁷⁰

The hagiographical vita, the *Life of Ioane and Eptvime*, puts great emphasis on Eptvime's intellectual and translation skills and hails him as:

*Blessed Euthymios ... a jewel of our nation, imitator of the holy Apostles, he enriched the Georgian language and the Georgian land. According to the testaments added to the books that he translated, through his worthy activity our Church acquired the enlightening and enriching knowledge of wisdom [my emphasis].*⁷¹

Eptvime can safely be considered a shining example of a cultural agent/broker who enhanced the cross-cultural ties between Byzantium and Georgia through his intellectual activities. It is important to emphasize that a significant number of the texts translated by the Iviron community was sent to the court of Davit of Tao and disseminated in Tao-Klarjeti. The *Life of Ione and Eptvime* tells the following story:

Many of these books were sent to David *kouropalatēs*, who was faithful and therefore rejoiced and praised God, saying: 'Thanks be to God who in our times reveled a new Chrysostom.' And the king sent letter after letter with a plea to translate more books and to send them back to the East. *And the beloved one translated without a break; he did not allow himself to rest but worked day and night like a bee on the sweet honey of divine books and though them our language and Church were sweetened.* He translated so many books that it is hardly possible to count them...[my emphasis].⁷²

The fact that Eptvime translated manuscripts at night is corroborated by a manuscript colophon in which the Iviron *hegoumenos* claims that: "I have finished the translation of this work, the gospel

⁷⁰ L. Menabde, *The Georgian Literary Centers II*, 195.

⁷¹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 41; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 55: ნეტარი ეფთვიმე... რომელი-იგი გამოჩნდა სამკაულად ნათესავისა ჩუენისა და მობამვად წმიდათა მოციქულთა, განანათლა ქართველთა ენაი და ქუეყანაი. რამეთუ, ვითარცა წამებენ მის მიერ თარგმნილთა წიგნთა შინა აღწერილნი ანდრერძნი, ამის ღირსისა მოღუაწებითა განსწავლულ იქმნა ყოვლითა სიბრძნითა განმანათლებლად და შემამკობელად ეკლესიათა ჩუენთა...

⁷² *Ibid.*, 61-62; 67-68: და მრავალნი წიგნნი წაესცნის წინაშე დავით პურაპალატისა, რომელნი-იგი იხილნა რაი, ვითარცა იყო მორწმუნე, სიახარულითა აღივსო, და ადიდებდა ღმრთსა და იტყოდა, ვითარმედ: 'მადლი ღმრთსა, რომელმან ჩუენთა ამათ ჟამთა ახალი ოქროპირი გამოაჩინა.' და ზედაის-ზედა მოუწერნ, რაითა თარგმნიდეს და წარსცემდეს. და იგი სანატრელი შეუსუენებელად თარგმნინ და რაითურთით არა სცემდა განსუენებასა თავსა თვსსა, არამედ დღე და ღამე ტკბილსა მას თავლსა წიგნთა საღმრთოთასა შურებოდა, რომლისა მიერ დაატკბო ენაი ჩუენი და ეკლესიაი. რამეთუ თარგმნნა წიგნნი საღმრთონი რომელთა აღრიცხუვაი კნინდა-და შეუძლებელ არს...

of Matthew; those of you who will read this pray for me; forgive me for my handwriting as I was busy and mostly wrote during the nights.”⁷³ Eptvime also translated several texts from Georgian into Greek. He introduced into the Byzantine world the story of *Barlaam and Josephat* and works of Theodor Abu-Qurah: “Like a sonorous golden horn, the sweetness of his translations reaches the land not only of Kartli but also Greece, because he translated Balavariani and Abu Qurah and ‘several other books from Georgian into Greek.’”⁷⁴

Eptvime the Athonite was much revered by subsequent generations of Georgian learned ecclesiastics. Giorgi Mci‘re (The Minor), in his *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite*, pays due respect to Eptvime, whom he calls “luminous star of our nation, the great Eptvime.”

*Like a thirteenth apostle he cleansed our country completely from the deficiency mentioned above through his numerous translations of Holy Scripture...And he also left us accounts of the rulers and canons of the Church, the bulwark of our faith. He left these copies which from this holy mountain and God-built Lavra reached our land and spread on our nation like the living springs of the heavenly river [my emphasis].*⁷⁵

In Giorgi Mci‘re’s view, Eptvime’s intellectual output – the vast corpus of translated literature – enlightened Georgians. According to Mci‘re, the Greeks in the past had called Georgians barbarians because they lacked education, but after Eptvime’s work Georgians became equal to the Greeks in their wisdom.⁷⁶

Giorgi Mci‘re’s *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite* is another hagiographical vita that tells a great deal about the intellectual enterprise of the Iviron community as well as about Byzantine-Georgian cultural and political relations in the second half of the eleventh century. The main protagonist of the text, Giorgi the Hagiorite, *hegoumenos* of Iviron, achieved fame as a learned ecclesiastic and great translator who continued Eptvime’s legacy. Giorgi was a child when he migrated to Constantinople with the family of the prominent aristocrat, Peris ჯოჴიკ‘ის-ჴე. After Peris was

⁷³ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 139.

⁷⁴ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 41; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 111; 124: და ვითარცა მეათცამეტემან მოციქულმან ქუეყანაი ჩუენი ამათ ზემოხსენებულთა ღუარძლთაგან სრულიად გაწმინდა მრავლად თარგმანებითა წმიდათა წერილთაითაი, ვითარცა დასაბამსავე სიტყვსა ჩუენისასა ვთქუეათ, და წესნი და კანონნი ეკლესიისანი დამამტკიცებელნი სარწმუნოებისა ჩუენისანი. ესე ყოველნი აღწერილად დაგვტევნა, რომელნი-იგი წმიდისა ამის მთისაგან და ღმრთივ-აღმენებულისა ლავრისა ვითარცა მდინარისაგან ედემეანისა ნაკადულნი ცხორებისანი პირსა ზედა ქუეყანისა და ნათესავისა ჩუენისასა მიეფინნეს.

⁷⁶ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 108; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 101.

executed by the order of Basileios II because he participated in Nikephoros Phokas' and Nikephoros Xiphias' rebellion in 1021,⁷⁷ Peris' wife and his entire household were sent to the imperial capital as hostages at emperor's request: "King Basil accused Peris of treason and out of rage beheaded him. By the order of the king, this worthy lady with her household was banished to Constantinople, where they remained for the twelve years."⁷⁸ During those twelve years in Constantinople, Giorgi mastered Greek and received an excellent education.

During their stay in Constantinople, by the efforts of the uncle of the admirable child, and even more so by the efforts of the worthy lady, young *George was handed over for education to the school of philosophers and rhetoricians* embellished by both lives, not laymen but God-fearing monks acknowledged by all. Thus, *in the twelve years Giorgi showed great motivation and diligence in learning, which was successfully supported by the sharpness of his mind and his previous learning experience* [my emphasis].⁷⁹

Giorgi's biographer states that after he completed his studies, Giorgi became well-versed in theology and philosophy.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, his vita does not specify where and what kind of education he received, but since he was hostage at the imperial court from 1022 to 1034, he probably received an education similar to that of Eptvime the Athonite. Without doubt, long-term residence in the imperial capital turned out to be crucial for Giorgi; Byzantine education allowed him to become a prolific translator and man of literature.

After twelve years of living in Constantinople, Giorgi went back to Georgia, where he was consecrated as a monk. But after some time he moved to the monastery of Kalipos on the Black Mountain and started his monastic and intellectual career under the supervision of Giorgi the

⁷⁷ On the rebellion of Phokas and Xiphias, see C. Holmes, *Basil II and Governance of Empire, 976–1025* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 515-25; A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A. D to the First Crusade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 132-34.

⁷⁸ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 119; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 107; ხოლო ამისა შემდგომად რისხვით ბასილი მეფისაითა ფერისს თავი წარეკუეთა, რამეთუ განდგომილებადი დასწამეს. და ესრეთ ბრძანებითა სამეფოითა ესე ღირსი დედაკაცი ერთურთ თვისით კონსტანტინოპოლედ წარიყვანეს, ვინაი-იგი დაყვეს ათორმეტი წელი.

⁷⁹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 118; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 107: ხოლო მათსა მას მუნ ყოფასა მამის-მამან ამის საკვრველისა ყრმისამან და, უფროს-და ვთქუა თუ, საღმრთომან მან დედაკაცმან სასწავლოდ მისცეს ყრმაი იგი გიორგი კაცთა ფილოსოფოსთა და რიტორთა, ორითავე ცხორებითა შემკობლითა, არა ერისკაცთა, არამედ მონაზონთა ღმრთის-მოშიშთა ყოველთა მიერ წამებულთა. და ესრეთ ათორმეტსა მას წელსა ყოველივე მოსწრაფებაი და გულს-მოდგინებაი ერთბამად შემოიკრიბა, ვიდრე-და მახვლთა გონებითა და მრავალ ჟამ გამოცდილთა მოსწრაფებითა წარემატა;

⁸⁰ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 117-18, and 178-79; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 107, and 144-45.

Recluse, who commanded him to “receive the divine gift of translation from Greek into Georgian.”⁸¹ Because of his exemplary translating skills, after several years Giorgi the Recluse sent Giorgi to Mount Athos to continue his career at the monastery of Iviron, which was experiencing difficulties. At Iviron, Giorgi earned the authority of an erudite monk. He translated a large body of texts and completed works which Eptvime had left behind unfinished. His biographer characterizes him as a worthy heir of Eptvime and continuer of his legacy.

This holy monk...began translation of the holy books under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we all know, apart from Eptvime, there has never been such a translator in our language, nor I think will there be one in the future. Giorgi made most of the translation at night...He did not give a spare moment to himself but was occupied with the sweetness of honey of the holy books by which he sweetened our language and adorned our churches. By his golden writings, he has lavishly and enormously enriched our language...

He has revealed the radiance of some of the books that had never been translated into our language by bringing them to light out of the depth of ignorance; and he has purified and melted by his holy reasoning some others that had been translated but not so well or have been venomously distorted in the course of time by various ignorant or incompetent users ...

It is fitting to mention the title of the books the blessed translated, so that the faithful Christian may hear the activity of *this holy man who translated not only on the Holy Mountain and Black Mountain...but also in the imperial city...Some of the books have been copied two or three times; it difficult to even imagine that one man during his lifetime could copy so many books...let alone that this astonishing man made a full translation from Greek in a lofty and God-radiant way [my emphasis].*⁸²

Although it is far from easy to ascertain the number of books/manuscripts Giorgi and his team translated, his biographer provides an impressive list of the works which Giorgi made available in Georgian. Among his translations are the synaxarion of Constantinople (commissioned in the tenth

⁸¹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 122; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 110.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 145-7; 124-5: და ყოვლისა ზრუნვისაგან თავისუფალმა იწყო თარგმანებად წმიდათა წიგნთა, ვითარცა სული წმიდაი მოსცემდა. რამეთუ ესე ყოველთა უწყით, ვითარმედ ეგევითარი თარგმანი თვინიერ წმიდისა მამისა ჩუენისა ევთვემესსა სხუაი არა გამოჩენილა ენასა ჩუენსა და, ვჰგონებ თუ, არცა გამოჩინებად არს. და უფროისნი წიგნი და მით უთარგმნიან და ესრეთ შეუსუენებლად თარგმნიან და კანონსა თვსა და ზბრკოლებელად აღასრულებენ. და რაითურთით არა სცემდა განსუენებასა თავსა თვსა, არამედ დღე და ღამე ტკბილსა მას თავლსა წიგნთა საღმრთოსათა შურებოდა, რომელთა მიერ დაატკბო ენაი ჩუენი და წმიდანი ეკლესიანი განაშუენნა, და წერილთა თვსთა ოქროთა განამდიდრნა უხუად და გარდარეულად... რამეთუ რომელნიმე წიგნი სრულიად არაყოფილნი და ენისა ჩუენისაგან უცხონი სიღრმეთაგან უმეცრებისათა ნათლად გამოაბრწყინვნა, ხოლო სხუანი ოდესმე თარგმნილნი და წუთ ვერ კეთილად გამოლებულნი გინა თუ ჟამთა სიგრძითა უცებთა და უგუნურთა მხმარებელთაგან დაგესლებულნი, ვითარცა ვთქუთ, ბრძმედსა მას შინა წმიდისა მის გონებისა თვსისასა გამოადვნა და გამოახურვნა.

century by emperor Konstantinos VII), the Menaion for the entire year, the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council and works of Theodore the Studite.⁸³ From Mci're's point of view, Giorgi's intellectual enterprise not only enlightened Georgians, but his precise translations eradicated doctrinal/canonical errors in the Georgian Church and thus purified the faith in the Georgian lands. Although this statement may sound exaggerated, it demonstrates that Giorgi's works were widely disseminated in the Georgian kingdom and enhanced a further orientation of Georgian Church towards Byzantium. The Athonite fathers' activities further brought Georgia into the Byzantine cultural orbit.

During his ecclesiastical career, Giorgi visited Constantinople on multiple occasions where he used the libraries to translate rare manuscripts and books.⁸⁴ Giorgi also made a journey to the Georgian kingdom and spent five years (1060s) at the court of king Bagrat IV (r.1027–1072). He brought from Iviron translated books which circulated widely and were copied extensively in “many dioceses and in monasteries.”⁸⁵ Based on the information provided by the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite*, we can say that a learned man like Giorgi could have a significant impact on the intellectual landscape of Georgia. His visit enhanced manuscript circulation and translating activities in the Georgian kingdom.

In Georgia, Giorgi took under his patronage 80 poor and orphan boys and took them with him when he left for Byzantium. His primary goal was to provide these children with a good education.

There were many reasons for collecting these orphans... first of all, because of his mercy similar to divine in the time of hardship, as we have mentioned above; secondly, because of the work he had undertaken, for he had translated many books and desired that our people should study. As it was difficult to educate the aged and adult, he therefore collected such a group of people... who accepted teaching just as wax is imprinted by a mould... therefore he was not disappointed in his expectations.⁸⁶

⁸³ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 147; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 125.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* About the libraries of Constantinople see K. Ciggaar, *Western Travelers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium*, 74; R. Browning, “Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.” *Past & Present*, N. 69 (1975), 4.

⁸⁵ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 173; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 141.

⁸⁶ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 172; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 140: რამეთუ იყო მრავალი მიზეზი შეკრებასა ამათსა შინა, ... პირველად ყოვლისა, ღმრთისა მიმსგავსებული მოწყალებაი, ვითარცა ზემო ვთქუთ, ჟამისა მისთვის განსაცდელისა, ხოლო მეორედ, ვინაითგან შრომაი, თავს-ედვა და მრავალნი წიგნნი ეთარგმნეს და ენება, რაითამცა ნათესავმან ჩუენმან დაისწავა. ხოლო ვინაითგან შეუძლებელ იყო ჰასაკითა სრულთა და განსწავლულთა განსწავლაი, ამისთვისცა ბუნებაი იგი

These children would have had better opportunities to receive education and widen their horizons in the imperial capital and other monastic centers of Byzantium than in Georgia. Their fate was so central to Giorgi that when he arrived in Constantinople, he secured a meeting with emperor Konstantinos X Doukas and asked him to be a patron to these children.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, there is no further information about these orphans. The majority of them were probably educated and continued their lives in the Byzantine empire. They either joined Georgian monastic communities in Byzantium or pursued secular careers in the army or civil administration. Maybe some of them returned to Georgia after studying in Constantinople and improved the intellectual landscape at home. For instance, it is believed that that Arsen of Iq'alto – the twelfth-century Byzantine-educated theologian and translator – was among the orphans that Giorgi took to Constantinople.⁸⁸

If we believe the *LGH*, during his stay in Georgia Giorgi became a tutor to prince Giorgi Bagratid (the future Giorgi II).⁸⁹ However, the text does not elaborate on how long and exactly what Iviron monk taught the young prince. It is fascinating that the heir to the Georgian throne received intellectual guidance from a literatus monk who had a profound Byzantine education, as well as knowledge about Byzantine imperial court life. Giorgi the Hagiorite not only spent twelve years of his childhood at the court but visited the imperial palace on many occasions in his capacity as the Iviron *hegoumenos*. Giorgi probably shared his life experience at court with prince Giorgi and gave him insight into Byzantine court politics and governmental machinery. Prince Giorgi may also have learned about Byzantine court culture from his father, king Bagrat IV, who spent six years in total in Constantinople. Three years Bagrat was a hostage at the court of Basileios II in his minority (1022-25), and three years he was an honorable captive (1051-54) at the court of Konstantinos IX Monomachos.

ლბილი ჩვილი, რომელი, ვითარცა ცვლი საბეჭდავსა, ეგრეთ მიიღებს სწავლულეებასა... რომლისგან არა განგრუნა სასოებაი მისი.

⁸⁷ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 182-3; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 146-7.

⁸⁸ [I. Lolashvili] ი.ლოლაშვილი. არსენ იყალთოელი: ცხოვრება და მოღვაწეობა [Arsen of Iq'alto: Life and Deeds] (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1978), 43.

⁸⁹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 161; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 134.

Georgian Monastic Centers on Black Mountain

The core of the Byzantine empire, Athos, Olympus, and Constantinople was not the only place where Kartvelian monastic communities emerged. The distant periphery of Byzantium, namely Black Mountain, became a place of attraction equal to Athos from the second quarter of the eleventh century. After the Byzantine empire restored imperial control over Antioch and Northern Syria, monasticism flourished in these territories. Sometime during the 1030s, Georgian monks from Tao and Klarjeti migrated to Antioch and its adjacent lands in large numbers. The main reason for this was the Byzantine-Georgian wars, which devastated Tao and parts of Klarjeti.

Giorgi the Recluse is one of the prominent monks from Black Mountain who laid the foundation for the Antiochian school of translation.⁹⁰ He supervised many talented translators, including Giorgi the Hagiorite. Giorgi the Hagiorite made his first translations on Black Mountain and later, by the order of Giorgi the Recluse, went to Iviron to translate works which Eptvime left unfinished. The Georgian monastic communities scattered all over the Byzantine empire were not isolated from each other but had close connections. Kartvelian monks often travelled between Athos and Black Mountain and exchanged manuscripts. Several examples are known when a manuscript composed on Athos was sent to Black Mountain and vice versa. For instance, Giorgi the Recluse took good care to enlarge the library of Iviron monastery and sent manuscripts to his peers on Athos. One of the Athos manuscripts (Ath. N84) contains Giorgi the Recluse's colophon which proves that Black Mountain monks were aware of the holdings of the Iviron library. In the colophon Giorgi says: "I, poor monk Giorgi, have learned that the Holy Mountain did not have a *Life of Saint and Blessed Martha* and *Life of Saint Barlaam*, therefore I decided to translate these works and donate them."⁹¹

As a consequence of the long-term contact with the Byzantine world, a new literary trend in Georgian literature developed in Antioch known as "hellenophilism."⁹² Hellenization of the Georgian language is associated with Ephrem Mci're [Minor] who produced a great number of manuscripts at the monastery of Kalipos and thus earned a reputation as a great translator and

⁹⁰ Menabde, *The Georgian Literary Centers*, 152

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹² K. Bezerashvili, "Hellenophilism in Georgian literature as Cultural Orientation towards Byzantine Thought: Ephrem Mtsire's cultural Orientation," *Scripta & e-Scripta* 14-15 (2015), 338.

theologian.⁹³ The translation of 130 Byzantine texts into Georgian, including works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is ascribed to his name.⁹⁴ Ephrem Mci're came up with his own translating philosophy. When Georgian monks in Antioch felt threatened by the Greek monks and the patriarch of Antioch questioned their orthodoxy, Mci're proposed to translate Georgian texts as close to the Greek originals as possible. In this way, Georgian Christian texts would be clean of theological errors and discrepancies. Ephrem earned such fame that he was posthumously commemorated in the Synodikon of the Ruis-Urbnisi Church council convoked by king Davit IV in 1105.⁹⁵

The growth of the Georgian world's acquaintance with Byzantine culture is closely linked to the flowering of literary activities in Georgian monasteries and monastic communities that emerged in the Byzantine empire in the ninth and the tenth centuries. The Georgian monasteries maintained close connections with the Georgian lands and translated Greek texts and manuscripts widely circulated through various channels in Georgian kingdoms and princedoms, which further oriented the Georgian Church to the Byzantine Church. Although in the first quarter of the eleventh century Georgian monastic community of Black Mountain rose in prominence and became active in producing manuscripts, in the Georgian imagination the Monastery of Iviron retained the authority of a center of knowledge. For Giorgi Mci're, Iviron was the place “where the light of the knowledge of divinely spiritual books had shone through our holy father Euthymios and then through this blessed father George...”⁹⁶

1.3 “Radiant Among the Rulers” and a “Holy King:” The Image and Authority of the Byzantine basileus in the Georgian World

For medieval Georgian society, Constantinople was not only a sacred and holy city but a place where the basileus resided. The Byzantine imperial court functioned as the source of religious-political legitimacy and attracted members of the Caucasian secular and ecclesiastical elite. For some Kartvelians, close ties with the imperial court and affiliation with an emperor were

⁹³ On Georgian monastic community on Black Mountain see D. Tvaltvadze, “Some aspects of Georgian-Byzantine cultural relations according to the colophons of Georgian scholars in Antioch” *Pro Georgia, Journal of Kartvelian Studies*, N2-(2010): 45-57.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

⁹⁵ [E. Gabidzashvili] ე. გაბიძაშვილი, რუის-ურბნისის კრების ძეგლისწერა (The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council) (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1978), 196.

⁹⁶ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 174-5; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 142.

vital for political survival and social advancement. A person from the Caucasus with political ambitions could travel to Constantinople and secure support from the emperor and his entourage. After receiving the necessary political/military and financial support, he could then move back home, and rise among peer aristocrats due to increased prestige and strengthened legitimacy.

The Byzantine emperor's authority grew in the eyes of the Kartvelian lay elite from the end of the seventh century. Even though Kartli was under Arab control from 654, the civil war in the caliphate allowed the Byzantine imperial court to re-establish its influence temporarily in Kartli. Consequently, Kartvelian presiding princes became clients of the Byzantine emperors. The shift in the balance of power and the emperor's resuscitated authority in Kartli/Iberia is reflected in several inscriptions made between the end of the seventh century and the first years of the eighth.

Constans II (r.641–668) is the first Byzantine emperor whose name appears in two dedicatory inscriptions in Kartli. The first inscription, made on the wall of Žvari church [Holy Cross] of Sameverisi tells the following story: “Christ, in the twentieth year of king Konstantine, I Domninos, *mamasaxlisi* of this church built this channel...”⁹⁷ The second inscription was made on the wall of the church of Sioni in Samšvilde by the order of prince Varaz-Bakuri. The text dates the beginning of the church building to the twentieth year of emperor Constans II's reign.⁹⁸ In 705-707, by the order of Varaz-Bakur, another inscription was made on the church of Abastumani that dates the construction of the church according to the regnal years of emperor Justinian II: “With the aid of Christ, when king Justinian reigned, I was promoted by Aršuša *patrikios* and *eristavi* of the Kartvelians, and I have erected this cross...”⁹⁹

After Justinian II's execution, the new emperor, Philippikos Bardanes (r.711–713), ordered the execution of Varaz-Bakur and appointed Stephanos III as the new prince (*erismtavari*) of Kartli. In order to further buttress Stephanos III's legitimacy as the new ruler of Kartli, his ties and affiliation with the Byzantine emperor were brought to the fore in an Ateni Sioni church inscription. The text relates: “Christ, I Ioane have written this. Kaisar Vardan gave the scepter to

⁹⁷ [Lapidary Inscriptions 1] ლაპიდარული წარწერები, ed., N. Shoshiashvili (Tbilisi:1980), 223; V. Goiladze, “The Reflection of the Byzantine Oriental Policy in the Georgian Sources”, in *Byzantium in Georgian Sources*, eds., N. Makharadze and N. Lomouri (Tbilisi: Logosi, 2010), 394-405.

⁹⁸ *Lapidary Inscriptions*, 103.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

god-like Stephanos, son of Nerse, who was crowned, ... and his promotion was recognized as legitimate.”¹⁰⁰

The inscriptions carved on the outside walls of churches pinpoint that the princely house of Iberia/Kartli rendered respect and put great trust in the emperor in the wake of Arab rule in the Caucasus. In all the epigraphic texts noted above the Byzantine emperor is referred to as a “king” with only one exception when the epithet of “kaisar” is applied to the basileus. In Georgian literary and epigraphic texts it was common to call the emperor a king (*mepe*). This epithet by no means diminished the authority of the Byzantine emperor. King (*mepe*) was the literal translation of a Greek imperial title – basileus; kaisar (*keisari*) was another title used in Old Georgian texts to address the Byzantine emperor.

After the Kartvelian political center moved from eastern Georgia to the southern-western regions of Tao-Klarjeti, these lands became more connected to the Byzantine world. The rulers of Tao-Klarjeti knitted strong ties with the imperial court and positioned themselves as the emperor’s allies. Due to these circumstances the names of Byzantine emperors appear often in Georgian epigraphic texts. Moreover, significant political and military events that affected the stability of Byzantium echoed on the non-Greek periphery of the empire. In this light, the inscription on the chapel of Zarzma church is of a particular value.

In the name of God and with the help of the holy Theotokos, I, Ioane, son of Sula, built this holy chapel. During this time Skleros rebelled in Greece, and Davit *kouropalatēs* – God glorify him – came to the holy kings’ aid [i.e., Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII], and he sent all of us with the army, and we put Skleros to flight in the country called Xarsanani, and the place called Sarvenisni.¹⁰¹

This inscription is interesting for several reasons. First, the *ktetor* of the chapel dates the completion of the edifice by the Skleros’ rebellion. As it turns out, Ioane, an aristocrat from Tao-

¹⁰⁰ [G. Abramishvili] გ. აბრამიშვილი. ატენის სიონის სამი გრაფიტი (Three Graffiti of Sioni at Ateni) (“Mnatobi” 1984 N9), 164; “ქ. ესე მე დ(ა)ვწერე იოანემან. ვარდან კაისარ მისცა [გვირგვნი და სტეფანოზ] ნე(რ)სესა მე, დარი ღმრთისაი, შერაცხეს და ვარაზ მ.... [სტეფან]ოზ მამფალსა და წადმართ(ცა) [ცნეს დამყარებაი მისი ...]”

¹⁰¹ *Lapidary Inscriptions I*, 278-82; სახელითა ღმრთისაითა და წმიდისა ღმრთისმშობელისა მეოხებითა მე, ივანე, ძემან სულაისმან აღვაშენე წმიდაი ეგუტერი. მას ჟამსა, ოდეს საბერძნეთს, გადგა სკლიაროსი, დავით კურაპალატი ადიდე ღმერთმან: უშუელა წმიდათა მეფეთა და ჩუენ ყოველი ლაშქარს წარგვავლინა. სკლიაროსი გავაქციეთ, მე მას ქუეყანასა, რომელსა ჰქუიან ხარსანანი, ადგილსა რომელსა ჰქუიან სარვენისნი.

Klarjeti, participated in the battle of Charsianon in 979 and was among the 12 000 soldiers whom Davit *kouropalatēs* sent to the Byzantine emperor to defeat Skleros' army. Second, scrutinizing this inscription further shows a vital detail that has escaped scholarly attention. In this inscription, Davit of Tao is praised for sending military aid to the Byzantine emperors and is referred to only as *kouropalatēs*. His royal epithet of *mepe* (king), which he is called in other contemporary sources, is omitted. In contrast, the Byzantine emperors, Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII are described with the grand title of “holy kings.” Thus, it is reasonable to assume that a distinct political vocabulary in the Zarzma inscription was used deliberately to maintain the hierarchy between the Byzantine emperor and the ruler of Tao.

Barda Skleros' revolt and the subsequent turmoil that ensued in the empire is reflected in another Georgian source, a manuscript colophon from Mount Olympus. The Georgian monastic community at Olympus describes in dark colors the chaos the civil war created in the empire:

This was written in Greece, on the holy mountain of Ulumbo [i.e., Olympus] in the Lavra of Krania during the kingship of Basil and Konstantine ... and during the rebellion of Barda Skleros, a time of a great trouble in Greece, when the poor were devastated, and youth rose up against one another and slaughtered each other with swords, and brother against brother and son against father...¹⁰²

The Byzantine emperors used various methods to build up their authority in the Christian Caucasus, including patronage of churches and monasteries, and the dedicatory inscription from Oški cathedral confirms this. The inscription tells the following story: “Christ, Holy Trinity, glorify those crowned by you kings Basil and Konstantine [Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII], they completed the building by making a roof again of this divine church ...”¹⁰³ It seems that Oški cathedral was completed because of Basileios' and Konstantinos' financial support. The imperial court's patronage in Georgia was not confined only to the Oški cathedral, however, and was large in scope. The charter of *katholikos* Melqisedek I – one of the most influential medieval Georgian patriarchs – confirms that emperors Romanos II, Basileios II, and Konstantinos VIII granted huge

¹⁰² Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 123: “დაიწერა საბერძნეთს: მთასა წა ოლიმპოს: საყოფელსა წ-სა ღ-თის მშობელისასა: ლავრასა შინა სახელით კრანიას: მეფობასა|ბასილისსა: და კონსტანტინესსა:| პატრიაქობასა: ანტონისსა: და |ფიცხლად: განდგომილებასა: ვარდა: სკლეროსისა: ჭირსა|დიდსა საბერძნეთისასა: ოხრებასა გლახაკთასა და აწყუედასა: ჭაბუკთასა: უწყალოდ: ერთიერთას: მახვილთა: მმაი მმასა ზედა: და მამაი შვილსა ზედა: ესე ყოველი იქმნებოდა...”

¹⁰³ *Lapidary inscriptions 1*, 51: “ქ. სამებაო წმიდაო, ადიდენ შენ მიერ გვირგვინოსანნი| მეფენი ბასილი და კოსტანტი, რომელთა მიერ განსრულებულ იქმნა, მეორედ დაბურვითა ტაძარი ესე.”

sums of money, a monastery on Mount Athos with 150 villages, and valuable gifts that enabled Melqisedek to finish Sveticxoveli, one of the biggest cathedrals erected in medieval Georgia.¹⁰⁴

Probably because of Basileios' generous patronage of Georgian monasteries and monastic communities he is commemorated with a laudatory epithet in the inscription that was carved on Oški cathedral wall after his death (1025). The text goes as follows: “In the month of December, on Sunday, *qornoikon* 245, the autocratic and holy/saintly Basil, king of the Greeks passed away. Let God establish his soul among the souls of holy kings [i.e., Byzantine emperors].”¹⁰⁵ As in the Zarzma inscription, Basileios is extolled as a “holy king.” Although this inscription was made soon after Byzantine-Georgian war, certain circles in medieval Georgia still expressed their respect to the Byzantine emperor.

Apart from the epigraphic inscriptions and a charter, Georgian hagiographical narratives open up a new path for studying the Byzantine emperors' image and the authority they enjoyed among Kartvelian ecclesiastics. An anonymus author's *Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti* (henceforth *LMK*) is the first narrative that will come under scrutiny here. This short hagiographical text narrates the martyrdom of K'onstanti, an aristocrat by birth, at the hands of the Arabs in the ninth century.¹⁰⁶ Before Konstanti was executed, as an exemplary saintly figure he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and visited other holy places in Palestine.¹⁰⁷ At that time the narrative was composed, Jerusalem and Palestine were perceived as the only holy/sacred place worthy of pilgrimage. The Kartvelian perspective on the sacred topography of Christendom soon changed, however, and from the end of the ninth century Constantinople became a place as equally sacred and holy as Jerusalem.

The Byzantine rulers, empress Theodora (r. 845–855) and emperor Michael III (r. 856–67), are mentioned several times in the *Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti*. The author introduces the Byzantine emperor and empress in the very first line of his work. He starts the introduction with: “I will narrate the life and martyrdom of holy and blessed Konstanti which happened during

¹⁰⁴ [Corpus of the Eleventh- and Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents] ქართული ისტორიული საბუთების კორპუსი, eds., N. Shoshiashvili and V. Silogava (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1984), 23-26; [V. Goiladze] ვ. გოილაძე, ათასწლოვანი სვეტიცხოველი: ნარკვევები [One thousand years Old Sveticxoveli: Studies] (Tbilisi, 2011), 119-21.

¹⁰⁵ *Lapidary inscriptions*, 52; “[მთი]ცვალა თვთმპყრობელი წ[მიდაი] მეფეც ბ(ერ)მ(ე)ნთ(ა)ი ბ(ა)ს(ი)ლი ქ(ო)ნ(ი)კ(ო)ნსა სმე, [თთ(უ)ესა] დ(ე)კ(ემ)ბ(ე)რსა იბ, დლ(ე)სა] კ(ვ)რ(ია)კ(ე)სა. ღ(მერ)თმან ს(უ)ლი მისი წ(მიდა)თა მეფ(ე)თა თ(ა)ნა დ(ა)წ(ე)სოს.”

¹⁰⁶ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 164-73.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

the reign of the God-serving queen, Theodora, who ruled in the kingdom of Greece while her son, Michael, was a minor.”¹⁰⁸ The hagiographical narrative demonstrates deep respect for empress Theodora and stresses her role in the restoration of icon veneration and “eradication of wrong beliefs all over Greece.”¹⁰⁹ The names of Theodora and Michael are not only brought into the narrative to define the exact period of K‘onstanti’s death: they play an essential role in recognizing his heroism and devotion to Christianity. Upon learning about K‘onstanti’s martyrdom, the “holy kings” (Theodora and Michael) write a consolatory letter to his family members. In the letter Theodora and Michael extoll K‘onstanti’s suffering for Christ and promise his family protection and patronage.

The hagiographical text was probably composed soon after K‘onstanti’s death and it served to glorify the martyrdom of a prominent aristocrat executed by the Muslims and possibly also to support his cult. The anonymous author utilized an interesting literary strategy to promote the image of K‘onstanti posthumously. He introduces Theodora and Michael in the text as the ultimate sources of authority and thus legitimizes K‘onstanti as an internationally recognizable saint and martyr. It is striking that K‘onstanti’s recognition as a saint comes from the empress and emperor rather than from the patriarch of Constantinople. Thus, by the ninth century, the Byzantine empress Theodora enjoyed significant prestige in the ecclesiastical circles of Kartli.

The *Life of Ilarion*, already discussed above, is fascinating Georgian literary narrative when it comes to portraying the elevated image of an emperor, namely, Basileios I (r. 867–76). Furthermore, like *LMK*, essential events in the *LI* are dated according to the regnal years of the Byzantine emperors. For instance, Ilarion’s arrival in Constantinople is given according to the ruling years of Michael III (r.842–867): “with the divine will he traveled to royal city of Constantinople during the time of the pious king Michael, who received the kingship from his father, Theophilos. Michael, with his mother Theodora, affirmed the veneration of holy icons.”¹¹⁰ The author of *LI* applies the same strategy when he gives the date of his protagonist’s death:

And our father [i.e., Ilarion] passed away in the month of November, ... on the fifth day of the rule of Basil Macedonian [i.e., Basileios I], who received the kingship

¹⁰⁸*Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 165.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰*Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 19: და ნებითა ღმრთისაითა წარემართა სამეუფოდ ქალაქად კონსტანტინოპოლედ ჟამთა მიხაელ მორწმუნისა მეფისათა, რომელმან დაიპყრა მეფობაი შემდგომად მამისა თვისისა თეოფილესა და დაამტკიცა თაყუანის-ცემადი პატროსანთა ხატთაი დედისა თვისისა თანა თეოდორისა.

after Michael. Also, this Michael was the one who restored the veneration of icons. He was also called/known as ‘the drunkard.’¹¹¹

In this narrative, the Byzantine emperor plays an essential role; he establishes a cult of Ilarion, patronizes his disciples and helps them establish the Georgian monastery of Romana.¹¹² According to the *Life of Ilarion*, when emperor Basileios learned that Ilarion’s bodily remains had acquired healing power and his grave become a place of pilgrimage in Thessaloniki, he summoned the monks from Mount Olympus to the imperial palace.¹¹³

And then the king spoke to the them about the deeds and miracles of Ilarion and about the information which he received about this matter from the bishop of Thessaloniki and prefect of the city. And when the *hegoumen* of Olympus heard this story, for he was the first person to give shelter to Ilarion on the mountain..., he immediately started telling the king about Ilarion’s miracles which he performed in the monastery... And afterwards king asked him: “are there any of his disciples alive?” and *hegoumenos* answered: “yes holy king, three of his disciples, in old age, are alive.” Upon learning this, the god-serving king gave an order to bring Ilarion’s disciples by the *dromon* to the imperial palace...
*And when the king saw their angelic faces, he became very happy ... and the king bagged them to bless him and his kingdom, and these holy men raised their hands to the sky and blessed him and his kingdom [my emphasis].*¹¹⁴

Basileios offered the Georgian monks any monastery in Constantinople, but they refused on the grounds that it would be inappropriate for them to take a monastery already inhabited by others. Instead, they requested a new monastery outside of Constantinople. The emperor fulfilled their wish and in seven months the monastery of Romana was established.

¹¹¹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 29: ხოლო აღესრულა მამაი ჩუენი წმიდაი ილარიონ თუესა ნოემბერსა ი-თ-სა, დღესა შაბათსა, ჟამსა მეხუთესა დღისასა, მეფობასა ბასილი მაკიდონელისასა, რომელმან-იგი შემდგომად მიქაელისსა მიიღო მეფობაი.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 30-32.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹⁴ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 30-31: მაშინ მეფემან იწყო თხრობად მათდა საქმეთა და სასწაულთა ამის წმიდისათა და ვითარ-იგი მიეწერა მისდა თესალონიკით მთავარსა ქალაქისასა და მთავარეპისკოპოსსა. ხოლო ვითარცა ესმა ესე მამასახლისსა მას ულომბელსა, რომელმან-იგი პირველად შეიწყნარა წმიდაი ილარიონ ... მეყსეულად იწყო თხრობად მეფისა საქმეთა წმიდისა ილარიონისათა და საკვირველებათა მისთა, რომელნი ექმნეს მონასტერსა მისსა...ხოლო მეფეც ჰკითხვიდა, თუ: ‘არიანდა ვინ მოწაფეთა მისთაგანნი მთასა მას.’ და მან მიუგო: ‘ჰე, წმიდაო მეფეო, არიან სამნი მოხუცებულნი მოწაფეთა მისთაგანნი, ღირსნი და სთონნი ღმრთისანი.’ მაშინ ღმრთის-მსახურმან მეფემან ბრძანა სწრაფითა დიდითა მიყვანება მოწაფეთა მისთაი დრომინითა სამეუფოითა პალატად პატივთა დიდითა შემსგავსებულად ღირსებისა მათისა...და ვითარცა შევიდეს იგინი, განიხარა მეფემან სიხარულითა დიდითა ... და ევედრებოდა მეფეც ლოცვისა ყოფად მისთვის და ყოვლისა სამეუფოისა მისისა, ხოლო ნეტართა მათ ხელითა აპყრობილითა ულოცეს მეფესა ყოვლისა თანა სამეუფოისა მისისა.

And the king came with the patriarch ... and placed the relics of the Apostles in the monastery and he donated precious dishes in gold and silver, and villages and forests with other means necessary for the monastery... and *the king created a small cell for himself and in it he placed a bed and book shelf with books –gospels and Paul [Paul’s letters?] –and he said, “let this be my place so that I am close to men of God, through whose prayers God will have mercy on my sinful soul [my emphasis].*¹¹⁵

The emperor became so attached to and impressed by these three Georgian monks that he brought his two sons, Leon and Alexander to them and said: “Holy Father, please pray for them and teach them books and your language [Georgian] and let them always be the subject of your prayers.”¹¹⁶ To further demonstrate his respect to Ilarion’s disciples, Basileios initiated the transfer of Ilarion’s relics from Thessaloniki to Constantinople.

And when the saint’s parts reached the God-protected royal city, the God-serving and the pious king learned this, and he ordered the patriarch, bishops, priests, deacons, court officials, and the citizens to go out in the streets of the city and meet the saint’s relics. And the king with the patriarch and citizens walked until the sea, chanting and praying, holding the candles in their hands. And they carried his remains to the palace. The king moved the saint’s body to the chapel of his bedchamber, and he was considering building a corner for the saint’s relics.¹¹⁷

But at night Ilarion appeared in Basileios’ dream and demanded the transfer of his body parts from the imperial bedchamber to the outskirts of the city.¹¹⁸ The next day Basileios fulfilled Ilarion’s wish and personally participated in transfer of his relics from the imperial palace to the outskirts of Constantinople, close to the Romana monastery.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33: და მივიდა მეფეც პატრიარქისა თანა და ყო სატფურებაი და დასხნა ნაწილნი წმიდათა მოციქულთანი ... შეწირა მეფემან ჭურჭელი ოქროისა და ვეცხლისაი, და სოფელნი და ქულბაგნი და მეტოქი ქაქსა შიანა. და მისცნა ტყენი, რომელნი იყვნეს გარემოს ადგილსა მას. და მისცა ყოველივე სახმარი, ვითარცა შეჰგავს მონასტრისათვის უხუებით. და შექმნა მეფემან მცირეც სენაკი თავისა თვისისათვის და დადგა მას შინა ლოგინი თავისა საგებლითურთ, და დადგნა საწიგნენი და დასხნა წიგნნი, სახარებაი და პავლეც, და თქუეა ესრეთ. ვითარმედ: ‘ესე იყოს საყოფელი ჩემი მახლობლად ღირსთა ამათ მამათა, რაითა ლოცვითა მათითა ინებოს ღმერთან ხსნაი ჩემი მოსაგებელისაგან ცოდვათა ჩემთაისა.’

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 34: ხოლო ვითარცა მიიწინეს ღმრთივ-დაცვულსა მას სამეუფოსა ქალაქსა ნაწილნი იგი წმიდისანი, ეუწყა ესე ღმრთის-მსახურსა და მორწმუნესა მეფესა. მაშინ უბრძანა პატრიარქსა აპისკოპოსთა თანადა და მრვდელთა და დიაკონთა და ყოველთავე მთარვართა და ერსა ქალაქისასა, რაითა ყოველნივე ერთბამად გამოვიდნენ მიგებებად წმიდისა მის. და განვიდა მეფეც პატრიარქისა თანა და ყოველისა ერისა, ვიდრე ზღვის-პირამდე გალობით და ლიტანიითა, სიმრავლითა სანთელთაითა და საკმეველთა სულნელებითა, და წარიყვანეს იგი პალატად სამეუფოდ. და დაუსვენა იგი მეფემან ეკუტერსა შინა პალატისა თვისისასა, და განიზრახვიდა გონებასა თვისსა, თუ რომელსა ადგილსა აღუსენოს სანაწილეც წმიდასა მას.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

Although the friendship between emperor and monk was a popular *topos* in hagiography, the *Life of Ilarion* is the only Georgian narrative that portrays this elevated and monk-loving image of the Byzantine emperor. Basileios is one of the main protagonists of the text, playing a central role in the foundation of the Georgian monastery of Romana. In addition, he initiates the transfer of Ilarion's bodily remains to the imperial capital and enhances the establishment of Kartvelian monk's cult. One may question the historical authenticity of the events described in the *Life of Ilarion*, but there is no doubt that the imperial court sanctioned and supported the foundation of Romana monastery. The *Life of Ilarion* is the second Georgian hagiographical text after the *Life and Martyrdom of K'onstanti* to use an emperor's authority to enhance the image of a Kartvelian saint.

Georgian ecclesiastics kept demonstrating their respects for the basileus even after the relations between Byzantium and Georgia deteriorated in the eleventh century. A great reverence for the Byzantine emperors is conveyed in hagiographical *vitae*: Giorgi the Hagiorite's *Life of Ioane and Eptvime* and Giorgi Mc'ire's the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite*. Both texts were composed during the period when Georgian-Byzantine relations were far from perfect, but surprisingly, both narratives fail to mention this. Even emperor Basileios II, who fought wars against king Giorgi I and whose army laid waste to southern Georgia, receives favorable treatment in the *Life of Ioane and Eptvime*.¹¹⁹

Basileios is a pious emperor par excellence, he permits the Kartvelians to establish a monastery on Athos and grants them the right to acquire land on the Holy Mountain. Moreover, the emperor donates lands, money, and an island to Iviron so that the monastery has enough resources for survival and economic independence. Furthermore, Basileios and his brother, Konstantinos, demonstrate great respect and reverence for the Kartvelian monks of Athos. When Ioane the Athonite and his fellow monks decided to leave the Mount Athos because of the Greek monks' permanent hostility towards them, it is Basileios who persuaded Ioane and his associates to stay. The story goes that Ioane with his peers arrives in Abydos to find a boat sailing to Spain. There Ioane met his old friend, the governor of Abydos, and tells him of his intention to leave Byzantium. The governor tries to persuade Ioane to stay, but when he fails, he writes a letter to the emperors and informs them about Ioane's decision:

¹¹⁹ On war between Basileios II and king Giorgi I see: Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 322, and 482-3; D. Rayfield, *Edge of the Empires*, 75-6.

And when he wrote, the emperors commanded that father John and the others should be sent to the imperial court.

When they appear at the court, *the kings welcomed them with great honor...* “Holy fathers, we have much love for your holiness, so why is it that you have decided to leave us and go to a foreign land?” Blessed John replied: “*God-serving and autocrat kings*, I was a poor layman in the world, bearer of every sin and I wished to go to a foreign land to save my soul and live a simple life. And how it happened I do not know, that Tornike my kinsman, came to stay with me and hence I found myself immersed in great conflicts and confronted with worldly mutiny; now I wish to rid myself of all of this and take care of myself.”

*The kings respectfully kept the brethren for a long period of time at the court, then by supplication persuaded them to return to their monastery and granted them a generous gift [my emphasis].*¹²⁰

Like other Georgian narratives discussed above, the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite* narrates a monk-loving and positive image of emperors Konstantinos IX Monomachos and Konstantinos X Doukas. The emperors demonstrate their benevolence towards the Georgian monks of Athos and are ready to fulfill their requests.

According to the text, Giorgi the Hagiorite met twice with emperor Konstantinos IX Monomachos.

This blessed one found the courage to go to the imperial city and visited the *God-protected king, Constantine Monomachos*. When father George appeared before him, the king greeted the monk appropriately ... and said to him: “What is it man of God, that made your holiness come to our imperial throne?” The monk replied: “*Rejoice in Christ, radiant among the rulers*, for it is by means of me ... that the Holy Mother of God ... instructs you that in our monastery her church ... should not perish from water leakage because of being badly covered. Let your majesty grant us lead that will protect the holy church, *so that the prayers for your holy*

¹²⁰ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 54-55; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 63: და ვითარცა მიუწერა უბრძანეს მეფეთა, რაითა სამეფოს წარავლინნეს. და ვითარცა აღვიდეს, დიდითა პატივითა მოიკითხნეს იგინი მეფეთა და დიდად პატივითა მოიკითხნეს იგინი მეფეთა და დიდად აბრალეს და ჰრქუეს, ვითარმედ: ‘წმიდანო მამანო, ჩუენ დიდი სიყვარული გუაქუს სიწმიდისა თქუენისაი, და რაი არს ესე, რომელ ესრეთ ივლტით ჩუენგან და უცხოსა ქუეყანასა წარხუალთ?’ მიუგო ნეტრმან იოვანე და ჰრქუა: ‘ღმრთის-მსახურნო და თვითმპყრობელნო მეფენო! გლახაკი ესე ერის-კაცი ვიყავ სოფელსა შინა მყოფი და თანამდები ყოვლისა ბრალისაი და მენება, რაითა უცხოებასა სამე წარვიდე და სული ჩემი ვიცხოვრო და გლახაკებით ვიყოფებოდი. და თუ ვითა მოხდა, არა უწყი; მოვიდა თვისი ჩემუ თორნიკ და მისითა გზითა დიდთა შულლთა შთავვარდი და ერის-კრებასა და მნებას, რაითა ამის ყოვლისაგან თავისუფალ ვიქმნა და სულისა ჩემისა ზრუნვასა შეუდგე.’ მრავლითა ჟამთა დიდითა პატივითა დაიმჭირეს და მერე დიდითა ქნებითა ძალით დაარწმუნეს მინასტრადვე შექცევაი და დიდითა ბოძითა განუტევეს.

majesty may be offered there.” The king happily fulfilled the request, giving away lead from the imperial treasure...¹²¹

The second time, Giorgi traveled to Constantinople in the 1050s. His arrival in the imperial capital coincided with king Bagrat IV’s and his mother, queen Mariam’s, diplomatic mission to the imperial court. With the help of Bagrat IV, Giorgi was granted an audience with emperor Konstantinos IX, who promised his support to Iviron and issued a chrysobull. In this episode, the author of the narrative makes a distinction between the authority of the emperor and the Georgian king. Although at first glance it may seem that both rulers are treated equally, scrutiny of the vocabulary used by the author in relation to the emperor and king demonstrates the contrary. For instance, Giorgi several times addresses Bagrat only as “God-loving ruler,” while Konstantinos IX receives a more elevated epithet: “radiant among rulers.”¹²²

The fact that the author of *LGH* uses different epithets to signify a hierarchy between the emperor and the Georgian king can be supported by another example. In the 1060s, Giorgi the Hagiorite was in Georgia at the court of Bagrat IV and when he decided to leave for Constantinople, Bagrat gave him a royal letter and precious gifts for Konstantinos X Doukas (r.1059–67). After arriving in Constantinople, Giorgi secured an audience with Konstantinos X and handed over Bagrat’s letter and gifts. “And the next day, he [Giorgi] was taken up to the palace. When the monk appeared in front of the king [i.e., Konstantinos] *he venerated and praised him according to the custom*, offering his prayer and blessing for him and his son...”¹²³ The Byzantine emperor expressed his respect to Giorgi and said:

¹²¹ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 134; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 117: ხოლო ამან ნეტარმან კეთილი ღონე მოიპოვა, რამეთუ წარვიდა წინაშე ღმრთის-მსახურისა მეფისა კოსტანტი მონამახისა ქალაქად სამეუფოდ. და ვითარცა შევიდა წინაშე მისსა, ჯეროვანი მოკითხვაი მიაგება ბერსა მეფემან, რამეთუ დიდი სარწმუნოებაი აქუნდა მისსა მიმართ, და ესევიდა წმიდათა ლოცვათა მისთა და ჰრქუა მას, ვითარმედ: ‘რასათვის მოშურა სიწმიდე შენი, კაცო ღმრთისაო, ჩუენისა მომართ ხელმწიფობისა?’. ჰრქუა მას ბერმან: ‘გიხაროდენ ქრისტეს მიერ, ბრწყინვალეო თვითმპყრობელთა შორის. გივრძანებს ჩემ მიერ ... წმიდაო ღმრთის-მშობელი, რაითა მარადის სადიდებელი ტამარი მისი არ განირყუნას წყალთაგან, რომელი ჩამოდის ზედა უბურაობითა მონასტერსა ჩუენსა. აწ ბრძანენ მეფობან შენმან მოცემად ტყვეი, რომლისა მიერ დაიბუროს წმიდაო ეკლესიაი, რაითა მას შინა ელოცებოდის წმიდასა მეფობასა შენსა.’ ხოლო მან სიხარულით აღასრულა თხოვაი იგი ბერისაი. ნავთაგან სამეუფოთა უბრძანა მოცემაი ტყვისა, რომელ-იგი მოიღო და დაბურა წმიდაი ეკლესიაი, ვითარცა ყოველნი ხედავთ, თუ რაბამ შუენიერ არს და ბრწყინვალე.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 117-118; 134 and 135.

¹²³ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 177; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 143: და ვითარ შევიდა წინაშე მეფისა, წესისაებრ სამეუფოისა თაყუანის-სცა, ქებაი შეასხა და ლოცვაი და კურთხევაი შვილითურთ მიუძღუნა.

‘I am grateful to the *Lord Bagrat Sevastos* that he directed to our kingdom such man, resembling the angels. Although he is Georgian, he is adorned with our custom in everything.’ Then he [the emperor] read the letters addressed to him by *Sevastos* in which it was said: ‘Rejoice, o God-loving king, I have directed to your majesty someone similar to incorporeal beings and a shepherd of all of us ... by whose prayer may God *fortify your holy reign throughout the Oikumene* [my emphasis].’¹²⁴

This fictionalized episode reveals that the author of the hagiographical vita was aware not only of the way the emperors referred to Georgian kings and what kind of political vocabulary they employed, but he also guessed how Georgian kings would address the emperors in official diplomatic correspondence. The Byzantine emperors did not recognize the Georgian kings’ royal status and addressed them either as archons or by their honorary court dignities, which is why emperor Konstantinos X addresses king Bagrat as “Lord/archon Bagrat *sevastos*.” In contrast, Bagrat in his letter acclaims Konstantinos as holy, autocratic and ecumenical ruler. By this token, namely, by putting in Bagrat’s mouth the words which the emperor would be willing to hear from a subordinated ruler, Giorgi Mc’ire admits the pre-eminence of the Byzantine emperor.

The monk-loving and positive image of Konstantinos X Doukas is further reinforced in the *LGH* when the author of the text describes the second meeting between Konstantinos X and Giorgi the Hagiorite. According to the narrative, Giorgi’s main objective was to ask the emperor for protection and patronage of the 80 orphans he had brought from Georgia to Constantinople. The meeting between Konstantinos and Giorgi took place near imperial Philopation:

The God-serving king together with his son arrived at *where we stood according to the etiquette. When he came close, we knelt and venerated him and acclaimed him in our language.* Then he, *blessed among the kings*, looked at us from a close distance, approached and was astonished by the number and the young age of the orphans ... The king expressed gratitude to the monk, saying: ‘You blessed one, have undertaken such a great and lofty deed that no one could have accomplished at this time.’ And the monk himself handed the letter to the king saying: ‘*Holy king*, these orphans I have collected in the east and taught them the name of God. Now I present them to your majesty. Bring them up according to your judgment and have

¹²⁴*Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 177; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 144: ‘მადლიერ ვარ უფლისა ზაგრატ სევასტოსისადა, რომელ ესევიტარი კაცი, მიმსგავსებული ანგელოზთაი, წინაშე მეფობისა ჩუენისა წარმოავლინა, რამეთუ დაღაცათუ ნათესავით ქართველ არს, ხოლო ყოვლითურთ წესი ჩუენი ჰმოსიეს.’ მაშინ წარიკითხნა წიგნი სევასტოსისანი, რომელთა შინა წერილი იყო, ვითარმედ: ‘გიხაროდენ, ღმრთის-მოყუარეო მეფეო, წარმომივლენეს წინაშე მეფობისა შენისა კაცი, მიმსგავსებული უსხეულოთაი და მოძღუარი ჩუენ ყოველთაი, ეგრეთ შეიწყნარე, ვითარცა შეუენის მეფობასა შენსა, რომლისა ლოცვითა დაამყარენ ღმერთმან ყოვლისა სოფლისა მკჳრობელი წმიდაი მეფობაი შენი.’

mercy upon them so that they may pray for your soul and for the long and prosperous life of your children.’¹²⁵

In order to validate the Byzantine emperor’s authority, Giorgi Mci’re applies the following literary strategy. First, his protagonist, Giorgi the Hagiorite, and his peers perform *proskynesis* in front of the emperor and give him an acclamation in Georgian.¹²⁶ Second, as in other episodes of this hagiographical narrative, distinct and elevated epithets are employed to address the emperor; Konstantinos is eulogized as “blessed among kings” and “holy king.” It is important to emphasize that Giorgi the Hagiorite never performed *proskynesis* in front of king Bagrat, neither did he acclaim him nor called him “blessed among kings” or “holy king.” These eulogistic epithets are reserved strictly for Byzantine emperors.

Examining closely Giorgi Mci’re’s literary strategy, it is apparent that he carefully chose the words to portray the images of the Byzantine emperors and Georgian king. In different parts of the text, Byzantine emperors are referred to and acclaimed as “radiant among the rulers,” “blessed among the rulers,” “holy,” “autocratic and ecumenical ruler,” whereas less exalted epithets are applied to Bagrat. He is referred to simply as “king” or “God-loving king.” Without a question, Mci’re held emperor in higher esteem than Bagrat, but it does not mean that he subverts his authority or demonstrates disrespect towards him. One should bear in mind that Giorgi Mci’re composed his narrative in the eleventh century, when the Byzantine emperor had the authority of a pre-eminent ruler in Eastern Christendom. Therefore, for Giorgi Mci’re, the hierarchy between the Byzantine emperor and Bagratid king was natural.

The fact that the Byzantine emperor and Constantinople enjoyed a great repute among the Kartvelian monastic literati is also corroborated by various manuscript colophons. Most of the manuscript colophons composed by Georgian monastic communities of the Byzantine empire demonstrate the following features. First, the manuscripts are dated by the Byzantine dating system

¹²⁵ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 182; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos* 147: და ესრეთ მოიქცა რა ღმრთის-მსახური მეფე და მოვიდა შვილითურთ, სადა-იგი განწყობილ ვიყვენით წესისაებრ: ხოლო ვითარცა მოგუეახლა, დავვარდით და თაყუანის-ვეცით ენითა ჩუენითა ქებაი შევასხით. ხოლო მან, კურთხეულმან მეფეთა შორის, გვიხილნა რაი მახლობელად, ჩუენდა მოვიდა და დაუკვრდა სიმრავლე იგი ობოლთაი მათ და უჰასაკობაი ... და ჰრქუა მას ვითარმედ: ‘დიდი და მაღალი საქმე გიქმნიეს, ნეტარო, რომელ ამას ჟამსა სხუაი ვერვინ შემძლებელ არს.’ ხოლო ბერმან მისცა პიტაკი თვისთა ხელითა და ჰრქუა: ‘წმიდაო მეფეო, ესე ობოლნი აღმოსავლეთს შემიკრებიან და სახელი ღმრთისაი დამისწავებია და აწ წინაშე მეფობისა თქუენისა მომიყვანებია, ვითარცა ჯერ-გიჩნს, აღზარდე და შეიწყალენ მლოცველად სულისა თქუენისა და შვილთა თქუენთა მზეგრძელობისათვს.’

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

– *indikton* – as well as the Georgian *qoronikon*. Second, apart from the double dating system, these colophons often mention contemporary Byzantine emperors as well as Georgian kings in order to better define the period during which the manuscript was composed.

For instance, a Georgian manuscript that contains the translated works of Gregory the Theologian (dates ca. 1030) contains the following information:

This holy book was written *in the God-protected city of Constantinople which is the enlightener of bodies and souls* [my emphasis] from the creation of the world, according to the Greek *indikton*...and Georgian *qoronikon*...And during the kingship of Romanos in Greece – God multiply the days and years of his reign for the benefit of all Christians – and the lordship in Kartli, young Bagrat.¹²⁷

Georgian scribes from the monastic communities of the Byzantine empire, however, did not follow strictly defined rules. Some colophons apply the double dating system but mention only Byzantine emperor. For example, an Ivron manuscript colophon reports: “This was written on the holy mountain of Athos, in the monastery built by holy fathers Ioane and Eptvime....during the kingship over the Greeks of Basil and his brother Konstantine and during the patriarchy in Constantinople of ...[the name of the patriarch is missing].”¹²⁸

The colophons of a Georgian manuscript composed in 1031 at the monastery of Chora is exceptional and unusual. This manuscript contains the canons of the sixth and seventh ecumenical councils. We know that these canons were translated into Georgian by Eptvime the Athonite at the Ivron Monastery. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the Georgian manuscript from Chora was a copy of Eptvime’s translated work which had come to the Constantinopolitan monastery from Ivron. Hence, one can say with certainty that Georgian monastic communities maintained a network of connections and frequently exchanged books and manuscripts. The colophon of scribe says: “This was written in the city of Constantinople, which is a new Rome, ... in the monastery of Chora, during kingship of Romanos, in 1031.” What is even more interesting is that in the decades after its composition, another Georgian scribe inserted in this manuscript a list of the

¹²⁷ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 169: დაიწერა წმინდა ესე წიგნი... სულთა და ხორცთა განმანათლებელი ღუთივ დაცულსა ქალაქსა შინა კონსტანტინეპოლეს დასაბამითგან წელთა ბერძენთა სათუალავითა ... ინდიკთონსა იგ; ქართველთა ქორონიკონსა:სნა: საბერძნეთს მეფობასა რომანოზისასა ღმერთმან განამრავლენ წელნი და დღენი მეფობისა მათისანი ყოველთა ქრისტიანეთათვის ... ქართლსა მთავრობასა ბაგრატ-ყრმისასა...

¹²⁸ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 166: დაიწერა მთაწმინდას ათონას, მონასტერსა წმ. მამათა აშენებულსა იოანე და ევთიმესა ... მეფობისა ბერძენთა ზედა ბასილისსა და მმისა მათისა კონსტანტინესა ძეთა, კონსტანტინოპოლს პატრიარხოზისა...

Byzantine emperors and empresses from Michael IV (r. 1033–42) to Isaakios I Komnenos (r. 1057–59). Each emperor and empress is celebrated as an Orthodox king and or queen. Of particular interest is the vocabulary used to refer to Isaakios Komnenos: “May God grant many days and years of reign to king Isaakios and make him victorious over his Turkish enemies.”¹²⁹ The Georgian monastic community in the imperial capital was aware of the threat that the Turks posed to the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire in the 1050s. It is far from easy to understand the intention of the scribe who added the list of the emperors in the Georgian manuscript. Perhaps in this way he wanted to render respect to the Byzantine rulers.

I have demonstrated how Georgian monastic communities from the core of the Byzantine empire demonstrated their respect to the Byzantine emperors. It will be instructive to see if a similar pattern occurs in the manuscript colophons composed on the periphery of the Byzantine empire, namely Black Mountain and Kalipos monastery. As noted above, in the eleventh-century Kalipos became a center of learning and manuscript production equal in scope to the Iviron monastery. One of the manuscript colophons from Kalipos monastery contains the following information: “This book was written in 1040 in the land of Asiria, in proximity to Antioch, in the Georgian monastery of Kalipos, during the kingships of Michael and Bagrat king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians, and *kouropalatēs*. Lord, glorify/exalt their kingship.”¹³⁰

The colophon of the Alaverdi Gospel – composed in Kalipos monastery and later sent to Georgia – says: “This was written in Kalipos in 1051, in the lavra of the holy mother of God, during the kingship of Konstanti Monomachos and the patriarchy of Peter in Antioch, and at that time when Bagrat king of the Apxazians and *nōbelissimos*, was in Constantinople.”¹³¹ What is interesting here is that the monks of Kalipos, who resided far from the imperial capital, were perfectly aware that Georgian king Bagrat IV was in Constantinople on a diplomatic mission

¹²⁹ Ibid., 148: ისაკ მართლ-მადიდებელისა მეფისა დღენი და წელნი მრავალნიცა არიან; მოეც ძლევა მტერთა ზედა თურქთა.

¹³⁰ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 180: დაიწერა წ~ა ესე წიგნი დასაბამითგან წელთა :ხ ქ: კდ: ხელითა ჩუენითა ცოდვილითა და შეიმოსაცა ქვეყანასა ასურეთისასა, საზღვართა ანტიოქისათა, მონასტერსა კალიპოსს, მეფობასა ბერძენთა ზ~ა წ~ისა მეფისა მიხაილისსა და აბხაზთა და ქართველთა ზ~ა ბაგრატ კუროპალატისასა, ადიდენ ღ~ნ მეფობაი მათი ...

¹³¹ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 203-4: დაიწერა კალიპოს, ლავრასა წ~ისა ღმრთისმშობლისასა, მეფობასა კონსტანტი მონომახისასა, ანტიოქიას კატრიარქობასა პეტრესსა და ბაგრატის აფხაზთა მეფის ნოველისიმოსისა სამეფოს ყოფასა.

(1051–54). This indicates that the Georgian ecclesiastics at Kalipos maintained a close connection with other Georgian monasteries and monastic centers located in the core of the Byzantine empire.

Conclusion

A new geopolitical reality emerged after the advance of Islam in the Caucasus. The Arab domination cardinally changed the political and religious map of the region. The Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite, who felt threatened by the Arabs and their religion, migrated towards Tao and Klarjeti, lands close to the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire. The appearance of a new political and ecclesiastical center in these lands determined a further orientation of the Georgian world towards the Byzantine empire. After Byzantine power recovered in the east, the Christians of the Caucasus started to envisage the empire as the bulwark of Orthodoxy and Constantinople as a holy city. From the ninth century, Kartvelian ecclesiastics were attracted by Byzantine sacred places, which resulted in the foundation of several Georgian monasteries and the growth of Georgian monastic communities all over the empire. As it turns out, Georgian monastic communities were active not only in translating Byzantine texts and manuscripts, but they saw to it that their works would reach Georgia and disseminate there. The close connection of Georgian monastic communities with the Georgian territories further determined the reception of the Byzantine/Christian thought in the Georgian world.

The growth of Byzantium's political and cultural weight in the Caucasus further translated in the strengthening of the emperor's authority in the eyes of the Georgian secular and ecclesiastical elite. In the Georgian world, the Byzantine basileus was visualized as a sacred and pre-eminent Christian ruler. The Georgian sources analyzed in this chapter represent the Byzantine emperors as an embodiment of ideal kingship, pious, and monk-loving rulers. They are furthermore portrayed as benevolent patrons of Georgian monasteries and monastic communities. Some Georgian authors even exploited the Byzantine emperors' authority to promote their protagonist's status. For example, the sainthood and heroic death of K'onstanti by the Muslims is recognized and extolled by the empress Theodora and emperor Michael, while emperor Basileios transferred the relics of Ilarion Kartveli to Constantinople and played a central role in founding the Georgian monastery of Romana.

The presence of the Byzantine emperors' names in the inscriptions carved on the walls of Georgian churches and monasteries as well as in manuscript colophons bears witness to the emperor's high status. As I have pointed out, the inscriptions and manuscript colophons date essential events, the construction of churches, and completion of manuscripts, according to the regnal years of the Byzantine emperors. Some Georgian texts, hagiographic vitae and inscriptions, emphasize the Byzantine emperor's superiority over the Georgian ruler by ascribing to the former more laudatory epithets than to the latter. It seems that for some Georgians the Byzantine basileus had more authority than the Georgian king.

Chapter Two. Shaping a Royal Image in the Shadow of Byzantium: The Rise of Bagratid Power under Byzantine Tutelage

During Arab-Byzantine confrontation, the imperial court of Constantinople continually attempted to reassert its influence in the Caucasus. The Byzantine empire pursued a strategy of maintaining the network of allies among the local elite and supported the formation of client-political entities. By the beginning of the ninth century, Ašot I Bagratid (r. 814–830) aided by Byzantine military and political support managed to establish a power base in the Byzantine-Georgian frontier region of Tao-Klarjeti. In the following years, under the auspices of Ašot, Tao-Klarjeti transformed into a polity loyal to Constantinople. The emergence of a new state in the frontier zone allowed the Byzantine empire to secure its eastern flank more securely and to reinforce imperial authority in the Christian Caucasus. In the long run, Byzantine ideological, military, and financial support paved the way for the Bagratid family to rise in prominence and establish its authority not only in Tao-Klarjeti but all over the Georgian-speaking lands.

This chapter has a two-fold purpose. First, it investigates the political relations between Byzantium and the Georgian world from the ninth up to the end of the eleventh century. I analyze the way the Bagratid family rose in prominence in Tao-Klarjeti with Byzantine support and the extent to which the imperial court's support helped this family to consolidate its power all over Georgian speaking lands. I investigate whether the creation of a unified Georgian kingdom was the main reason that caused conflict between the government of Constantinople and the Bagratid royal court. Second, a further goal of this chapter is to study the language and visual culture of Bagratid kingship; I examine the political and ideological weight the Byzantine honorary court dignities had for the Bagratid rulers and the role these titles played in their self-representation. During the period in question, the Bagratid rulers did not hesitate to emphasize that they were subordinated to the Byzantine basileus.

2.1 From Provincial Aristocrats to *kouropalatēs*: Creating the Image of the Byzantine Emperor's Subordinate Ruler

In the second half of the eighth century, Caucasian Iberia/Kartli and its capital, Tp'ilisi, was occupied by the Arabs. The harsh methods by which the Arabs governed Iberia/Kartli caused conflict between the local elite and Arab officials. The Arabs gradually excluded the members of

Guaramid family, who had previously ruled Kartli as princes from the sixth century. Equally dissatisfied by Arab domination were members of the Church and aristocracy who felt stripped of their privileges. As a consequence, Kartvelians started to migrate from the Arab-dominated east towards the remote southwestern regions of Tao and Klarjeti; these areas were beyond Arab power and close to the Byzantine frontier. In subsequent decades Tao and Klarjeti became the foci of eastern Georgian émigrés.

Like many aristocrats and ecclesiastics, the Bagratid family had also migrated from Kartli to the southern-western regions of Tao-Klarjeti. After an unsuccessful rebellion against the Arabs in Kartli, Ašot I Bagratid with his family fled to Constantinople.¹³² Georgian sources are silent about the details of the negotiations that most likely took place between Ašot and the Byzantine emperor. But, it seems that Ašot convinced emperor Leo V “the Armenian” (r. 813–820) of his loyalty and secured imperial support.¹³³ To further rise in prominence, Ašot wanted to be recognized by the emperor as the heir of the Guaramid power and receive the high-ranking title of *kouropalatēs* which had already been granted to Guaramid princes from the sixth century.¹³⁴ After the Guaramids lost power, the highly prestigious Byzantine title of *kouropalatēs* started to be granted to the Bagratid family.

Ašot returned from Constantinople with the emperor’s ideological and military support. He had been elevated to the rank of *kouropalatēs* and provided with sufficient military force to establish his rule in Tao. The eleventh-century author, Sumbat Davitis-ze, in his short chronicle the *Life and Tale of the Bagratids* pinpoints that Ašot did not rise in prominence without Byzantine support: “God granted kingship to Ašot *kouropalatēs*, and the will of the Greek king strengthened his power.”¹³⁵ Ašot tried to make the best use of his affiliation with the Byzantine imperial court to establish his political authority in Tao-Klarjeti. He positioned himself as the emperor’s man and made the dignity of *kouropalatēs* a hallmark of his power and prestige. In near-contemporary Georgian sources, Ašot is almost always referred to by his imperial court title of *kouropalatēs*. The hagiographical text, the *Life of Grigol Xanteli*, composed almost a century after the events it

¹³² *The Life of Kartli 1*, 213.

¹³³ The Georgian sources create some confusion about the chronology of Ašot’s promotion to the rank of *kouropalatēs*. It is not clear if his elevation to this honorary dignity happened before his travel to Constantinople or during his stay in the imperial capital. It seems more logical to think that Ašot received this Byzantine court dignity during his stay in Constantinople.

¹³⁴ Guaram I (r. 588–590) was the first prince of Iberia/Kartli to receive the title of *kouropalatēs*. Elevation of Guaram to this dignity indicated imperial court’s wish to secure an alliance with the Iberian princes in the Caucasus.

¹³⁵ *The Life of Kartli 1*, 376.

describes, offers an exciting insight into certain aspects of early Bagratid kingship. The *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* mentions Ašot Bagratid several times. The first time the Bagratid ruler is introduced in the narrative as “God-serving sovereign, great Bagratunian Ašot *kouropalatēs*.”¹³⁶ The second time Ašot is hailed as “God-serving king Ašot *kouropalatēs*.”¹³⁷ The next time he is called “*kouropalatēs* Ašot,”¹³⁸ and in other four cases Ašot is referred only as “*kouropalatēs*.”¹³⁹ It seems that by the first half of the tenth century, the Byzantine court title of *kouropalatēs* was not only firmly integrated into Bagratid royal titulature, but it had become a royal title and synonym for the king.

After the death of Ašot *kouropalatēs*, this title was granted to Ašot’s second son, Bagrat, rather than to the elder son, Adarnase. Bagrat inherited the core and strategically important territory of Ašot I’s domains. Although Adarnase retained control over Artanuji (by that time a political center of Tao-Klarjeti) and bore the title “prince of princes” (*eristavt-eristavi*). The *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* provides the following information on this matter: “By this time Bagrat *kouropalatēs* by the will of God and by the will of his brothers and by order of the Greek king (i.e., Byzantine emperor) received the title of *kouropalatēs* after his father Ašot’s death because he was elevated to the kingship.”¹⁴⁰ If we believe the *Life of Grigol Xanzteli*, which was written decades after these events, Bagrat was granted the title of *kouropalatēs* because he inherited his father’s throne. It is not clear why Bagrat became the senior ruler and what determined the neglect of the rules of primogeniture. It is unlikely that Adarnase renounced his right to rule and passed the power to his younger brother after his father’s death. We know that Ašot died unexpectedly and probably never nominated his second son as his successor. Thus, it looks like inter-family strife was resolved by the court of Constantinople which secured accession to the power of the candidate that was better suited to the imperial interest. The imperial government elevated Bagrat to the rank of *kouropalatēs* and thus determined his kingship and seniority within the Bagratid family. The fact that the promotion of Bagrat to *kouropalatēs* was a great event is corroborated by the *Life of Grigol Xanzteli*, which tells that when the monk Grigol heard about Bagrat’s elevation to the imperial rank he personally visited him: “Grigol came to Bagrat *kouropalatēs* and congratulated him on

¹³⁶ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 258.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 262, 263, 264.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 272.

receiving the title/dignity of *kouropalatēs*; he also praised him because he was granted the rank of *kouropalatēs*.”¹⁴¹ It is important to emphasize that the author of the *Life of Grigol* mentions Bagrat five times in his narrative and always calls him “Bagrat *kouropalatēs*.”¹⁴² This makes it clear that the elevation of the Bagratid ruler to the rank of *kouropalatēs* was a great event and this title/dignity had significant political and ideological value in ninth and tenth century Tao-Klarjeti. I also contend that a Byzantine honorary dignity defined an individual’s supremacy in the hierarchy of the Bagratid family. Even though the imperial title signified subordination to the empire, the Bagratids were proud of their titles. This explains why the Bagratids fashioned themselves as “*kouropalatēs*” or “king and *kouropalatēs*” in the ninth and the tenth centuries. From the ninth up to the end of the eleventh century, all the members of the Bagratid house who aspired to the kingship possessed high-ranking imperial court titles and these titles played an essential role in their self-promotion.¹⁴³

The acquisition of high-ranking Byzantine court titles was crucial for the Bagratid rulers for multiple reasons. First, the Bagratids stressed their cultural-ideological affiliation to the Byzantine empire. Secondly, possessing the title was a source of power and prestige. In the anarchic environment of the Caucasus, where multiple players jockeyed for power and authority, court titles served as a means of legitimacy. A court title was granted to a candidate by the Byzantine emperor whom the local elite perceived as a pre-eminent Christian ruler. Consequently, the recipient of the imperial title gained the recognition of his position from a ruler with authority. The emperor’s support gave a certain credibility to Bagratid authority in the eyes of their competitors and subordinates. Furthermore, conferring court title onto a candidate included bestowal of insignia and symbols of power as well as financial support, either an annual salary (*rhoga*) or payment in one installment. The Byzantine regalia of power which the Bagratids certainly received with the title of *kouropalatēs* further distinguished their family from other powerful aristocratic families.

The title of *kouropalatēs* became a visual manifestation of Bagratid distinctiveness and exclusiveness as it transformed a provincial ruler into a high-ranking Byzantine dignitary. After receiving an imperial title, a Bagratid candidate could claim double legitimacy. On the one hand,

¹⁴¹ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 272.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 273-74.

¹⁴³ About the Bagratid rulers’ Byzantine titles also see S. H. Rapp, jr. “Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past,” 560-68.

he was king by the grace of God and on the other hand, a member of the Byzantine court hierarchy and the emperor's man. After the death of Ašot I, the Bagratid dynasty split into three major branches and consequently, Tao-Klarjeti became a decentralized polity governed by three Bagratid clans.¹⁴⁴ The head of each clan appears to have designated himself sovereign/king [*xelmwipe*]. From this time onwards, the Byzantine imperial court seems to have used the title of *kouropalatēs* as leverage to check and balance multiple power players that emerged in Tao-Klarjeti. Constantinople realized that through political, ideological, and financial support it was possible to intervene in Bagratid family affairs and promote a suitable candidate by granting him a high-ranking court title.

As the decentralization and inter-dynastic tensions went ahead in Tao-Klarjeti, in 888 Adarnase II *kouropalatēs* adopted the title of “king of the Kartvelians.” It is a commonly held belief that ca. 888 was a threshold in the political life of Tao-Klarjeti because Adarnase II restored the Kartvelian/Georgian kingship and transformed Tao-Klarjeti from a principality to a kingdom. Based on the *Chronicle of Kartli*, however, there is no hard evidence to support this commonly accepted hypothesis. What seems more likely is that Adarnase simply upgraded his title to “king of the Kartvelians” in order to emphasize his seniority within the realm and distinguish himself from his Bagratid cousins who were styling themselves as kings. The appearance of a new and ambitious title in the Bagratid political vocabulary and the change of the power structure in Tao-Klarjeti may have caused concerns at the Byzantine imperial court and this probably explains why after Adarnase II's death his older son, Davit, – who inherited the throne from his father and became king of the Kartvelians, – was denied the title of *kouropalatēs*. This essential dignity was bestowed on Davit's young brother, Ašot. By this move, the imperial court stripped a senior Bagratid ruler from a source of power and prestige. From this time onwards, those Bagratids who inherited the title of “king of the Kartvelians” and thus claimed the seniority within the family were denied the title of *kouropalatēs*. Instead, the imperial court gave this privilege to another branch of the Bagratid dynasty, in this way creating two power bases in Tao-Klarjeti. Hence, dispensation of court titles to various members of the Bagratid family became a means through which the emperors checked and balanced various power players in Tao-Klarjeti.

The alliance between Byzantium and the Bagratids was based on mutual interests. The Bagratids sought the imperial court's benevolence and support. As already pointed out, an

¹⁴⁴ *The Life of Kartli 1*, 378-9.

affiliation with the dominant power and authority figure of the Christian emperor was crucial for the regional rulers like Bagratids. At the same time, the Byzantine empire encouraged the creation of a client-state in Tao-Klarjeti to improve its strategic position in the Caucasus. The imperial court expected the Bagratids to recognize the supremacy of the emperor, provide the empire with military aid when necessary, and secure the imperial frontier. The Bagratid rulers could contribute to the empire's defense system by keeping control of strategically essential places and preventing Muslim raiding armies from attacking the empire through their territory. For instance, Artanuji, the political and economic center of Tao-Klarjeti had great strategic importance. Chapter 46 of *De Administrando* accentuates the economic and strategic importance of the city and characterizes it as key in the region.¹⁴⁵

Apart from promoting their image as high-ranking dignitaries of the imperial court, the Bagratids adopted other means to increase their authority. They embellished the provenance of their house with sacred imagery, claiming to be the direct offspring of the Biblical King-Prophet David.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, this was one of the factors that helped the Bagratid house to establish its prestige in the region and exert authority over other echelons of medieval Georgian society. It is far from easy to set precisely when the Georgian Bagratids devised this legend. The earliest Georgian source that refer to the family's sacred genealogy is the *Lives of the Kings*. This text was composed around ca. 800 by an anonymous author before the Bagratid ascendancy to power, when the Guaramid princely house still held sway over Kartli. According to the text, a certain Bagratid who was from the biblical David's clan came to the presiding Iberian prince, asked for land, and promised to become his loyal subject.¹⁴⁷ Giorgi Merc'ule's the *Life of Grigol Xanzteli* also mentions the Davidic provenance of the Bagratid house. At the time when the hagiographical narrative was composed (ca. 951), the Bagratids had long consolidated their power in Tao-Klarjeti and risen from an aristocratic to the royal house. Merc'ule refers to a Bagratid sacred pedigree for the first time in his narrative in the following way; he acclaims Ašot *kouropalatēs*, the ruler of

¹⁴⁵ Konstantinos Porphyrogenitos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. G. Moravcsick and R. Jenkins, trans., 217. On the importance of Artanuji see further N. Evans, "Kastron, Rabad, and Ardūn: The Case of Artanuji," in *From Constantinople to the Frontier*, eds., N. Matheou, T. Kampianaki and L. Bondioli (Brill, 2016), 343-364.

¹⁴⁶ *The Life of Kartli 1*, 372-3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

Tao-Klarjeti, as “son of King-Prophet David and the anointed king.”¹⁴⁸ In another part of the narrative, Ašot is addressed as “sovereign, anointed by King-Prophet David and Christ.”¹⁴⁹

Additional textual evidence from the eleventh century talks about the Bagratid house’s claimed genealogy. The short chronicle, the *Life and Tale of the Bagratids* (composed around ca.1030), is so far the first and only narrative known to provide a detailed genealogical tree of the family from Adam to the Biblical David and down to Guaram, the alleged founder of the Bagratid house.

Adam begat Seth. Seth begat Enosh Lamek begat Noah. Noah begat Shem. Shem begat Arpachshad. ... Jesse begat King David. King David begat Solomon. Solomon begat Rehoboam. ... Rubim begat Moses. Moses begat Judas Dan begat Solomon. Solomon begat seven brothers, whom God gave to him during [his stay] in captivity.

And these seven brothers, the sons of this Solomon, set out from the land of Palestine, as the Jews were coming out of captivity, and appeared before Queen Rachael in Eklec and were baptized by her. And they remained in the land of Somxiti [i.e., Armenia] and to this day their descendants rule as *mtavaris* in Somxiti. So four brothers came to Kartli: one of them, named Guaram, was selected as *eristavi*, and the Kartvelian Bagrationis are the descendants and kin of this Guaram. And this brother, named Sahak, set out for Kaxeti and through marriage became related to Nerses.¹⁵⁰

An anonymus author’s *Chronicle of Kartli* (written around the 1070s) is another eleventh-century historical narrative that speaks of the kinship ties between the Bagratid house and the Biblical David. This information appears in the first pages of the text, where the author describes the marriage alliance between the Guaramid princely and Bagratid aristocratic houses.

¹⁴⁸ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature I*, 262.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁵⁰ *The Life of Kartli I*, 372-3; S. H. Rapp, Jr., *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography*, 351: ადამ შვა სეით. სეით შვა ენოს ... ლამექ შვა ნოე. ნოე შვა სემ. სემ შვა არფაქსად ... იესე შვა შვა დავით მეფე. დავით მეფემან შვა სოლომონ. სოლომონ შვა რობუამ ... იერობემ შვა მოსე. მოსე შვა იუდა ... დან შვა სოლომონ. სოლომონ შვა შვიდი ძმანი, რომელნი—იგი მოსცნა ღმერთმან ტყუეობასა შინა. და ესე შვიდი ძმანი, ძენი ამის სოლომონისანი, წარმოვიდეს ქუეყნის ფილისტიმით, ტყუეობით წარმოსულნი ჰურიანი, და მოიწივნეს ეკლესს, წინაშე რაქაელ დედოფლისა და მისგან ნადელ—იღეს. და დაშთეს იგინი ქუეყანათა სომხითისათა და მუნ დღეინდელად დღემდე შვილნი მათნი მთავრობენ სომხითს. და ოთხნი ძმანი მოვიდეს ქართლს. ხოლო ერთი მათგანი, სახელით გუარამ, განაჩინეს ერისთავად, და ესე არს ერისთავი ქართლისაი და მამაი ბაგრატიონთაი. და ესე ქართლისა ბაგრატიონიანი შვილისშვილნი და ნათესავნი არიან მის გუარამისნი. ხოლო ძმაი მისი, სახელით საჰაკ, წარვიდა კახეთს და დაემზახა იგი ნერსეს.

On Bagratid biblical origin also see S. H. Rapp, Jr., “Imagining History at the Crossroads”, 522-34; Idem, “Sumbat Davitis-ze and Political Authority in the Era of Georgian Unification”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol.120, N.4 (Oct. – Dec. 2000): 570-76.

And this Juansher [presiding prince and ruler of Kartli] married as a wife a Bagratid, the daughter of Adarnase, by the name of Latavri. His mother blamed him for taking her as a wife. She was not at all aware that they [Bagratids] were descendants of the prophet David, who was called the father of God in the flesh [my emphasis].¹⁵¹

While the Georgian Bagratids developed their Davidic and Jewish provenance as early as the eighth century, the Armenian Bagratids claimed to be of Jewish descent as early as the sixth century. This legend found its first literary portrayal in Movsēs Xorenac‘i’s the *History of the Armenians*, however, Movsēs Xorenac‘i never indicates that the Armenian Bagratids were related to the King-Prophet David.¹⁵² The information about the Davidic provenance of the Armenian Bagratids only appeared in the tenth century, in the literary composition of *katholikos* Yovhannēs Draxanakertc‘i (d. 923-24).¹⁵³ Interestingly, the Armenian *katholikos* resided for some time at the court of the Georgian ruler Adarnase II (888–923). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the head of the Armenian church adopted the idea of Davidic provenance from the Georgian Bagratids and applied it to the family’s Armenian branch.¹⁵⁴ The Armenian Bagratids also started to circulate their Jewish/Davidic origin from the tenth century.

The Bagratid house widely broadcasted their claimed sacred progenitor, and the story of their kinship with the Biblical David crossed the borders of Tao-Klarjeti and reached the Byzantine imperial court. Emperor Konstantinos VII (r.913–959), in his *De Administrando Imperio*, narrates the genealogy of the Bagratid family in the following way:

The Iberians, I mean those who belong to *kouropalatēs* pride themselves upon their descent from the wife of Uriah, with whom David, the prophet, and king, committed adultery: for they say they are descended from the children she bore to David and are related to David, the prophet, and king, consequently to the most holy Mother of God also, inasmuch as she was by descent of the seed of David.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ *The Life of Kartli 1*, 251; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 258: ხოლო ამან ჯუანშერ შეირთო ცოლი ნათესავი ბაგრატონიანთა, ასული ადარნასესი, სახელით ლატავრი, და აბრალა დედამან მისმან მიყვანება მისი ცოლად: არათურე კეთილად მეცნიერი იყო, ვითარმედ არიან იგინი ნათესავნი დავით წინასწარმეტყუელისანი, რომელი-იგი ხორციელად მამად ღმრთისად იწოდა.

¹⁵² Movsēs Xorenac‘i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 110-111.

¹⁵³ Yovhannēs Draxanakertc‘i, *History of Armenia*, trans. K. Maksoudian (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 73.

¹⁵⁴ S. H. Rapp, Jr., “Imagining History at the Crossroads,” 529-31.

¹⁵⁵ *De Administrando Imperio*, 205: Ἰστέους σεμνόνοντες οἱ Ἰβηρες, ἤγουν οἱ τοῦ κουροπαλάτου, λέγουσιν ἑαυτὺς κατάγεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς Οὐρίου, τῆς παρὰ τοῦ Δαυὶδ, τοῦ προφήτου καὶ βασιλέως μοιχευθείσης· ἐκ γάρ τῶν ἐξ αὐτῆς τεχθέντων παίδων τῷ Δαυὶδ ἑαυτοὺς λέγουσιν κατάγεσθαι καὶ συγγενεῖς εἶναι Δαυὶδ, τοῦ προφήτου καὶ βασιλέως καὶ ὡς ἐκ τοῦτου καὶ τῆς ὑπερεγίας Θεοτόκου διὰ τό ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ ταύτην κατάγεσθαι.

De Adminstrando imperio differs about the Bagratid sacred genealogy, however, and narrates a different story than that claimed by the Bagratids. From the Byzantine perspective, the Bagratids originated from Uriah's wife with whom the biblical David committed adultery. It seems that the imperial court of Constantinople was not happy to accept the official Bagratid narrative and denied that they were rightful descendants of the Biblical David. It is noteworthy that *De Adminstrando imperio* avoids mentioning the Jewish/Davidic origin of the Armenian Bagratids.

Even though the Georgian Bagratids could have concocted the legend about their sacred pedigree as early as the eighth century, it was not until the tenth century that they embarked on propagating their Davidic origin widely. The great emphasis on their sacred genealogy in the Bagratid propaganda coincided with the period when the Macedonian imperial family in Byzantium developed a special attachment to the Old Testament past and exploited Old Testament paradigms of kingship for their dynastic propaganda.¹⁵⁶ Since Tao-Klarjeti was under the political and cultural umbrella of Constantinople and the Bagratid rulers were influenced by Byzantine political culture, one should not rule out the possibility that they were inspired by the Macedonian example. Due to the scarcity of sources, we do not know how or by what media the Bagratids communicated their Davidic provenance, but it goes without saying that their claimed descent earned them high-status. Despite claiming a sacred origin and divine ordination of their rule, the Bagratids thought it equally important to underline their affiliation and subordinated position to the Byzantine emperor. This demonstrates that the Byzantine emperor enjoyed authority and prestige in the contemporary Caucasus.

2.2 A Challenge to Byzantine Domination? The Emergence of an All Georgian Kingdom and a Rift in the Byzantine-Bagratid Relationship

By the end of the tenth century, after the Caucasus and most of the western part of the region was in the Byzantine orbit, the Georgian political entities coalesced into a single kingdom. It is interesting that the gathering of Georgian-speaking lands and the foundation of a united Georgian kingdom were achieved under the leadership of the Bagratid dynasty, who managed to

¹⁵⁶ G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: the Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192-204; S. F. Tougher, "The Wisdom of Leo VI," in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews*, ed. P. Magdalino (Ashgate: Variorum, 1994), 171-179; T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 78-79.

build its authority and prestige in the Caucasus owing a great deal to Byzantine political and ideological support. While the Armenian Bagratids failed to keep their leading position in the Caucasus and unite Armenian territories under their sovereignty, their Georgian kin turned out to be much more fortunate in this regard.

By the end of the tenth century the Christian Caucasus was a patchwork of various intermingled kingdoms and principalities fighting for domination in the region. The Bagratids of Tao-Klarjeti enjoyed more prestige and authority than the rulers of the kingdom of Apxazeti and the kingdom of K'axeti, and the reason for this was that the Bagratids held prestigious Byzantine court titles and had close ties with the imperial court. The kingdom of Apxazeti was politically and militarily stronger than Tao-Klarjeti, however, and the kings of Apxazeti enjoyed more power in their realm than their Bagratids peers. In the second half of the tenth century, Tao-Klarjeti became an extremely decentralized state while Apxazeti remained more centralized. Furthermore, the kings of Apxazeti were more successful in expanding the borders of their realm.¹⁵⁷ By the 950s, it seemed that the Bagratids had lost the initiative in the struggle to dominate the Georgian-speaking lands while kingdom of Apxazeti gained the upper hand.

As the struggle for supremacy in the Georgian-speaking world intensified among the states of Apxazeti, Tao-Klarjeti and K'axeti, the imperial court in Constantinople started to dispense imperial court titles on a larger scale. Before the first half of the tenth century, court titles were confined only to the Bagratid family of Tao-Klarjeti, but the honorary dignities of *patrikios* and *magistros* were bestowed to the rulers of Apxazeti and K'axeti in the 950s. Because of scanty evidence it is not clear if the distribution of Byzantine imperial court dignities to the kings of Apxazeti and K'axeti happened frequently. So far, we can ascertain that only Kvirike among the kings of K'axeti was elevated to the rank of *magistros*.¹⁵⁸ It should be emphasized, however, that the most prestigious imperial title of *kouropalatēs* was granted only to the Bagratid rulers.

¹⁵⁷ [M. Lordkipanidze] მ. ლორთქიფანიძე. ქართული ფეოდალური მონარქიის შექმნა (The Making of the Georgian Feudal Monarchy, *Studies in Georgian History*, vol. II) (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1973), 517-18.

¹⁵⁸ [T. Kaukchishvili] თ. ყაუხჩიშვილი, ბერძნულუ წარწერები საქართველოში [Greek Inscriptions in Georgia] (Tbilisi, 1951), 148-50.

The unification of Georgian lands under the leadership of Bagrat Bagratid was initiated by his kinsman, Davit of Tao, who bore the title of *magistros* and later *kouropalatēs*.¹⁵⁹ The inter-dynastic marriages between the Bagratid house and royal family of Apxazeti created a fertile ground for merging the states of Tao-Klarjeti and Apxazeti into a single kingdom. Bagrat was a son of king Gurgen II and heir to the lands of Lower Tao. From his mother's side, Bagrat could claim legitimacy to the throne of Apxazeti. Bagrat's mother, Guranduxt, was a sister of the blind and childless king Theodosius II, who seems to have been persuaded to nominate Bagrat as his heir. Moreover, Davit *kouropalatēs*, in his capacity as the ruler/king of Upper Tao declared Bagrat his successor. Thus, through this arrangement, young Bagrat Bagratid was placed in the line of succession of three polities simultaneously: the kingdom of Apxazeti and the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Tao (formally a single polity but divided into two parts between two branches of the Bagratid dynasty). In addition, the powerful aristocrat Ioane Marușize secured the principality of Kartli (the heartland of Georgian-speaking territories) for Bagrat. Even though Bagrat was legitimized as a successor of three polities, it took him decades to lay claim to his inheritance and unify Georgian lands in an all-Georgian kingdom.

This geopolitical arrangement that resulted in the creation of the Georgian kingdom was quite extraordinary for a region dominated by the nucleus of aristocratic houses with centrifugal tendencies. Thus, it is far from easy to ascertain what determined this sudden turn in Caucasian power politics and why a plan of this scale was devised and executed. While discussing these critical events that lead to the creation of the kingdom of Georgia, one must take into account the position of the imperial court. As Byzantium was a dominant player in the Caucasus, it is essential to understand how the government of Constantinople reacted to the changes that took place between 980 and 1008 in the Caucasus. The unification of Georgian lands coincided with the reign of the ambitious and powerful emperor Basileios II who is rightly considered one of the most successful Byzantine rulers. During his long reign, Basileios faced multiple challenges in rebellions initiated by influential military leaders. He managed to overcome these difficulties, however, and succeeded in strengthening the position of Byzantium as a leading power in the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁰ The long-lasting and brutal wars won by Basileios II guaranteed the stability of

¹⁵⁹ *The Life of Kartli I*, 272-74; On the role of Davit of Tao in the foundation of Georgian kingdom, see, C. Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia," in *The Cambridge Medieval History vol. IV: The Byzantine Empire: Byzantium and its Neighbours*, eds. J. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 617.

¹⁶⁰ Holmes, *Basil and the Governance of Empire*, 450.

the Balkan frontier. In the Caucasus, the emperor further strengthened the empire's position and initiated the slow and creeping annexation of the Georgian region of Tao and the Armenian polities.¹⁶¹ In the light of Basileios' hard line towards the empire's neighboring subjects, the emergence of an all-Georgian kingdom as the result of merging several polities into a single state stands out as a compelling case. Byzantine and Georgian sources fail to provide a clear picture of the way the government of Constantinople reacted to Bagrat III's ambitious strategy to unify the Georgian-speaking lands.

During Bagrat III's long and turbulent reign (978–1014), the Byzantine empire did not attack the Georgian kingdom neither did Basileios try to undermine Bagrat's power. The emperor, however, was harsh to Bagrat's foster father, Davit *kouropalatēs*, whose domains were annexed to the empire. But the reason for Upper Tao's incorporation into the empire lies in Davit *kouropalatēs*' decision to support the foes of Basileios II in the 980s.

The First Rupture between the Byzantine Imperial Court and the Bagratids of Tao-Klarjeti

The first major conflict between the Bagratid house and the imperial court occurred in the 980s when Davit *kouropalatēs* for the reasons unknown to us supported Bardas Phokas' revolt in 987. Only a decade earlier, in 979, Davit had provided the young emperors Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII with sufficient military aid to put down the rebellion of Bardas Skleros.

In 976, Bardas Skleros, *doux* of Mesopotamia, declared himself emperor and gradually consolidated power in a significant part of Asia Minor. The imperial court was alarmed when Skleros almost succeeded in blocking Constantinople. In order to deal with Skleros, the decision-makers in Constantinople called Bardas Phokas out of exile and put him in charge of the imperial army.¹⁶² The government of Constantinople, in a desperate need of manpower, used various diplomatic channels to secure support and military assistance from Davit of Tao. It seems that the ruler of Tao delayed engaging in the Byzantines' matters for more than two years. Davit chose the side of Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII only when the imperial court entrusted command of the army to Bardas Phokas, an old acquaintance and possibly a friend of Davit. After three years of

¹⁶¹ N. Garsoian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the Eleventh Century," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times. The Dynastic periods from Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, vol. 1, ed. G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 199-240.

¹⁶² A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood*, 83-7; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 250-51.

civil war, a joint Byzantine and Kartvelian/Iberian army under the leadership of Bardas Phokas prevailed against Skleros and dealt him a severe defeat in 979 at Charsianon.¹⁶³

The elite of Tao-Klarjeti seem to have been proud of the role they played in defeating the rebel Skleros, and this was expressed in contemporary and near-contemporary sources: The *Life of Ioane and Eptvime*, the epigraphic inscription of Zarzma church, and the colophon from an Athos manuscript. All three sources explicitly state that the Iberian army was a vital force in defeating Skleros. The *Life of Ioane and Eptvime* provides a long story about the unrest that started in Byzantium in 976 and the role the forces of Davit of Tao played in securing the throne of Basileios II and Konstantinos.¹⁶⁴ If we believe the narrative, the imperial court begged Ioane-Tornike, a Georgian monk from Athos, to travel to the court of Davit of Tao and persuade him to move against Skleros. Empress Theophano allegedly claimed that there was no chance to defeat Skleros and save young Basileios and Konstantinos unless Davit of Tao with his army agreed to take actions against the rebel army commander.¹⁶⁵ The same rhetoric appears in the inscription at Zarzma church in which the *ktetor* of the edifice asserts that the Iberian army routed the rebellious Skleros and his forces (I have discussed and quoted this text in the first chapter).¹⁶⁶

Among these three sources that touch events of 970s, the most interesting is the colophon of an Athos manuscript by monk Ioane-Tornike, a former commander of the Iberian army and participant in the battle of 979. Ioane-Tornike, an eyewitness of the events, retells the story interestingly. According to him, when Skleros rebelled, the “the holy/saintly kings” [i.e., the Byzantine emperors] were in a precarious situation and their reign threatened. The “invincible” Davit of Tao, however, came to the aid of the “holy/saintly kings,” defeated Skleros, and in this way saved and secured their reign.¹⁶⁷ Although contemporary Georgian sources exaggerate the role of Davit’s help, there is no doubt that the Kartvelian/Iberian army played a crucial role in defeating Skleros. According to the Byzantine historian Ioannes Skylitzes, the imperial army under Bardas Phokas’ command got the upper hand in the last decisive battle only after the imperial army

¹⁶³ A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood*, 86; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 265.

¹⁶⁴ *The Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 45-50; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 57-60.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 58; 45-46.

¹⁶⁶ *Lapidary Inscriptions*, 278-82.

¹⁶⁷[Georgian State Museum Manuscript Description, A-collection, vol. IV] საქართველოს სახელმწიფო მუზეუმის ქართულ ხელნაწერთა არქეროლოგია (A კოლექცია) (Tbilisi, 1954), 186-87; T. Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 108. For the English translation of the colophon see N. Makharadze and N. Lomouri eds., *Byzantium in Georgian Sources* (Tbilisi: Logosi, 2010), 402-3.

was reinforced by several thousand Iberians sent by Davit of Tao.¹⁶⁸ Because of contributing to the defeat of Bardas Skleros, Davit of Tao and his entourage were remunerated lavishly by the imperial court. Davit was elevated from the rank of *magistros* to *kouropalatēs* and received vast territories into possession: the region of Basean, the city of Theodosiupolis, and other areas around Lake Van.¹⁶⁹ It is not clear, though, if these territories were given to Davit only temporarily, in lifetime possession or hereditary succession. These new territories and title of *kouropalatēs* made Davit unquestionably one of the most authoritative and influential rulers in the Caucasus. Not only Georgian but also contemporary Armenian sources emphasize the unique position and authority that Davit *kouropalatēs* enjoyed. For instance, the Armenian historian Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi considered Davit as the dominant regional ruler, who defeated neighboring people, ended battles and brought peace in the region. From Tarōnecʿi’s point of view, regional rulers submitted to Davit voluntarily because he enjoyed great authority.¹⁷⁰ One of the markers of Davit’s immense prestige and power was a silver coin which he minted after he received the title of *kouropalatēs*. Davit was the first Bagratid ruler to issue a coin in his name with his Byzantine title of *kouropalatēs* on the reverse.¹⁷¹ It is interesting that Davit is hailed only with his Byzantine title of *kouropalatēs* but his Georgian royal title of *mepe* (king) is absent on his coinage. As already pointed out, by the tenth century there were several Bagratids who styled themselves kings/sovereigns, but only one *kouropalatēs*. Therefore, it seems the title that Davit placed on his coin had far superior political weight to a Georgian royal title.

Davit’s entitulation, through which his authority was communicated, stands out. While on the coin he is styled only as “*kouropalatēs*,” a manuscript colophon from Mount Anthos acclaims him as “*kouropalatēs* of the entire East.”¹⁷² This manuscript was commissioned and created by order of the monk Ioane-Tornike, a former Byzantine official, *patrikios*, *synkellos*, and commander

¹⁶⁸ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811-1057*, trans. J. Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 324; C. Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 453.

¹⁶⁹ On the exact Geographical toponyms and the territories received by Davit III from Basileios see: T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi*, 244; C. Toumanoff, “Armenia and Georgia” in *The Cambridge Medieval History vol. IV: The Byzantine Empire*, 617.

¹⁷⁰ T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi*, 307.

¹⁷¹ All four surviving specimens of Davit’s silver coin were discovered in various parts of Europe; One specimen in Germany, another in Estonia, a third in Russia, and the last in Sweden See: [G. Dundua and T. Dundua] გ. დუნდუა და თ. დუნდუა, ქართული ნუმისმატიკა, ნაწილი I [Georgian Numismatics: Part One] (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishers, 2006), 188-89; [D. Kapanadze] დ. კაპანაძე, ქართული ნუმისმატიკა [Georgian Numismatics] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1969), 61-62; [E. Pachomov] Е. Пахомов, Монеты Грузии [Georgian Coins] (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1970), 55-56.

¹⁷² Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 108.

of the army which Davit sent to the Byzantine emperors to defeat Bardas Skleros in 979. The colophon says: “I, Ioane, a former Tornike, and my brother Ioane Varaz-Vache, sons of the blessed Chordvanieli family, commissioned and wrote this book, which is called by the holy fathers a Paradise/Heaven,...for the glorification and prayer of the powerful and God-serving Davit, king and *kouropalatēs* of the entire East.”¹⁷³ The “*kouropalatēs* of the entire East” was an interesting interpretation of Davit’s imperial dignity. Maybe Davit used this phrase to present himself as a high-ranking Byzantine dignitary charged with a special governing function in the east by the Byzantine emperor. The phrase “the entire East” likely meant the Caucasus and north-eastern districts of Asia Minor. The formula, “*kouropalatēs* of the entire East,” coined by Davit did not go into oblivion after his death. Bagrat III, in his role as the first king of the united Georgian kingdom, adopted this phrase and exploited it to bolster his image.

As was pointed out in the first chapter, close associates of Davit of Tao benefited greatly after the imperial army defeated Skleros. Ioane-Tornike, the commander of the Kartvelian army, claimed the spoils of war after the battle of Charsianon (979) and donated them to the Georgian monastic community of Athos. Besides, in exchange for the military help, emperor Basileios allowed the Georgians to establish their monastery on Athos.

After discussing the way Davit of Tao benefited from his good relationship with the imperial court and the extent to which the dignity of *kouropalatēs* shaped his authority in the region, a further question arises: Why did Davit support Bardas Phokas? Some scholars have provided an implausible explanation that a personal relationship and friendship between Davit and Bardas Phokas determined his decision to aid the rebel army commander.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, it is believed that Phokas promised Davit hereditary succession for the lands which he had received from Basileios II in exchange for his military aid in 978.¹⁷⁵ That Davit and Phokas had a good relationship or were close friends is not an argument to explain Davit’s abrupt change of position. Neither is it plausible that the territorial acquisition motivated Davit to go against Basileios II.

¹⁷³ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 108.

¹⁷⁴[M. Lordkipanidze] მ. ლორთქიფანიძე, ტაო-კლარჯეთის “ქართველთა სამეფო” [The “Kartvelian Kingdom” of Tao-Klarjeti, *Studies in Georgian History*, vol. 2] (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1973), 480.

T. Greenwood, “Armenian Neighbors (600–1045),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 358.

¹⁷⁵ A recently published dubious monograph by J. Samushia, destined for a broad audience, argues this. See [J. Samushia] ჯ. სამუშია. ბაგრატ III გამაერთიანებელი [Bagrat III the Unifier] (Tbilisi: Palitra Publisher, 2018), 131-32; Lordkipanidze, “‘The Kartvelian Kingdom’ of Tao-Klarjeti,” 480.

Something else encouraged the Iberian *kouropalatēs* to shift his alliance. In order to understand the reason for this, it is essential to understand the context and dynamics of Bardas Phokas' revolt.

The rebellion of Bardas Phokas ensued very soon after Basileios suffered a humiliating defeat in the Balkans at the hands of Bulgarians, which undermined his prestige. The events of the 980s posed a more significant threat to the regime of Basileios than the revolt of Skleros.¹⁷⁶ When Phokas rebelled, he was supported by the majority of senior army commanders and the eastern armies stayed loyal to him, while Basileios II had on his side a few western commanders and a dwindled army.¹⁷⁷ The major battles fought between the rebel commander and the imperial army in the 980s took place in the extreme west of Asia Minor, which was not the case during Skleros' revolt.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, soon after the unrest broke out, Bardas Phokas threatened Constantinople from the Asian side and managed to retain a tight grip on the coast of Asia Minor.¹⁷⁹ Thus, perhaps Davit *kouropalatēs* made a pragmatic choice and supported Phokas because it seemed that the rebel army commander had chances to prevail against the reigning emperor and dethrone him. Davit became engaged in Phokas' revolt right after it began, and he provided the rebel Byzantine army commander with significant military aid. Contemporary literary narratives emphasize that the Iberians [i.e., the Kartvelians] were an integral part of Phokas' army. When the Armenian historian Step'anos Tarōnec'i starts telling the story of the Phokas rebellion, he states that the Byzantine general with the Greek and Iberian forces went against Basileios.¹⁸⁰ Tarōnec'i also says that the Iberian and Phokas' armies fought together against Constantinople for two years.¹⁸¹ The Iberian army even dealt a severe blow to the Byzantine army lead by George Taronites.

After Basileios II won his first, and a decisive victory, with the help of a Rus mercenary army in 989,¹⁸² he could not leave Davit of Tao's treason unanswered. In his struggle for legitimacy

¹⁷⁶ Holmes, *Basil and the Governance of Empire*, 460.

On the relationship between the Bagratids and the Byzantine empire between ninth and the eleventh centuries in English see Z. Papaskiri, "The Byzantine Commonwealth and the International status of the Georgian Political Units in the first half of the tenth century", *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 5, issue 3–4 (2011), 126-144; W. Seibt, "Byzantine Imperialism against Georgia in the later 10th and 11th Centuries?" In *the Annual of Georgian Diplomacy*, vol. 16, ed. R. Metreveli (Tbilisi: National Academy of Georgian Sciences, 2013): 103-114; D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 73-84; M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries* (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), 56-67; C. Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia," 620-21.

¹⁷⁷ Holmes, *Basil and the Governance of Empire*, 460.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 460.

¹⁸⁰ T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i*, 287; Holmes, *Basil and the Governance of Empire*, 481.

¹⁸¹ T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i*, 287.

¹⁸² Holmes, *Basil and the Governance of Empire*, 460.

and prestige, the emperor had to demonstrate that he knew how to handle the foes of the empire. As contemporary sources point out, the furious Basileios marched against Davit. The Iberian *kouropalatēs* was quick to realize that he had no other choice but to appear in the camp of the emperor, perform an act of penance and ask for mercy. More importantly, Davit agreed that after his death his domains would cede to the empire. From then on, Basileios had a legitimate right to assume control over Upper Tao after Davit's death. Thus, Davit was punished by the emperor because he neglected his duty. As a bearer of the prestigious title of *kouropalatēs* and as the emperor's man in the Caucasus, he was expected to support the regime in case of crisis rather than to back a recalcitrant military commander. Considering the significance of Davit's role in this turmoil, he escaped severe punishment. His realm did not become a target of Basileios' punitive campaign and he retained his title of *kouropalatēs*. To prove his loyalty to the emperor, Davit fought against the Muslim states of the Caucasus and strengthened Byzantium's strategic position in the east. Davit consolidated power in the areas of Basean and Lake Van, seized the city of Manzikert, and won a victory against the Rawwadid emir of Azerbaijan.¹⁸³

The Consequences of Phokas' Revolt for the Georgian World

When discussing the alliance of Davit *kouropalatēs* and Bardas Phokas, the question also arises whether Bagrat III backed Phokas? So far, no surviving source implies that Bagrat III provided Phokas with military aid. Some months before Phokas' defeat, the relationship between Bagrat and Davit deteriorated sharply and nearly ended in a large-scale military confrontation. Probably the disagreement concerning the Phokas' rebellion caused this conflict between Bagrat and Davit; it is reasonable to hypothesize that Bagrat III was neutral during Phokas' revolt or even sympathized with Basileios II. The Armenian and Georgian sources say that after the defeat of Phokas, Basileios with his army moved against Davit of Tao and among Georgian rulers only Davit appeared as penitent in the emperor's camp. Had Bagrat III participated in the civil war, Basileios would have wanted to punish him like Davit; at the least we would see Bagrat together with Davit in the camp of the Byzantine emperor.

The *Chronicle of Kartli*, the only Georgian source that discusses the conflict between Bagrat and Davit, gives a dubious explanation for the cause of the disagreement. The Armenian

¹⁸³ T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i*, 300, 303-307.

historian Step‘anos Tarōnec‘i claims that Bagrat devised a cunning stratagem to attack Davit unexpectedly. It seems that Davit learned about Bagrat’s plan and mobilized the army. He asked for assistance from his allies, including the Armenian king Gagik II, who came to his aid.¹⁸⁴ The two armies were ready to engage in battle, but when Bagrat realized that he was outnumbered and could suffer defeat he avoided military confrontation and decided to negotiate with Davit.¹⁸⁵ I am of the opinion that in the course of Phokas’ revolt, emperor Basileios II succeeded in winning the support of Bagrat and persuaded him to attack Davit. In this way the imperial court tried to neutralize Davit, a formidable ally of Phokas. Davit *kouropalatēs* was an influential and powerful ruler and the empire’s ally in the region; therefore, it is doubtful that Bagrat attacked Davit without imperial support and sanction.

The revolt of Bardas Phokas and the second phase of civil unrest in Byzantium had farther-reaching consequences for the Caucasus and particularly for Georgia than has been recognized so far. This event was a threshold that opened a wide gap between the imperial and Bagratid royal courts and set into motion a process which was difficult to reverse. For already the second time within ten years, the Christian rulers of the Caucasus, sided with the rebelling generals rather than with the government in Constantinople. In 976-979, most of the Armenians took part in the Byzantine civil war on the side of Bardas Skleros. Ten years later, Davit *kouropalatēs* provided Bardas Phokas with significant military aid. Basileios learned the lesson during his struggle for power that the Caucasian rulers were dangerous and unreliable partners. By the end of the tenth century, it became increasingly clear that the Byzantine empire’s network of client states, which was supposed to improve the empire’s strategic position in the Caucasus, had failed. Instead, the Caucasian states became a source of instability. Davit’s miscalculation, which had seemed a well-thought-out decision during the revolt, generated a process of the creeping annexation of Georgian territories. Davit’s decision to make the emperor heir of his domains furthermore set a negative precedent which in subsequent decades was employed several times by the imperial court in relations to the Armenian states.¹⁸⁶ Besides, the involvement of Davit *kouropalatēs* and his entourage in Bardas Phokas’ revolt altered the harmonious relationship between him and Bagrat III, which nearly became a large scale and enduring military confrontation. A war between Bagrat

¹⁸⁴ T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step‘anos Tarōnec‘i*, 290-1.

¹⁸⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 268-9; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 276-7.

¹⁸⁶ N. Garsoian, “The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the eleventh Century,” 188-98.

III and Davit would have attracted other Caucasian players and jeopardized a fragile balance of power in the region. The significant part of Davit *kouropalatēs*' domains that had passed to the imperial control after his death created tension between the Bagratid family and the Byzantine imperial court. Three decades later, these debated territories became the cause of a large-scale and devastating war between king Giorgi I (r.1014–1027) and emperor Basileios II and later between Bagrat IV (r.1027–1072) and Konstantinos VIII.

“King and *Kouropalatēs* of the Entire East:” the Royal Image of Bagrat III

After the death of Davit *kouropalatēs* in 1001, Basileios was quick to come to Tao to claim his inheritance.¹⁸⁷ Direct control of these lands seemed the best solution; the emperor decided to neutralize a client-state that had caused problems for the empire. Bagrat III and his father, Gurgen II, king of Lower Tao, avoided military confrontation with the emperor and appeared in his camp.¹⁸⁸ The details of the negotiations between the Georgian rulers and Basileios are unknown, but it seems that the emperor received them well and both Bagratids were granted high-ranking imperial court titles; Bagrat was elevated to the rank of *kouropalatēs* and his father became *magistros*.¹⁸⁹ Sumbat Davitis-ze, in his chronicle, the *Life and Tale of the Bagratids*, claims that by elevating the son to a higher rank than the father Basileios wanted to cause animosity between them and thus trigger internal civil strife in the kingdom. Although the account of the *Life and Tale of the Bagratids* may seem trustworthy, this statement of the chronicle should be viewed with some skepticism.¹⁹⁰ This text was written around the 1030s, soon after the Byzantine-Georgian war, when the relationship between two states was far from perfect. Therefore, it is possible that Sumbat Davitis-ze, a court historian, was biased. The point to be made is that the dignity of the

¹⁸⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 278; Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 312, 481; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood*, 110.

¹⁸⁸ *The Life of Kartli*, 370.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Some scholars believe the account of the *Life and Tale of the Bagratids*, which states that Basileios' “unequal” treatment of the father and son was a well-calculated strategy. The claim of *Life and Tale of the Bagratids* looks more trustworthy when one complements it with the account of Step'anos Tarōnec'i. The Armenian historian relates that after Basileios II departed from the Caucasus, Gurgen II organized a campaign in Tao because he was dissatisfied that he received the dignity of *magistros*. Although Gurgen may have been outraged because he received a lesser dignity, this does not mean that Basileios II intended to cause animosity between the father and son. Besides, it is also difficult to believe that Gurgen organized the campaign in Tao only because he was not happy with his dignity of *magistros*. Gurgen II probably took control over some fortresses in Tao to improve the strategic position of his realm that bordered with ex-domains of Davit *kouropalatēs*. On Step'anos Tarōnec'i's account about Basileios' relationship with Bagrat and Gurgen see T. Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i*, 310.

kouropalatēs was usually granted to the most powerful ruler and the emperor's man in the Caucasus.¹⁹¹ Since in 1001 Bagrat had more political/military weight in the Caucasus than his father Gurgen II, his elevation to the rank of *kouropalatēs* was logical. Through this action, Basileios secured the loyalty of Bagrat III, who had transformed the political landscape of the Georgian world.¹⁹² In 1001, Bagrat was the rightful king of Apxazeti (politically and militarily more formidable than Tao-Klarjeti); he held sway over the principality of Kartli (the heartland of Georgia) and it was only a matter of time before he would take control of his father's domain, Lower Tao. Gurgen II, in contrast, ruled only Lower Tao, a small and decentralized state where he shared power with his semi-independent and influential relatives from the Bagratid clan. In addition to this, Bagrat III was an adopted son of Davit of Tao and he had more right to claim his foster-father's title of *kouropalatēs* than Gurgen II. In these circumstances, Basileios II's decision to grant the title of *kouropalatēs* to the more powerful and prominent ruler was a pragmatic and well-calculated action rather than a cunning strategy to cause discord between the father and son. The imperial court frequently used this method as a way to check and balance various power players in Tao-Klarjeti in order to secure the imperial interest in the region. However, in my view this was not the case in 1001.

Paradoxically, the meeting between Bagrat and Basileios in 1001 is represented in modern Georgian scholarship as an impressive victory for Georgian diplomacy. It is argued that Bagrat, through his diplomatic skills, prevented Byzantine aggression and further expansion into the Georgian lands.¹⁹³ This rather arbitrary judgment, however, cannot withstand criticism. If Basileios had viewed the emerging Georgian state as a significant challenge to the empire's domination in the Caucasus he would have initiated a military campaign or found other means to disrupt its unification. The emperor had enough military and political resources to deal with Bagrat

¹⁹¹ Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold and Rivers of Blood*, 101.

¹⁹² Holmes in her book *Basil and the Governance of Empire* states: "While Basileios was occupied with the Bulgarian war, a powerful Georgian kingdom emerged." One forms the impression from Holmes' statement that the Byzantine imperial court was not aware that the Bagratids were uniting Georgian lands into a single kingdom. It sounds as if the Georgian kingdom emerged almost accidentally, and Basileios faced a new reality after the war with Bulgaria was over. The making of the Georgian kingdom was a long process, however, and the imperial court was well aware that the Bagratids were transforming the Caucasian political map. The only thing that Basileios could not foresee by 1001 was that Bagrat III would attack and annex the kingdom of K'axeti, beyond the sphere of the Byzantine influence and interest. See Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 481.

¹⁹³ [M. Lordkipanidze and Z. Papaskiri] მ. ლორთქიფანიძე და ზ. პაპასკირი, ერთიანი ქართული სახელმწიფოს წარმოქმნა და მისი დიპლომატიური უზრუნველყოფა (The Creation of the Georgian Monarchy and its Diplomacy, *History of Georgian Diplomacy*, vol. I] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1998), 222.

III. Evidence is lacking, however, to speak for Basileios' plans to prevent the consolidation of Georgian lands, nor does there seem to have been hostility towards Bagrat III. It is also challenging to find proof in the sources to support the established view that Basileios wished to expand Byzantium's borders at the expense of Georgian lands. Basileios occupied only part of Upper Tao, while the rest of it was given to Bagrat in lifetime possession. One could speculate that by dividing Tao into imperial and Bagratid zones, Basileios wanted to keep the emerging Georgian kingdom in check. Close reading of the sources, however, shows that Basileios seems to have felt comfortable with the existing balance of power and the relationship between two states was peaceful until the death of Bagrat, c.1014.

For Bagrat III, the first king of an all-Georgian kingdom, the dignity of *kouropalatēs* played an essential role in shaping his royal image. In surviving sources, Bagrat is almost always referred to as “king and *kouropalatēs*.” The royal court took good care to publicize Bagrat's authority all over Georgia through various media, including inscriptions. Two inscriptions on the church of C'vimoeti refer to Bagrat III. A text on the eastern wall of the church acclaims Bagrat as “invincible Bagrat, king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians and *kouropalatēs*.” A text on the western wall reads: “Christ have mercy and glorify the one whom you have crowned, Bagrat king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians and the great *kouropalatēs* of the entire east.”¹⁹⁴ Although these two inscriptions were made in the same year (ca.1002), the royal entitulation of Bagrat III varies. A standard formula, “king and *kouropalatēs*,” is used in the first instance, but the other text is more rhetorical, accentuating Bagrat's kingship by the grace of God and using eulogistic epithet of “the *kouropalatēs* of the entire East.” As noted elsewhere, “*kouropalatēs* of the entire East” was first coined during Davit of Tao's rule and Bagrat adopted this eulogistic phrase of his foster father to demonstrate his own elevated position in the Caucasus. By the end of his reign, Bagrat had consolidated his power over all the Georgian speaking lands and his entitulation was modified. The inscription on K'acxi church (1010/14) refers to the Georgian king in the following way: “Holy Trinity, glorify the one crowned by you, Bagrat king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Taoians, K'axetians, and Ranians, and great *kouropalatēs* of the entire East.”¹⁹⁵ In addition to these inscriptions, a royal charter of *katholikos*-patriarch Melqisedek is relevant as it offers the view of

¹⁹⁴ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 143.

¹⁹⁵ *Lapidary Inscriptions II*, 56.

Bagrat's royal image. The charter demonstrates a fair bit of inconsistency when it comes to Bagrat III's royal titles. In the main text of this long charter, the head of the Georgian church refers to king Bagrat III twice, in both cases as "Bagrat *kouropalatēs*." In contrast, the Byzantine emperors, Basileios II and Konstantinos VIII, are referred to as "Basil, Greek king" and "Konstantine, king of the Greeks." From the main text, one may suspect that the *katholikos*-patriarch of the Georgian Church maintained a hierarchy between the Byzantine emperors and the Georgian king and rendered more respect to the former than to the latter. The matters become clearer at the end of the charter, however, where Melqisedek signs and validates the document. There he refers to Bagrat as "exalted by God, a powerful Bagrat, king of the Apxazians and by the will of God *kouropalatēs* of the entire East."¹⁹⁶ In the same charter where Bagrat III puts his signature, however, he refers to himself more modestly: "king of the Apxazians and *kouropalatēs*."¹⁹⁷ Despite minor inconsistencies, "king and *kouropalatēs*" or "king and *kouropalatēs* of the entire East" was the standard formula that expressed Bagrat's authority.

In contrast to Davit of Tao, Bagrat minted a relatively different coin that contained neither Christian imagery nor emphasized his Byzantine court title of *kouropalatēs*. His coin was bi-lingual, Georgian and Arabic, and Islamic in outlook. While the Arabic legend on the coin obverse hails Allah and Muhamad as his messenger, an abbreviated inscription in Georgian on the coin reverse refers to Bagrat: "Christ exalt Bagrat, king of the Apxazians."¹⁹⁸

2.3 From *Nōbelissimos* to *Kaisar*: Byzantine Court Titles in the Visual and Verbal Rhetoric of King Bagrat IV and King Giorgi II

Georgian rulers' self-representation through high-ranking Byzantine court titles reached a new level during the reign of Bagrat IV (r.1027–1072), the first Bagratid king to become *nōbelissimos* and *sebastos*. In order to communicate his image as a bearer of prestigious imperial court titles, Bagrat minted innovative bi-lingual, Georgian-Greek silver coins (Fig.1). His silver coins are only extant in forty specimens, which is relatively few in contrast to the 163 Byzantine coins issued by Bagrat's contemporary emperors which have been discovered in modern-day

¹⁹⁶ *Corpus of the eleventh- and the thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 30.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹⁸ For a more detailed description of the coin see G. Dundua and T. Dundua, *Georgian Numismatics: Part One*, 190; D. Kapanadze, *Georgian Numismatics*, 61-62; E. Pakhomov, *Georgian Coins*, 55-56.

Georgia.¹⁹⁹ The first issue includes all the coins on which Bagrat IV is called *nōbelissimos*; coins of the second issue are those which designate him as *sebastos*.²⁰⁰ Before proceeding with further analysis of Bagratid coinage, it is vital to discuss briefly Byzantine coin finds in Georgia.

Archeological evidence indicates that between the fifth and the seventh centuries Byzantine coinage circulated widely in the western part of Georgia, while eastern Georgia was integrated into the Sasanian silver-based monetary system. From the seventh century, because of the Arab conquest of the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire, the circulation of Byzantine coins on the territory of Georgia declined drastically. From the second half of the tenth century, however, after Byzantium launched an offensive in the east, dissemination of Byzantine coins in Georgia increased, reaching a peak in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Approximately 300 eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine coins have been found on the territory of Georgia.

It is not exaggerated to claim that Georgia (especially the western regions) was integrated into the Byzantine monetary system in Late Antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages. Moreover, it seems that the Byzantine *nomisma* was the primary medium of exchange in the eleventh-century Georgian kingdom. This can be corroborated by evidence attested in the royal charters which Bagratid kings issued to the monasteries. According to the charters, the Bagratid kings donated large sums of money to the monasteries in Byzantine *nomisma* rather than in Georgian silver coins.²⁰¹



¹⁹⁹ T. Dundua, and G. Dundua, *Georgian Numismatics*, 184-87.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁰¹ *Corpus of the Eleventh- and Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 32-51.

Figure 1. The first issue specimen of Bagrat’s bi-lingual silver coin

Obverse: The bust of Theotokos who wears a pallium and maphorium. On the left and right side of the image, is an abbreviated Greek inscription: Ἡ ΑΓΙΑ ΘΗΚΟΣ - “The holy mother of God.”

Reverse: An abbreviated inscription in Georgian: ԻՄԾԾԻԳԼԻՔՄԲԵՇԺՓԻ – “Christ, exalt Bagrat king of the Apxazians.” In the center in three lines, non-abbreviated: ԾՇԽՕ/ԻԻԵԻԵԻ/ԺՕՆԻ – “and *nōbelissimos*.”

Bagrat IV’s silver coin was innovative for several reasons. First and foremost, it was inspired by the *miliarēSION* of Konstantinos IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055). The images of the Theotokos on Byzantine *miliarēSION* and the Georgian coin have a striking resemblance. It should be noted that the image of Theotokos and Greek legend appeared first on the Georgian coinage. The other essential novelty was the appearance of Bagrat’s long entitulature on the coin’s reverse. While the abbreviated “Christ, exalt Bagrat king of the Abkhazians” is inscribed around the margins, the non-abbreviated “and *nōbelissimos*” is placed in the center of the reverse (Fig.1). I contend that the central location of *nōbelissimos* on the coin reverse indicates that Bagrat wanted to bring to the fore his Byzantine dignity more than a Georgian royal title. He had good reasons to do so, as he was the first Georgian ruler to be promoted to such a high rank. The *nōbelissimos* was a high-ranking dignity in the Byzantine court hierarchy; in the *Klētorologion* of Philotheos (ca. 899) it is ranked second after *kaisar*. *De Ceremoniis* provides a detailed description of the ceremony that accompanied the elevation of a person to the dignity of *nōbelissimos*. According to *De Ceremoniis*, the ceremony was to take place in the Tribunal of the Hall of the Nineteen Couches, in the presence of the emperor, a patriarch, court officials, and army units. The emperor himself put a gold chlamys on the candidate and by doing so confirmed the candidate’s elevation to the court hierarchy. At the end of the ceremony, the *nōbelissimos*, similarly to the emperor and *kaisar*, received an acclamation.²⁰² After the completion of the acclamation, the emperor, *kaisar*, and *nōbelissimos* entered the Hall of the Nineteen Couches and took their seats. The *nōbelissimos* sat next to the *kaisar*, who was placed on the right-hand side of the emperor.²⁰³ Until the first half of the eleventh century, this dignity was reserved only for the members of the imperial family, but

²⁰² *Constantine Porphyrogenetos: The Book of Ceremonies 2*, 226-227.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 227.

nōbelissimos was conferred on leading military commanders from the end of the eleventh century.²⁰⁴

Probably Bagrat's silver coins, like the Byzantine *miliarēsiōn*, were distributed during ceremonies and their primary goal was to communicate the king's authority through the abbreviated entitulation to the upper stratum of society: aristocrats, courtiers, and high-ranking ecclesiastics. Bagrat likely minted this silver coin soon after he received the title of *nōbelissimos*, but it is not clear when and under what circumstances he was promoted to this rank. The earliest source that calls Bagrat *nōbelissimos* is the inscription on the Avlar church (ca. 1050) that says: "We exalt our king Bagrat *nōbelissimos* and his son Giorgi *kouropalatēs*..."²⁰⁵ The Georgian ruler seems to have used various communication media to propagate his newly acquired title among the aristocracy and high-ranking ecclesiastics to inform them of his elevated status in imperial court hierarchy. Maybe he hoped that this prestigious court title would help him increase his authority and persuade the target audience that he enjoyed the support of the Byzantine emperor. Furthermore, Bagrat may have wished to celebrate the improvement in Byzantine-Georgian relations and stress his respect for the reigning emperor, Konstantinos IX Monomachos. New silver coinage minted in imitation of Konstantinos' *miliarēsiōn* with the Byzantine court title was a gesture to assure the emperor of Bagrat's loyalty and good intentions. A concise background of Georgian-Byzantine affairs will shed light on why Bagrat IV wanted to improve his relationship with Konstantinos IX.

From his father, Giorgi I (r.1014–1027), Bagrat IV inherited uneasy relations with the Byzantine empire which did not improve during the first half of his reign. One cause of conflict between Byzantium and the Georgian kingdom was a territorial dispute over Upper Tao, which had been annexed to the Byzantine empire during the reign of Basileios II.²⁰⁶ While Basileios II was engaged in a long-drawn war with the Bulgarians, Giorgi I decided to take control over the former domains of Davit of Tao. After Basileios II settled the matter in the Balkans, he marched against the Bagratid king; Giorgi I's attempts to recapture these territories ended in a large-scale war with Byzantium. Conflict with the empire had a devastating effect on the Georgian kingdom;

²⁰⁴ *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. II, ed. A. Kazhdan (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1490.

²⁰⁵ [G. Gagoshidze] გ. გაგოშიძე, ბაგრატ IV ნოველისიმოსი: 1050 წლის უცნობი წარწერა თრიალეთიდან (Bagrat IV *Nōbelissimos*: an unknown inscription from Trialeti, c. 1050) (Essays of the Georgian National Museum IX, 2004), 50.

²⁰⁶ Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 2.

Giorgi suffered severe defeat, and the imperial army ravaged the southern regions of his realm. As a consequence, Giorgi was not only forced to negotiate peace with emperor Basileios II and recognize the Byzantine claim over the contested territories but to hand over Bagrat, his three-year-old son and heir to the throne as a hostage. Small Bagrat spent three years of his childhood at the imperial court and could only leave for Georgia when Basileios was on his death-bed.²⁰⁷

The relations between the Byzantine empire and Georgia went from bad to worse after the accession of Konstantinos VIII. From contemporary Georgian sources one gets an impression that the imperial court began to undermine the regime of Bagrat IV after the death of Basileios. The *Chronicle of Kartli* tells the following story:

After the death of the great king Giorgi, immediately Bagrat became king ... at the same time the nobles of Tao departed for Greece, Vac'e son of Karici, and Iovane bishop of Bana, accompanied by a multitude of nobles from Tao. King Constantine, at the beginning of the year, dispatched a *parakoimōmenos* with an innumerable army; he came and halted (there), and ravaged the lands which king Basil had already devastated. He advanced to the fortress below Klde-Karni in Trialeti... when the *parakoimōmenos* saw that he was unable to inflict any damage he turned back.²⁰⁸

The imperial army under the command of a *parakoimōmenos* from Trialeti retreated to the southern-western regions of Šavšeti and Klarjeti and succeeded in creating political turmoil there. As a consequence, more aristocrats switched their alliance from Bagrat IV to Konstantinos VIII and surrendered their fortresses to the Byzantine army. While the Bagratid crown's authority collapsed in Šavšeti, the defense of the region was entirely initiated by the local players who remained loyal to Bagrat IV. Saba, bishop of Šavšeti, converted one of the fortresses into his power base from where he and his supporters harassed the Byzantine forces and Georgian aristocrats loyal to the empire.

When Saba, bishop of Tbet'i saw that there was no other remedy in Šavšeti, he constructed the fortress at the entrance of Tbet'i, took control of the land of Šavšeti, and made a grand alliance with Bagrat, king of the Ap'xaz. God honored him and

²⁰⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 288-9; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 284.

²⁰⁸ *The Life of Kartli*, 291; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 286: შემდგომად მიცვალეზისა დიდისა მეფისა გიორგისსა, მასვე ჟამსა მეფე იქმნა ბაგრატ ყოველსა მამულსა და სემეფოსა მისსა ზედა...მასვე ჟამსა წარვიდეს აზნაურნი ტაოელნი საბერძნეთს: ვაჩე კარიჭის-ძე და ბანელი ეპისკოპოსი იოვანე, და მათ თანა სიმრავლე აზნაურთა ტაოელთა. ხოლო კონსტანტინე მეფემან მოქცევასა ოდენ წელიწადისასა გამოგზავნა პარკიმანოზი ლაშქრითა ურიცხვთა, მოვიდა და ჩამოდგ; და მოაოხრნა იგივე ქვეყანანი, რომელნი ბასილი მეფესა მოეოხრნეს. მოვიდა თრიალეთს ციხესა ქუეშე კლდე-კართსა...რაჟამს იხილა პარკიმანოზმან, რომელ ვერას ავნებდა, შეიქცა გარე.

did not deliver the land to the enemy. For at that time *parakoimōmenos* and *proedros* dispatched Iovane of Bana the *chartularios*, accompanied by Valangi with a large army, and also Demetre of Klarjeti, son of Sumbat as if to take the populace of the land. By this means many of the humble people of the land were swayed ... in those times there occurred in these regions many battles, tumults, comings and goings. But although the land was greatly troubled, yet God honored Bagrat, king of the Ap'xaz and Kartvelians. A mortal illness befell king Constantine. He wrote to the *parakoimōmenos proedros* and summoned him back.²⁰⁹

Modern scholars from Georgia inspired by the account of the *Chronicle of Kartli*, constructed a narrative according to which the newly created Georgian kingdom became a victim of Byzantine imperialism and aggression.²¹⁰ The eleventh-century Armenian historian, Aristakes Lastiverc'i, however, tells a different story. He relates that emperor Konstantinos, whom he characterizes as peace-loving and benevolent, sent the eunuch Niketas to Georgia, who managed to persuade many local nobles to abandon their domains and travel to Constantinople. Aristakes, however, does not mention any military operation initiated by the government of Constantinople against Bagratid Georgia. Neither the biased and anti-Byzantine *Chronicle of Kartli* nor the more balanced account of Aristakes mentions exactly what triggered Konstantinos' harsh measures against the Georgian kingdom. Yahia of Antioch is the only author that tells the whole story about the Byzantine-Georgian conflict in the post-1025 period. According to Yahia, after the death of Giorgi I, a young Bagrat was persuaded by his entourage that it was a high time for him to take control of the lands his father, Giorgi, had ceded to Basileios.²¹¹ It seems that the

²⁰⁹ *The Life of Kartli*, 292-3; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 287: რაჭამს იხილა საბა, მტბევარმან ეპისკოპოსმან, რომელ შავშეთს არღარა იყო სხუა ღონე, ააგო ციხე თავსა ზედა ტბეთისასა, დაიჭირა ქუეყანა შავშეთისა, ქმნა დიდი ერთგულობა ბაგრატ აფხაზთა მეფისათვის. პატივ-სცა ღმერთმან / და ვერ წარუღეს ქუეყანა მტერთა. რამეთუ მას ჟამსა გაგზავნა პარკიმანოზმან და პროედროსმან იოვანე ბანელი ხარტულარი, წარიყვანა თანა ვალანგი ლაშქრითა დიდითა, და მისცა თანა დემეტრე კლრაჯი, ძე სუმბატისი, რეცა შესატყუევნელად ქუეყანისა კაცთათვის, და ამით მიზეზითა მოიქცეს მრავალნი კაცნი მის ქუეყანისანი წურილისა ერისაგან ... და მათ ჟამთა ქუეყანათა ამთ შინა იქმნეს ბრძოლანი და შულლნი და მი-და-მონი მრავალნი. და ვითარ დიდად იღელვებოდა ქუეყანა ესე, კუალადცა პატივ-სცა ღმერთმან ბაგრატს, აფხაზთა და ქართველთა მეფესა. ეწია სენი სასიკუდიანე კონსტანტინე მეფესა. მოუწერა პარკიმანოზს პროედროსსა, უხმო შეღმართ.

²¹⁰ [J. Samushia] ჯ. სამუშია. ბაგრატ IV [Bagrat IV] (Tbilisi: Palitra L, 2019), 28-36, and 90; M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, 61-2; W. Seibt, "Byzantine Imperialism against Georgia in the later 10th and 11th Centuries?" 107-8.

²¹¹ [The Account of Yahia of Antioch on the Byzantine-Georgian relationship from the end of the tenth to the first quarter of the eleventh century] ბ. სილაგაძე. იაჰია ანტიოქიელის ცნობები საქართველო-ბიზანტიის ურთიერთობების შესახებ X ს. ბოლოს და XI ს. პირველ მეოთხედში, Arabic text ed. and Georgian trans. B. Silagadze (*Georgian Source Studies*, VI, Tbilisi, 1986), 118; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 157.

Georgian army attacked imperial possessions in Tao and occupied some fortresses. In this way, the Bagratid crown decided to put the new regime of Konstantinos to the test and violated the treaty signed by Basileios and Giorgi in 1022. Thus, Konstantinos' "aggression" was nothing but retaliation aiming to take back the territories in Tao as well as to punish the Bagratid crown for breaking the truce. Konstantinos had other reasons to mistrust the ambitious Bagratids. In 1025, soon after Basileios' death, Nikephoros Komnenos, a *doux* of recently annexed Vaspurakan, joined king Giorgi in plotting against Konstantinos. But Komnenos did not succeed in raising a revolt against the emperor; he and his supporters were arrested by imperial officials.²¹² King Giorgi had signed a peace treaty with Basileios three years before this event promising him to cease hostilities against the empire. During his reign Giorgi made multiple attempts to forge a coalition against Basileios II. The Bagratid king cemented an anti-imperial alliance with local Caucasian rulers, backed the rebellion of Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias in 1021, and negotiated with the notorious al-Hakim, promising him military assistance in an imminent war with the Byzantine empire.²¹³

After the death of Konstantinos in 1028, the Bagratid court used the regime change as an opportunity to negotiate with the new emperor. Mariam, queen-regent during the minority of her son Bagrat IV, with *katholikos*-patriarch Melqisedek, traveled to Constantinople in 1031.²¹⁴ "Queen Mariam, the mother of Bagrat, king of the Abkhazians, went to Greece to seek peace and concord, as well as to obtain the title of *kouropalatēs* for her son, as is the custom and rule in their house."²¹⁵ This episode in the *Chronicle of Kartli* is interesting because it highlights the value the dignity of *kouropalatēs* had for the Bagratids and how this family claimed a hereditary right to possess this court title. The fact that Mariam secured the title of *kouropalatēs* for her son was probably considered a great success of her diplomatic mission. In the imperial capital, the Georgian queen not only managed to come to terms with emperor Romanos III, but she also succeeded in arranging an inter-dynastic marriage between the Bagratid and Argyroi families. As a result, Helena Argyrina, the emperor's niece, was betrothed to Bagrat. For the first time the Bagratids got

²¹² *Повествование варданета Арустаха Ласкуверу*, 70; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 156.

²¹³ A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 130.

²¹⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 294-5.

²¹⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 294; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 288: წარვიდა დედოფალი მარიამ, დედა ბაგრატის, აფხაზთა მეფისა, საბერძნეთად მიებად მშვიდობისა და ერთობისა, და კუალად მიებად პატივისა კურაპალატობისა მისათეს თვისსა, ვითარცა არს ჩვეულება და წესი სახლისა მათისა.

an opportunity to establish kinship ties with the imperial family, which enhanced their prestige. The marriage, however, was short-lived because Helena died several months later.

The first significant crack between Georgia and Byzantium after a relatively peaceful period happened in the 1030s, when Bagrat's half-brother, Demetre, escaped to Constantinople. Demetre was promoted to the rank of *magistros* at the imperial court, and in exchange, he handed over his patrimony, the strategically important castle of Anak'opia on the Black Sea littoral and adjacent territories to the empire. "From then on, up until the present time, Anako'pi has passed out of control of the king of Ap'xaz."²¹⁶ Thus, the Byzantine empire managed to occupy the north-western part of the Georgian kingdom and establish a stronghold there.

After the accession of Konstantinos IX Monomachos, matters got worse and the imperial court used all possible means to undermine Bagrat IV's authority. When Bagrat came into conflict with the influential aristocrat Lip'arit, duke of K'ldk'ari, the imperial court was quick to secure Lip'arit's loyalty and provide him with military and political support. From this time onwards, Lip'arit served as an imperial agent, a deadly rival of Bagrat and threat to his regime.

*After a short time Liparit brought back from Greece Bagrat's brother Demetre, with a royal Greek army [my emphasis]. Certain other magnates and nobles joined them. They came to the Upper Land and entered K'art'li. The besieged Ateni and ravaged various parts of K'art'li. The Kaxs and Greeks aided Liparit, but they were unable to take Ateni because the commanders of the fortresses were firm in their loyalty to Bagrat ... The time of winter has arrived; the Greeks wished to withdraw. Liparit came to terms with king of Ab'xaz ... The Greeks returned to Greece and took Demetre with them.*²¹⁷

With these actions, Byzantium began open war against Georgia. Modern scholars usually argue that the Byzantine emperors pursued an aggressive policy towards Bagrat because they feared that the Georgian kingdom had become too powerful and independent during his rule.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ *The Life of Kartli*, 295; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 288: და მიერთგან წარუხდა ანაკოფია აფხაზთა მეფესა მოაქაჟამადმდე.

²¹⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 298; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 290-1: შემდგომად მცირედისა ჟამისა გამოიყვანა ლიპარიტ დემეტრე, ძმა ბაგრატისი, საბერძნეთით ბერძენთა მეფისა ლაშქრითა. და მიერთნეს სხუანიცა ვინმე დიდებულნი და აზნაურნი, მოვლეს ზემო ქუეყანა და ჩამოვიდეს ქართლს, მოადგეს ატენს, არე-არე მოწუეს ქართლი. და ჰყვეს ლიპარიტს კახნი და ბერძენნი, და ვერ წაიღეს ატენი რამეთუ ციხეთა უფალნი კაცნი მტკიცე იყვნეს ერთგულობასა ზედა ბაგრატისსა...არე ზამთრისა მოწევნულ იყო; ბერძენთა ენება შეღმართ წასვლა. დაეზავა ლიპარიტ აფხაზთა მეფესა; უბოძა მეფემან ქართლის ერისთაობა. წარვიდეს ბერძენნი საბერძნეთად და წარიტანეს დემეტრე თანა.

²¹⁸ [M. Lordkipanidze] საქართველოს შინაპოლიტიკური და საგარეო ვითარება Xს. 80-იანი წლებიდან XIს. 80-იან წლებამდე [The Internal and External Affairs of Georgia from the 980s to 1080s] *Studies in Georgian History*

This assumption is partially based on the interpretation of the *Chronicle of Kartli*, which uses anti-Byzantine rhetoric and blames the emperor for instigating civil war in Georgia but never mentions the reason why Konstantinos confronted Bagrat. The account of Ioannes Zonaras adds clarity; this Byzantine author points out that Bagrat broke the truce and attacked the imperial possession in Tao.²¹⁹ Twice, in the 1020s and the 1030s, Bagrat and his supporters pursued a persistent but dangerous strategy to gain control over certain areas of Upper Tao, by that time an integral part of the *katepanate* of Iberia.

The truce between Bagrat and Lip‘arit did not last long. Lip‘arit again brought Demetre from Constantinople, with “treasure and the army of the Greek king” and the civil war continued with ferocity.²²⁰ This time Bagrat started to experience more difficulties and it is hard to say how things might have developed if the Seljuk Turks had not captured Lip‘arit at the battle of Kapetron in 1048,²²¹ when Lip‘arit participated in a Byzantine expedition against the Seljuk Turks as an ally of Konstantinos.

After a year passed the Turks of Sultan Barahimilami²²² appeared in the land of Basean. The army of the king of the Greeks set out, and they summoned Liparit. Liparit came to the assistance of the Greeks with all the forces of the Upper region. They came to grips below Ordo and Ukumi. The Turks routed the entire army of the Greek and of Liparit. There was a great slaughter, and Liparit was captured and taken to the sultan in Xorasan.²²³

After Lip‘arit’s imprisonment the main obstacle for Bagrat to negotiate with the emperor was neutralized. Most likely, Bagrat used to his advantage the imperial court’s concern caused by

III (Tbilisi, 1979), 148-9; M. Lordkipanidze and Z. Papaskiri, “The Creation of the Georgian Monarchy and its Diplomacy,” 241; J. Samushia, *Bagrat IV*, 90-1.

²¹⁹ *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome Historiarum*, 139.

²²⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, 300; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 293.

²²¹ On the battle of Kapetron see: A. Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130* (London: Routledge, 2017), 74-80. Beihammer is wrong to assume that Lip‘arit participated in this battle on the Byzantine side because of the military/political alliance between king Bagrat IV and Konstantinos IX. Beihammer seems not to be aware of Georgian context; king Bagrat and Lip‘arit were rivals and later was a Trojan Horse in the hands of imperial court to undermine Bagrat’s power. By 1048 Lip‘arit and Bagrat were deadly rivals, and Lip‘arit participated in the campaign as the emperor’s man.

²²² i.e. Ibrahim Inal

²²³ *The Life of Kartli*, 302; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 294: და შემდგომად წელიწადსა მოქცევისა გამოჩნდეს თურქნი სულტნისანი ბარაჰიმლიმისანი ქუეყანასა ბასიანისასა. გამოვიდა ბერძენთა მეფის ლაშქარი, და უხმეს ლიპარიტს. და წარვიდა ლიპარიტ შუელად ბერძენთა ყოვლითა ლაშქრითა ამის ზედაის კერძისათა. შეიბნეს ორდორსა და უკუმისა ქუემოთ, და გააქციეს ყოველი სპა საბერძნეთისა და ლიპარიტისა თურქთა. იქმნა მოსვრა დიდი, და შეიპყრეს ლიპარიტ და წარიყვანეს ხუარსანსა სულტანს თანა.

the Seljuk threat and offered military service to the emperor. As early as 1049, Bagrat IV with his troops joined the Byzantine army to attack the Seljuks:

The Turks had halted in the land of Ganja and intended to take Ganja. The king of the Greeks dispatched his representative *lictor* with a large army. They summoned Bagrat with all his forces; he joined them, and they attacked the Turks. They reached the gate of Ganja and Turks withdrew. So they delivered the land of Ganja safely and returned safely.²²⁴

It seems that Bagrat was elevated to the rank of *nōbelissimos* because he participated in the imperial expedition against the Seljuks at the emperor's request. This was a way for the government of Constantinople to compensate for the loss of Lip'arit and its military resources by brokering a temporary peace with the Georgian king. Bagrat IV may have thought that he had secured Konstantinos' favor, but the emperor paid ransom to the Seljuk sultan to arrange Lip'arit's release from captivity: "Because he had been taken prisoner on account of his serving the Greek king, he went to Greece and visited the king of the Greeks. He received troops from the Greek king, so Bagrat was unable to resist him."²²⁵ It seems that after Lip'arit's return from Constantinople matters went out of control in the kingdom and Bagrat decided to travel to the imperial capital to negotiate personally with the emperor to avoid further weakening of his power. Bagrat was perfectly aware that without imperial support Lip'arit had little chance of causing trouble of this scale. In Constantinople, a grave disappointment awaited Bagrat. Not only did he fail to persuade Konstantinos IX to stop supporting Lip'arit, but he was detained and kept as an "honorable guest" at the imperial court for three years (ca.1051–1054). Meanwhile, Lip'arit became the de facto ruler of Georgia by securing his appointment as a tutor to Bagrat's son, prince Giorgi (future Giorgi II).²²⁶

The other reason that contributed to the growing animosity between Konstantinos and Bagrat was latter's decision to confront the empire in Armenia. As contemporary sources attest, while the Byzantine army was advancing in the kingdom of Ani with the aim of annexing it to the

²²⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 302; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 295: და დადგომილ იყვნეს განძას ქუეყანასა თურქნი, და წასაღებლად მიეწურა განძა. გამოგზავნა თავისა ნაცვლად ბერძენთა მეფემან ლისტური ლაშქრითა დიდითა, და აწვეს ბაგრატ ყოვლითა ლაშქრითა მისითა, და წაჰყვა თანა. დაემართნეს თურქთა; და მივიდეს განძას კარსა, და მირიდეს თურქთა და დაარჩინეს განძისა ყვეყანა და შემოიქცეს მშვიდობით.

²²⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 303; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 295: განძლიერდა ლიპარიტ, რამეთუ მსახურებისათვის ბერძენთა მეფისა ტყუე-ქმინილი იყო; წარვიდა საბერძნეთს, და ნახა ბერძენთა მეფე, და მოირთო ბერძენთა მეფისგან ძალი. და ვერღარა დაუდგა ბაგრატ.

²²⁶ *The Life of Kartli*, 303; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 295-6.

empire, the citizens of Ani appealed to Bagrat and asked him to take the city under his control. Bagrat accepted the offer and sent his representatives and Queen Mother Mariam to Ani.²²⁷ Some scholars have suggested that by this move Bagrat IV aimed to halt the Byzantine advance,²²⁸ but, it is unlikely that Bagrat thought that he would be able to confront and challenge the Byzantine military machine with his resources. Therefore, it is not entirely clear what the Bagratid king wanted to achieve by sending assistance to Ani, but what can certainly be argued is that his decision added fuel to the fire and must have caused irritation at the imperial court.

One should not rule out the possibility that in the period when Byzantium was a crucial player in the Caucasus, the emergence of Georgian kingdom could have caused concerns at the imperial court. Modern scholars from Georgia, however, push to the extremes and claim that the government of Constantinople was hostile to the Bagratids because the state they governed became so powerful that the Byzantine empire was fearful of losing its position in the Caucasus.²²⁹ How powerful Georgian kingdom was in the eleventh century does not matter; it simply could not have been a counterweight to the Byzantine empire. Furthermore, it is difficult to find evidence that supports the traditional viewpoint that the court in Constantinople perceived the Georgian kingdom as a challenge to its domination in the Caucasus. Neither can one accept the commonly held belief that the Byzantine empire during reign of Basileios II and his successors wanted to expand imperial territory at the expense of Georgian lands. Certain scholars even claim that the conflicts that ensued between the Bagratids and court of Constantinople was caused by the latter's attempts to destroy the Georgian kingdom and annex it to the Byzantine empire like the Armenian states of Taron, Vaspurakan and Ani.²³⁰

I question the traditional assumption because careful reading of contemporary sources shows that the conflicts between the Bagratids and the government of Constantinople was

²²⁷*The Life of Kartli*, 299; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 291.

²²⁸ [Z. Papaskiri] ზ. პაპასკირი, ერთიანი ქართული ფეოდალური სახელმწიფოს წარმოქმნა და საქართველოს საგარეო-პოლიტიკური მდგომარეობის ზოგიერთი საკითხი [The Emergence of United Georgian Feudal State and Some Questions of Georgia's Foreign Policy] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1990), 159.

²²⁹ [J. Samushia] ჯ. სამუშია. საქართველო-ბიზანტიის სამხედრო კონფრონტაცია გიორგი I-ის დროს, 1014-1019 [Military confrontation between Georgia and Byzantium during the reign of Giorgi I, 1014–1019] *Annual of Georgian Diplomacy, vol.11* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2004), 43.

²³⁰ Z. Papaskiri, *Emergence of United Georgian Feudal State and Some Questions of Georgia's Foreign Policy*, 150-51. About annexation of Armenian states see: A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 243-44, and 248-50; N. Garsoian, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the eleventh Century," 188-98.

territorial dispute over Upper Tao rather than the imperial court's "strategy" to weaken the Georgian kingdom, allegedly a geopolitical rival of the empire in the Caucasus. In the first half of the eleventh century the main goal of Constantinople was to have a loyal regime in Georgia in order to secure Upper Tao from Bagratid encroachments.

2.4 The Rise of the Seljuk Turks and Shift in Byzantine-Georgian Relations

Bagrat IV's stay in Constantinople (1051–54) would probably have lasted longer had it not been for sudden changes on the eastern frontier of the Byzantine empire. In 1054, the Seljuk Turks mastered a large army under the leadership of sultan Ṭughril Beg and invaded a vast area from Theodosiopolis to Lake Van.²³¹ Unlike the previous incursion, in 1054 Ṭughril Beg pursued a clear-cut strategy, aiming at imposing his authority over the leaders of Muslim polities along the Byzantine frontier before moving into Byzantium.²³² By these actions, Ṭughril Beg attempted to undermine the Byzantine network of vassal potentates. The gradual emergence of the Seljuks as a supra-regional power posed a threat not only to the Byzantine empire but the Georgian kingdom as well. The fact that the imperial government in Constantinople was alarmed by the new development in the east is reflected in the imperial court's decision to send *akolouthos* Michael to the eastern frontier. His primary duty was to gather Frankish and Varangian mercenary forces in the provinces of Chaldia and Iberia.²³³ Moreover, by Konstantinos IX's order, some units of the imperial army were transferred to the eastern frontier.²³⁴ As has been argued, Constantinople was well aware of the precarious situation that Ṭughril Beg's campaign created in the east and the imperial court took active measures to handle the problem.²³⁵

This context explains why Konstantinos suddenly released Bagrat IV from honorable captivity in 1054. Probably Bagrat persuaded the emperor and his entourage that in this changed geopolitical situation it would serve the imperial interest to secure an alliance with him and use his military resources against the Turks rather than to keep him as a hostage in Constantinople. An increased Seljuk threat and a gradual shift in the balance of power in the east raised Bagrat's

²³¹ D. Korobeinikov, "Raiders and Neighbours: the Turks," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 699; A. Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130* (London: Routledge, 2017), 80.

²³² Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 80.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 83.

²³⁴ Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 102.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

military/political value and finally changed Constantinople's policy towards the Georgian kingdom. No further information is extant on the nature of the Georgian-Byzantine military alliance nor the way this alliance was put into action. It seems, however, that improved relations with the imperial court opened new opportunities for king Bagrat to impose his authority over other Caucasian rulers. In 1054, Bagrat with his army, marched against the bellicose Shaddādid emir of Ganja and managed to reduce Ganja to the status of a vassal. Furthermore, Bagrat IV also subdued Aysartan I (1054-84), king of K'axeti, and K'virik'e I of Lori and turned them into the client rulers. By the end of the 1050s, Bagrat had managed to create a web of client rulers and become a powerful Christian ruler in the Caucasus. I believe that Bagrat's political/military achievements and his growing authority were the results of his improved relations with the imperial government. Maybe he returned from Constantinople with financial means and with military aid that enabled him to reinforce his positions inside and outside his domains. By 1057 he seems to have felt confident about his position in the Caucasus. A royal charter that Bagrat issued to Šio-Myvime (ca. 1057), one of the largest Georgian monasteries, reflects his elevated status as an ally of the Byzantine empire. In this charter, Bagrat IV proudly styles himself "king of the Apxazians and *nōbelissimos* of the entire East."²³⁶ As pointed out elsewhere, the formula "*kouropalatēs* of the entire East," had been coined during Davit III of Tao's rule and ever since then Bagratid rulers had styled themselves in this way.

Even though Byzantine-Georgian relations improved after ca. 1054, the imperial court was still not sure about king Bagrat IV. When empress Theodora assumed sole rulership in 1055, she requested hostages from him. Georgian historiographical narratives are silent on this issue, but the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite* tells that empress Theodora asked Bagrat to send his daughter Marta (the future Maria of Alania) to her so that she could raise her as her daughter. So the Georgian king joyfully fulfilled the wish of the empress and sent Marta with some members of his household to the imperial capital.²³⁷ Interestingly, the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite* does not even hint that empress Theodora requested hostages from Bagrat: Marta and members of his household. As already pointed out, the *Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite* narrates an amicable and friendly relationship between the imperial court and Bagrat IV. Another example also highlights that the imperial court had an ambivalent attitude towards the Georgian king. When Bagrat IV was granted permission to

²³⁶ *Corpus of the Eleventh- and the Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 37.

²³⁷ *Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature II*, 141; *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 120.

leave Constantinople in 1054, his mother, Queen Mariam, remained there. This probably indicates that Bagrat's influential mother was kept in the imperial palace as a guarantee of Bagrat's loyalty. Hence, soon after Bagrat's departure from Constantinople, two of his family members, his mother Mariam and his daughter Marta were at the imperial court.

A few years after Bagrat's arrival from Constantinople, the Byzantine empire started to experience further difficulties in containing the Seljuk advance. One of the reasons that helped the Seljuks succeed against Byzantium in the 1050s lies in the internal strife which erupted in the empire when Isaakios Komnenos rebelled in Asia Minor (ca.1057) and marched with his supporters to Constantinople. The military forces that were stationed close to the frontier before 1057 joined Isaakios' rebellion and abandoned their locations.²³⁸ The absence of military forces and imperial authority in the frontier zone facilitated the formation of coalitions among the local Byzantine lords, foreign mercenaries, and Seljuk warriors. In this way, "Anatolia from a structural point of view lost its cohesion and started to look like a patchwork of rival rulers, similar to what was happening in the Muslim lands of Syria, Iraq, and Azerbaijan."²³⁹

A gradual weakening of the Byzantine defensive system in the east became apparent when Seljuk Turk raiders captured and sacked Melitene in 1057/8, and a year later Sebasteia. By the 1060s, the Seljuks had tightened their grip over the southern Caucasus. The new sultan, Alp Arslān (r.1063–1073), decided to initiate a military campaign against the Christians of the Caucasus to further legitimize himself as a worthy heir of his uncle, Tughril beg, and overshadow his rival, Qutlumush. At the beginning of his rule, the sultan needed political and military success and the attack on Christians was a good starting point.²⁴⁰ In 1064, Alp Arslān sized the Armenian city of Ani, which allowed the Seljuks to establish control of the left bank of the Araxes along with other major invasion routes into Byzantium.²⁴¹ The same year the sultan's army ravaged the southern regions of the Georgian kingdom and captured and looted the city of Axalcixe. Though Alp Arslān's expeditions in the 1060s targeted Christian and Muslim states of the Caucasus, the consequence was disastrous for the eastern frontier of Byzantium. The sultan undermined the Byzantine network of client states and forced imperial subjects to reorient themselves towards the

²³⁸ Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 104.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 111.

²⁴¹ Korobeinikov, "Raiders and Neighbours: the Turks," 699.

Seljuk sultanate.²⁴² By improving their strategic position in the Caucasus, the Seljuks took decisive steps to open routes from Azerbaijan to Armenia and central Anatolia.²⁴³

In 1067, the Seljuks launched an invasion from the Euphrates, and after encountering the imperial army at Melitene they penetrated deeper into the heartland of Cappadocia and attacked Kaisarea. This city was not only a center of pilgrimage and commerce, but an imperial field camp, which was devastated by the invaders. The Seljuks also plundered the Church of St. Basil.²⁴⁴ This was the first westernmost invasion of the Seljuks into Byzantine territories, which marks 1067 as a turning point. It should have become evident for the imperial court that the Seljuk threat was not confined to the frontier zone alone but extended to all of Asia Minor.²⁴⁵ The Byzantine defensive system in the east was collapsing.

This is the background for discussing the further deepening of the Byzantine-Georgian military alliance, which resulted in inter-dynastic marriage between the Bagratid and Doukai families and Bagrat's elevation to the rank of *sebastos*. After annexing the Armenian polities, the Georgian kingdom remained the only Christian power in the Caucasus whose leader could mobilize a sizable army and assist the empire in its struggle against the Turks. Both sides, Byzantium and Georgia, were interested in cooperation to halt further Turkish penetration in Asia Minor and the Caucasus. Around 1067, Bagrat's daughter Marta (Maria of Alania) was sent to Constantinople second time and betrothed to Konstantinos X's (r. 1059–167) son, co-emperor Michael VII Doukas.²⁴⁶ The arrangement of this inter-dynastic marriage was one of Bagrat IV's most significant successes and it brought prestige to the entire Bagratid house. To celebrate his increased authority as expressed in his new title of *sebastos*, Bagrat updated his coinage (Fig. 2). The abbreviated Georgian legend on the coin reverse celebrates Bagrat as “king of the Apxazians and *sebastos*.” *Sebastos* was an honorific title in eleventh-century Byzantium, reserved only for members of the imperial family. Before the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r.1081–1118) the dignity of *sebastos* was rarely bestowed on to foreign rulers;²⁴⁷ the imperial court made an exception in elevating Bagrat IV to this rank.

²⁴² Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 115.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁴⁶ L. Garland, and S. Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman and Empress between Two Worlds”, in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience AD 800-1200*, ed. L. Garland (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 91-124.

²⁴⁷ M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire 1025–1204: A Political History* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 128.

King Bagrat managed to consolidate his position in his realm and the Caucasus after he improved his relationship with the Byzantine empire. The rise of the Seljuks, however, and the change in the balance of power posed a threat to his kingdom. By the end of his rule, Bagrat had married his sister to the Seljuk sultan in order to secure peace and avoid punitive campaigns against his kingdom. While Bagrat was lucky not to become a Seljuk vassal and avoided paying annual tribute to the sultan, his son and successor Giorgi II was less successful in this regard.

2. 5 Between the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuks: the Royal Image of Giorgi II

The gradual decline of Byzantine political and military power in the Caucasus did not result in the immediate diminishment of the empire's prestige in Georgia. Until the end of the eleventh century, Byzantine court titles seem to have conferred high status and power onto the Georgian kings and for this reason they continued to promote their image via court titles.

During his rule, king Giorgi II (r.1072–1089) received the titles of *kouropalatēs*, *nōbelissimos*, *sebastos* and *kaisar*. Giorgi became *kouropalatēs* while he was still a prince and heir to the Georgian throne, and he retained this dignity at least until 1073. In a royal charter to the Šio-Myvime monastery, Giorgi refers to himself as “king and *kouropalatēs*.”²⁵⁰ Giorgi never minted coins while he was *kouropalatēs*, but after he was granted the dignity of *nōbelissimos*, he followed in the footsteps of his father, Bagrat IV, and issued a bi-lingual (Georgian-Greek) silver coin with his title of *nōbelissimos* on the reverse. The coin legend acclaims Giorgi as “king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians, and *nōbelissimos*.”²⁵¹ As Giorgi II's reign is poorly documented, when and under what circumstances he was elevated to the rank of *nōbelissimos* are not known exactly. More can be said, however, about the date and context that determined Giorgi's further elevation to *sebastos* and *kaisar*.

While after the battle of Manzikert (ca. 1071) Constantinople experienced difficulties in organizing a proper defense of the eastern provinces, king Giorgi II succeeded in defeating a relatively sizable Seljuk army in 1074/5. Maybe this event gave hope to the emperor and his supporters that military success against the Turks could be achieved with the help of the Georgian king. For this reason, in 1076/77, Constantinople sent Grigol Bakourianos to Tao to negotiate with

²⁵⁰ *Corpus of the eleventh- and thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 45-9.

²⁵¹ T. Dundua, and G. Dundua. *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three. “Golden Age” and Decline. Coin Issues and Monetary Circulation in the 11th-16th Centuries* (Tbilisi: Meridian Publishers, 2015), 183-4.

Giorgi and discuss the terms of a military alliance. As it turns out, the emperor decided to bequeath to Giorgi the former domains of Davit *kouropalatēs* – Upper Tao, the region of Basean and Theodosiupolis – which had been a reason for wars and hostility between Byzantium and Georgia for decades. In this way, the Byzantine emperor removed an obstacle for further improving the relationship with the Bagratid royal court. By the 1070s, these lands nominally belonged to the empire, but in fact were occupied by the Seljuks. After reaching agreement with Bakourianos, Giorgi II organized a military expedition at the emperor’s request; he expelled the Turks from Kars, Vanadad, and Karnipor, and took these territories under his control.²⁵² Giorgi II probably received the dignity of *sebastos* either when he met with Bakourianos at the Byzantine-Georgian frontier or after his successful raid against the Seljuks. In order to spread his image and authority with the help of his recently acquired high-ranking imperial dignity, Giorgi renewed his coinage (Fig. 3).



Figure 3 The second issue sample of Giorgi II’s silver coin weights less and is smaller in diameter than Bagrat IV’s coins.

Obverse: The bust of Theotokos with the abbreviated Greek legend on the left and right side of the image: Instead of Η ΑΓΙΑ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ [Holy Theotokos] appears ΜΡ ΘΥ Η ΒΛΑΧΕΡΝΙΤΣΑ – “Mother of God of Blachernai.”

Reverse: abbreviated Georgian legend: ԻՂԾՏՂԻՂԾՓԷ՛ԵԳԸԾԸԻԵԳԻՆԵԳԸԾՓԻ – “Christ, exalt Giorgi, king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians.” In the center in three lines: ԾՇԵՂԻԴԵ/ՔՈՆԻ – “and *sebastos*.”

²⁵² Korobeinikov, “Raiders and Neighbours: the Turks,” 705.

There are two novelties on this second issue coin. First, the Georgian legend on the reverse lauds Giorgi as *sebastos* instead of *nōbelissimos*. Second, the Greek inscription on the obverse is transformed: “Holy Mother of God” is replaced by “Mother of God of Blachernae.” It is not clear why the Greek inscription was changed on this coin.

After a coup d’etat in the Byzantine empire in 1078, a new emperor, Nikephoros III Botaniates, married Maria of Alania, a wife of the deposed emperor Michael VII and sister of king Giorgi II. Most likely in order to solidify a relation with his brother-in-law, Nikephoros bestowed on Giorgi the title of *kaisar*. Giorgi II was the only Georgian king and to my knowledge the single non-Byzantine ruler to be granted such an honor. Before the reforms of Alexios I Komnenos, *kaisar* was the highest and most prestigious title in the Byzantine court hierarchy, reserved only for sons of the reigning emperor. Elevation of a candidate to this rank was accompanied by a ceremony during which emperor placed a small crown on the head of the newly elevated person. At the end of the ceremony, the *kaisar* received an acclamation.²⁵³ The imperial court probably had good reason to promote a foreign ruler to this rank. Most likely the new emperor and his entourage hoped to deepen further the military alliance with the Georgian kingdom and coordinate actions against the Seljuks.

Giorgi II was probably flattered by the high-ranking title of *kaisar*, which reinforced his authority and underlined his kinship ties with emperor Nikephoros III Botaniates and empress Maria of Alania. The title of *kaisar* was firmly integrated into Giorgi’s *intitulatio* and broadcasted through updated coinage (Fig. 4). The reverse legend on this coin celebrates Giorgi as “king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians and *kaisar*.”

²⁵³ *Constantine Porphyrogenetos: The Book of Ceremonies* 2, 222-5.



Figure 4 Third issue sample of Giorgi II’s silver coin. The coin is weightier and larger in diameter, 27mm, than previous specimen.

Obverse: The debased image of Theotokos. On the left and the right side of the image damaged and partially erased Greek legend: ΜΡ ΘΥ Η ΒΛΑΧΕΡΝΙΤΣΑ – “Mother of God of Blachernai.”

Reverse: abbreviated circular Georgian legend: ღԻԸԾԴԼԻԸՓԸՆԳԸԾԸԻԵԴԻՆԳԸԾՓԻ – “Christ, exalt Giorgi, king of the Apxazians and Kartvelians.” In the center in three lines: ԾԸ/ՎԴՆԸ/ԵՕՆԻ – “and *kaisar*.”

Apart from coinage, there is other evidence, a manuscript colophon, that acclaims Giorgi as *kaisar*.

This metaphrastic book was translated in the royal city of Constantinople, in the beautiful monastery of the mother of God of Trianphlios, by the unworthy monk Theophilos, from the creation of the world 6589, Greek *indiktion* four [i.e., 1080]; during the reign in the east of Giorgi *kesaros* [i.e., *kaisar*] son of Bagrat, on whose order I translated this work from Greek into Georgian, and during queenship of Marta in Greece, the sister of Giorgi, and kingship of Nikephoros Botaniates and Alexi Komnenos...²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 228-29: ითარგმნა ეკუ წიგნი ესე მეტაფრასტი ქალაქსა შინა სამეფოსა კონსტანტინეპოლსა, მონასტერსა შაყ ~დ შუენიერსა ტრიანფლიუს დედისა ლ~თისასა, უღირსისა მიერ თეოფილესა ხუცესმონაზონისა, მათვე ხელითა მიერ გაინუსხა დასაბამითგან წელთა ექუსი ათას ხუთას ოთხმეოც-და-მეცხრესა, ინდიკტონსა ოთხსა ბერძნულად; მეფობასა აღმოსავლეთს გიორგი კესაროსისა, ზაგრატის ძისა, რომლის ბრძანებითა ვიწყე თარგმნად წიგნთა ელლინურისგან ქართულად, ბოლო საბერძნეთს დედოფლობასა მართა, მისივე გიორგის დისასა და მეფობასა ნიკიფორე ბოტინატისა და ალექსი კომნენოსისა...

This colophon makes highly interesting statements. As one can see, the Georgian monastic community of the Byzantine empire, and particularly of the imperial capital, was closely connected with the Georgian royal court. As the scribe of the colophon relates, the menologion was commissioned by king Giorgi II. Besides, he informs the reader that the translation of the manuscript started during the reign of Nikephoros III Botaniates and was completed when Nikephoros was replaced by Alexios Komnenos. The Georgian monk living in Constantinople thought important to associate the creation of his work with important political events.

By the very beginning of the 1080s the Seljuks had established hegemony in the southern Caucasus and Giorgi II had failed to defend his kingdom from enemy onslaughts. His victory in the battle of 1075 and the subsequent expedition against the Seljuks in Basean and Theodosiupolis was a temporary success. In response, the Seljuks initiated a punitive campaign and attacked Georgia from the south and east. The Seljuk army was even successful in reaching the core of the kingdom and sacked the capital Kutaisi. The Georgian royal court during the first years of the crisis probably hoped that the Byzantine empire would mobilize its resources and challenge the Seljuks. When Giorgi II realized that Byzantium was unable to respond adequately to the Turkish threat, he decided to negotiate peace personally with sultan Malikshāh and traveled to the Seljuk capital in Isfahan in 1083.²⁵⁵ There, Giorgi II, high-ranking Byzantine dignitary, vowed submission to the Seljuk sultan. He agreed to pay an annual tribute and consented to contribute to further Seljuk expansion with his military service. Despite the agreement reached in Isfahan, the Georgian kingdom became the target of annual Turkish invasions. Giorgi's position was further undermined when prominent aristocrats under the leadership of Lip'arit, duke of K'ldək'ari, conspired against him and revolted. Neither the scale of the revolt nor the objective of the opposition is known. The fact that the rebel forces sacked the royal palace and carried away the royal treasure, however, indicates that Giorgi was in a precarious position. After Giorgi failed to deal with both internal and external foes, he was forced to abdicate and renounce his power in favor of his sixteen-year-old son, Davit, in 1089.

²⁵⁵ *The Life of Davit, King of Kings*, 161-2; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 312.

Conclusion

Byzantine recovery and expansion in the ninth and the tenth centuries facilitated the formation of a new balance of power in the Caucasus and strengthened the position of the local Christian lay and ecclesiastical elites. The empire pursued the strategy of maintaining a network of client principalities and states in the Caucasus. As a consequence of this policy, the Bagratid family with the imperial court's political and financial support managed to rise in prominence and establish a state in Tao and Klarjeti. The high-ranking court titles which the Bagratids started to receive from the Byzantine emperors bolstered their authority. This explains why in verbal and visual propaganda the Bagratids brought to the fore their court titles and fashioned themselves as “king and *kouropalatēs*” between the ninth and tenth centuries and “king and *nōbelissimos/sebastos/kaisar*” in the eleventh century. Thus, elevation of the Bagratid king's image with a formula that combined a Georgian royal epithet and a Byzantine court title became a hallmark of Bagratid propaganda. The Bagratid rhetoric of legitimation was multi-dimensional. Apart from highlighting its closeness to the imperial court of Constantinople, the family emphasized the exclusiveness of their house through forged Davidic and Biblical provenance. It seems that the close ties with the imperial court, a source of power and prestige for the Caucasian elite, along with well-devised propaganda enabled the Bagratid rulers to consolidate power throughout Georgian lands.

Constantinople met the creation of the Georgian kingdom, which changed the balance of power in the region, with relative ease. The relationship between the imperial court and the Bagratid rulers remained amicable until 1014. As I have argued, contrary to commonly accepted belief, the imperial court's intention was neither to annex Georgian lands in order to expand the imperial frontier nor to destroy the united Georgian kingdom, a formidable power in the Caucasus. The main cause of the conflict between the Georgian and the Byzantine courts was a territorial dispute over Upper Tao, which the Bagratids did not want to give up. For decades the Georgian kings had made multiple attempts to retake these lands from imperial possession.

After the emergence of the Georgian kingdom, the Bagratid kings, in their roles as rulers of a powerful state, broadcast their authority through their Byzantine honorary dignities. Bagrat III, Bagrat IV, and Giorgi II communicated to the high echelons of medieval Georgian society that as bearers of high-ranking imperial dignities they had a mandate from the emperor to rule in the

east with exclusive rights. Until the 1080s, the Byzantine high-ranking honorary titles conferred power on the Georgian kings and gave them legitimacy.

Chapter Three. Casting a Shadow over the Byzantine basileus' Authority: Constructing an Emperor-like Image of King Davit IV (r.1089–1125)

The end of the eleventh century witnessed a significant shift in the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean and a reconfiguration of the Byzantine and Caucasian political maps. As a consequence of Seljuk invasions, the Byzantine empire's defensive system in the east was shattered and a large part of Asia Minor was lost. With the Byzantine Empire on the defensive, the Seljuks gradually took control over the former Armenian polities and established their hegemony in the southern Caucasus. The Georgian kingdom, the only Christian state in the Caucasus by 1080s, became the target of frequent Seljuk attacks.

Although this chapter is not concerned with a study of the consequences which the rise of Seljuk power and decline of the Byzantine empire had on the Caucasus, nevertheless this context is essential for my research. This chapter studies a conceptual shift in royal representation and a fundamental change in the ideology of kingship during the reign of Davit IV. I argue that Davit's visual and literary image underwent an evolution during his long reign and grew increasingly similar to the Byzantine emperor's representation. Therefore, examining the Byzantine context is essential for this chapter to better demonstrate the extent to which the Georgian royal rhetoric drew on Byzantine imperial language and paradigms of rulership and to detect and scrutinize the similarities and disparities between the Georgian and Byzantine languages of kingship. In this chapter, I juxtapose Davit IV's and emperor Alexios I Komnenos' style of rulership and royal/imperial rhetoric. Both Alexios and Davit assumed power when their realms faced a severe crisis. Byzantium was confronting the Seljuk Turks in the east and Norman and Pecheneg invasions in the west and north. Davit, had to grapple with similar problems; constant Turkish invasions, lost territory, weakened governmental apparatus, diminished resources, and a feeble army that had shrunk in the wars with the Turks. Davit and Alexios were men of significant military and administrative skill, and, regardless of difficulties, they secured the recovery and revival of their realms. Alexios managed to stabilize his empire; he achieved success on the eastern frontier and recaptured territories in Asia Minor that had been lost to Turks. During his long reign, Davit waged victorious campaigns against the Turks, reconquered lost territories, and prevailed in executing the grand strategy of his predecessors by unifying all the Georgian-speaking lands under his umbrella. Consequently, Alexios and Davit were visualized as providential saviors by their

contemporary and near-contemporary rhetorical media, and their rule was perceived as a renewal that marked the end of the old and the beginning of a new era.

3.1 From High-Ranking Byzantine Dignitary to Independent Sovereign: Davit's Royal Image in Transition

When Davit assumed power in ca.1089, the kingdom which he inherited from his father, Giorgi II was in dire straits. The kingdom's borders had contracted because of the Seljuk conquest while the rest of the territories suffered from constant invasions. The Bagratid crown's resources had been stretched by the wars, its economy was depleted, and the army reduced and demoralized.²⁵⁶ In addition to all these calamities, in the first years of Davit's rule influential landowning aristocratic families under the leadership of Lip'arit Bayvaši continually undermined the royal office's authority. Thus, Davit's main agenda after he assumed power was to defend his realm from Seljuk incursions, at the same time dealing with bellicose aristocrats. With limited resources at his disposal and a weak army, Davit had a little room to maneuver.

Davit's precarious position explains the absence of an account of the first decade of his rule in the anonymous panegyrist's the *Life of Davit, King of Kings*. The anonymous, probably on purpose, omitted this period of Davit's kingship in his highly rhetorical narrative so that he would not have to discuss his protagonist's failures and "unimpressive" policy. Probably, had it not been for a gradual decline of the Seljuk sultanate that started after Malikshāh's death (c. 1092) and the launch of the First Crusade it is unlikely that Davit would have been able to execute reforms and achieve successes. The great shift in the balance of power in the Near East and the Caucasus allowed Davit to recover his kingdom and expand its borders. A new political reality opened new opportunities which Davit masterfully exploited.²⁵⁷

Coinage is thus the crucial source that helps to understand the first years of Davit's rule. More importantly, the coins reveal how Davit's royal image evolved and transformed as a

²⁵⁶ M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries* (Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987), 80-81.

²⁵⁷ Georgian scholars do admit some co-relation between Davit's military successes and geopolitical changes that took place in the Near East; but they are reluctant to admit that Davit's reconquest and expansion was a direct consequence of the decline of Seljuk power and the First Crusade. See: M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 94. In contrast to Lordkipanidze and other Georgian scholars, D. Rayfield takes more balanced approach and rightly argues that First Crusade and disintegration of the Seljuk empire determined Davit's successes. See: Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, 86.

consequence of geopolitical changes. Davit's bilingual silver coinage has come down to us in only seven specimens, which is significantly fewer than the surviving coins of his father, Giorgi II, and grandfather, Bagrat IV. Two factors can explain the drastic fall in coin minting during Davit's reign. First, an economic crisis unfolded as a consequence of Seljuk invasions, followed by a so-called silver crisis that hindered Davit from minting coins in large numbers.²⁵⁸ The second reason, which in my view was far more significant, was the king's growing skepticism about the prestige of his Byzantine court titles and the benefit they could bring to his authority. By the 1090s, Davit IV and his supporters probably understood that it was highly unlikely that the Byzantine empire would challenge the Seljuk Turks and regain lost territory in the east. Neither could Davit hope for military and financial support from the imperial court which would allow him to check Seljuk invasions. The Byzantine empire itself needed manpower and money to organize a proper defense of its territories.²⁵⁹ In these circumstances, when the Byzantine empire was on the defensive, with territory lost to the Seljuk Turks, and emperor's prestige diminished in the eyes of the local Caucasian elite, high-ranking Byzantine court titles started to lose their political and ideological weight.

Davit IV started his reign as a ruler formally subordinated to the Byzantine emperor and like his predecessors, bestowed with the Byzantine court title of *sebastos* (and possibly *panhypersebastos*). Following in the footsteps of his father, Giorgi II, and grandfather, Bagrat IV, Davit issued bi-lingual (Greek-Georgian) silver coins that emphasized his high-ranking Byzantine titles (Fig. 5).

²⁵⁸ G. Dundua and T. Dundua, *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics*, 194.

²⁵⁹ Emperor Alexios I Komnenos was forced to confiscate church property to finance the military expeditions against the external foes. See Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni 1081–1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 46-50; A. W. Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. D. Mouriki (Princeton, 1995), 579-80.



Figure 5. The first issue silver coin specimen; it is much lighter and thinner than those issued by Bagrat IV and Giorgi II.

Obverse: The bust of Theotokos; on the left side of the image Greek letters are erased, but we can assume that it was: MP. On the right side of the image: ΘΥ.

Reverse: Partially damaged marginal and circular abbreviated inscription in Georgian: ...ἸΘΓϞΦ... “Christ, exalt Davit, king of the Apxazians”. In the center, in three lines: ოც/ბ/ტ/ფ/ე/ბ – “and *sebastos*.”

Exactly when and under what circumstances the Georgian king received the title of *sebastos* from Alexios I Komnenos is unknown; it is certain, however, that Davit was raised to this rank before his coronation (ca.1089) in his capacity as prince and heir to the Georgian throne. This is corroborated by the colophon of a liturgical manuscript translated from Greek into Georgian in 1085. In the colophon, the scribe states that he finished the translation of the manuscript ca. 1085 and dedicates it to kings Giorgi and Davit. He refers to the Bagratid king and prince as “our God-crowned kings; the King of Kings Giorgi and *kaisar*, and his son King Davit and *sebastos*.”²⁶⁰ The fact that Davit received the title of *sebastos* – one of the highest dignities in the pre-Komnenian court hierarchy²⁶¹– while he was still a prince and underage demonstrates the degree to which the Byzantine court titles had been inflated by the 1080s. It is worth re-emphasizing that Davit’s grandfather, Bagrat IV became *sebastos* when this dignity had more significant political/ideological weight; he was elevated to this rank after his daughter, Marta, married

²⁶⁰ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 232-33.

²⁶¹ M. Jeffreys, “Constantine, Nephew of the Patriarch Keroularios, and His Good Friend Michael Psellos”, in *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*, eds., M. Jeffreys and M. Lauxtermann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61.

Michael VII Doukas, which further sealed the Byzantine-Georgian military alliance against the Seljuks.

*
**

The death of Malikshāh (ca. 1092) caused the first round of internal strife in the Seljuk Sultanate. War broke out between Malikshāh's brother, Tāj al-Dawla Tutush, and his son, Barkyāruq's, supporters. Tutush waged bloody wars to lay claim to the throne and denied Barkyāruq's legitimate right. In addition, Malikshāh's widow secured the coronation of her four-years-old son, Mahmūd. Hence, after ca.1092, three candidates fought for power in the Seljuk Sultanate. In 1094, Tāj al-Dawla Tutush won a victory in battle against his nephew, Barkyāruq, in Azerbaijan.²⁶² The year after, however, Barkyāruq defeated his uncle in battle. During this phase of the civil war, the Seljuk military elite was eliminated, while the cohesion in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia that had come into being as a result of Malikshāh's centralizing policy came to an end.²⁶³ The struggle between Malikshāh's successors was a great challenge for the internal stability of the Seljuk empire. The civil war shook the dominant position of the Seljuk realm in the Near East to its foundation.

Davit exploited the crisis in the Seljuk empire, as well as the successes of the Crusades, and by the end of the 1090s he had stopped paying annual tribute to the Seljuk sultan.²⁶⁴ This enabled the Georgian king to redirect these resources to military needs. The author of the *Life of Davit* admits a co-relation between the Seljuk decline and Davit's success and declares: "At that time the Franks came out and captured Jerusalem and Antioch. With the help of God, the land of Kartli recovered: Davit grew stronger and increased the number of his troops."²⁶⁵ Davit initiated guerrilla warfare; his small and mobile forces attacked and harassed the Turks in southern and eastern Georgia. Most likely Davit's first successes against the Turks and his growing power are reflected in bilingual silver coin, minted sometime at the very end of the eleventh century (Fig.6).

²⁶² Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 253.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 251.

²⁶⁴ *The Life of Davit*, 309; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 317.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

source that refers to the Georgian king with this Byzantine dignity. The colophon states: “Christ ... glorify both rulers crowned by you, shining and invincible king of kings Giorgi and high/elevated *kaisar*, and his God-given son Davit, king and *panhypersebastos*; make him strong and invincible in his struggle against his enemies.”²⁶⁷ Although it is difficult to give an exact date for when the colophon was inserted in the manuscript, an approximate date can be estimated. The colophon celebrates both Giorgi and Davit as kings, but the scribe wishes victories against the enemies only for Davit. This wording indicates that the colophon was composed after 1089, when Giorgi II renounced the throne and Davit assumed full power. After abdicating, Giorgi became a monk and continued his life in a monastery. Interestingly, this manuscript colophon is not the only surviving source which refers to the abdicated Giorgi as king. Decades later, ex-king and monk Giorgi was celebrated as “king of kings and *kaisar* of the entire East and West” in the Synodikon of the Ruis-Urbnisi ecclesiastical council convoked by Davit IV in 1105.²⁶⁸ Hence, the celebration of an abdicated and tonsured ruler as king was not uncommon in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Georgia.

By the beginning of the twelfth century, Davit had renounced his Byzantine dignity and ceased referring to it in his royal entitulation. To better understand the gradual evolution of the king’s royal image, significant political and military events should not be overlooked because the changing nature of the Georgian kingship was a consequence of political/military transitions that took place in the Caucasus. In the first years of the twelfth century, Davit started the second and more aggressive phase of his war against the Seljuks. In 1104 he took a risky step and annexed the kingdom of K’axeti,²⁶⁹ the easternmost state that had been a Bagratid target since the very beginning of the eleventh century. The conquest and integration of K’axeti into the Georgian kingdom was part of the Bagratids’ “grand strategy.” Davit’s ancestors had made multiple attempts to hold sway permanently over K’axeti but failed to do so. At the end of the eleventh century, the king of K’axeti became a Seljuk vassal and converted to Islam to avoid devastating Seljuk invasions and safeguard his kingdom from the Bagratid expansion. In this way, the kingdom of K’axeti became an integral part of the network of client states which the Seljuk Sultanate build in the Caucasus after challenging the Byzantine domination in the region. Davit’s expedition against

²⁶⁷ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 236.

²⁶⁸ [E. Gabidzashvili] რუის-ურბნისის კრების ძეგლისწერა, რედ. ე. გაბიძაშვილი (The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council) (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1978), 195.

²⁶⁹ *The Life of Davit*, 172-3; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 320.

the kingdom of K'axeti, a Seljuk vassal, should be discussed in light of a second round of crisis that erupted in the Seljuk sultanate between 1099 and 1104. Scholars have failed so far to see the connection between Davit's campaign against K'axeti and the intensified power struggle between Barkyāruq and his half-brother, Muḥammad Tapar, and further destabilization of the internal affairs in the sultanate after Barkyāruq's premature death in 1104.²⁷⁰ An attack on a Seljuk client state and deposition of its Muslim ruler would not be left unanswered; sooner or later the Seljuks would retaliate. Probably some months after annexing K'axeti, Davit and his army fought a first major battle against the Muslim army and won a decisive victory. If we are to believe Davit's panegyrist, the royal army wiped out the Turkish forces. The battle of 1104 was a major military triumph that enabled Davit to integrate the kingdom of K'axeti in his realm. After this victory Davit re-shaped his royal image. In the Synodikon of Ruis-Urbnisi ecclesiastical council, convened ca.1105 under Davit's auspices, the Georgian king is celebrated as "God-serving, and God-protected king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Ranians, and K'axetians."²⁷¹ In this important document, Davit was hailed only with his Georgian royal epithet; the Byzantine court title which had been an essential and integral part of Bagratid royal entitulation for centuries has disappeared. Thus, by 1105, Davit felt confident enough to discard his Byzantine title, in this way ending the Georgian kings' two-hundred-years of political subordination to Byzantine emperors. The celebration of the king in this vital document without his Byzantine court title was the beginning of something new. In the years that followed the council of the Ruis-Urbnisi, Davit and his supporters began exploiting extensively the Byzantine imperial language and symbols of power to delineate Davit's growing authority. A dramatic transformation of the Georgian ideology of kingship is reflected on radically new copper coin minted between 1118 and 1123 (Fig. 7).

²⁷⁰ For the civil strife in the Seljuk empire see Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 334-36; A. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 76-81.

²⁷¹ Gabidzashvili, *The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 195.



Figure 7: The only surviving sample of Davit’s copper coin.

Obverse: The old tradition of imprinting the image of Theotokos with an abbreviated Greek legend has disappeared, replaced by the bust of a king wearing an imperial coat and crown (*stemma*). In his right hand, Davit holds a scepter, and in the left, a *globus cruciger*. On the left and right sides of the king’s image, his abbreviated name is inscribed: $\delta\Gamma \delta\Phi$ – “king Davit.”

Reverse: The Byzantine court title which used to be an integral part of the reverse legend in two previous coin examples has disappeared. The Georgian legend around the margin reads: $\dagger\delta\Gamma\delta\Phi\Gamma\text{C}\Phi\Gamma\text{J}\text{H}\text{b}\text{E}\text{G}\text{E}\text{G}$ – “Christ, Davit, king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Ranians, K’axetians, and Armenians.”

This coin demonstrates best how Davit’s image was transformed from a Byzantine dignitary to an independent and powerful king. Davit appears on the coin in a very Byzantine fashion; he is garbed in imperial dress and holds all the attributes that were formerly reserved only for the emperors (scepter, *globus cruciger*, *stemma*). It is worth emphasizing that prior to the 1120s the Bagratid kings abstained from depicting their images on their coinage. Georgian kings embellished their coins instead with religious iconography and an abbreviated legend that contained information about their subordinated position to the emperor. How can the absence of the king’s image on the Bagratid coinage prior to 1120s be explained? I think that while the Bagratid kings recognized pre-eminence of the Byzantine emperor, they thought that only the emperor had the prerogative to be depicted on coinage. This may have been a Bagratid strategy to keep a low profile and demonstrate their respect to the basileus.

This copper coin needs to be scrutinized further in the context of Davit’s reconquest and military campaigns against the Seljuk Turks, which gradually expanded the Georgian kingdom’s borders and established a hegemony in the Caucasus. Several political and military events are

important in this regard. In 1121, the Georgian army under Davit's command won a decisive victory against a Muslim coalition army lead by Īlghāzī-bin-Artuq, a prominent member of the Artuqid clan and the ruler of Aleppo and Mayyāfāriqīn.²⁷² The defeat of the Muslim coalition under Īlghāzī's leadership had not only a military but an ideological significance. In Īlghāzī, Davit defeated a prominent leader of the Muslim world who had earned prestige and authority by employing the concept of *jihad* in wars against the Crusaders in Syria.²⁷³ By the beginning of the second decade of the twelfth century, Īlghāzī had established himself as a major player in Syria and initiated large-scale strikes against the Crusaders.²⁷⁴ In 1119, Īlghāzī dealt a crushing defeat to the crusade leaders of Antioch and Edessa at the battle of Balāt; Roger of Salerno was killed and a number of Franks were captured.²⁷⁵ As a true champion of *jihad* against Christians, Īlghāzī decided to further improve his position by initiating an ambitious campaign in the far north against the Georgian kingdom.

A year after the triumph in the battle of 1121, Davit's hands were free to assault Tp'ilisi – an old capital of Kartli that had been under Muslim control for four-hundred years. Gaining control of Tp'ilisi was one of the primary goals of Bagratid eastward expansion in the eleventh century. Davit's grandfather, Bagrat IV, took control over the city twice only to lose it both times. The seizure of Tp'ilisi in 1122 – one of the main Turkish strongholds and symbol of Muslim domination in the southern Caucasus – had significant military and ideological importance. Soon afterward Davit moved his royal capital from Kutaisi (western Georgia) to Tp'ilisi. Furthermore, the capture of Tp'ilisi was a prelude to another phase of expansion. In 1123 Davit's army marched south and occupied the Armenian city of Ani and its adjacent territories. A year later his troops took control of the capital of Sharvan and forced its ruler into submission. Thus, from Seljuk client Sharvan became a vassal of the Bagratid crown. By the end of his reign, Davit held sway over the southern Caucasus and the kingdom which he created united diverse religious and ethnic groups: Georgians, Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Armenians and a significant number of Muslims.

²⁷² On Īlghāzī See: C. Hillenbrand, "the Career of Najm al-Dīn Īl-Ghāzī," *Der Islam* 58 (1981), 250-292; the battle of Didgori (ca.1121) has been wrapped in nationalistic mythology until now. Contemporary Georgian scholars still believe that Davit with his army, numbering 56 000, defeated a Muslim coalition army of 300 000. The battle of 1121 had great importance, but Georgian scholars tend to overemphasize the consequences of this victory, claiming that after 1121 Georgia became a superpower.

²⁷³ Beihammer, *Byzantium and the emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia*, 334.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 378.

3.2 The Byzantine Origins of Georgian Royal Rhetoric

Davit's rule was the period of rapid political changes that witnessed the creation of a powerful Georgian kingdom in the Caucasus. His military triumphs against the Seljuks and successful expansion went hand in hand with a growing sophistication of court apparatus that resulted in the development of a distinct type of royal rhetoric. Davit's copper coin was neither a single source that reflected changes in Davit's representation nor the only medium that communicated his renewed image to the audience. Davit and his supporters seem to have used several media to propagate his authority.

Probably nothing formulates the new conception of Georgian kingship better than the encomiastic narrative the *Life of Davit, King of Kings*. Composed by an anonymous author in elevated literary classical Georgian, probably in the 1120s, the *Life of Davit* is a rare example of a Georgian rhetorical text that constructs the highly idealized image of the king in the most eulogistic terms possible and conducts a sophisticated discourse on the ideal kingship. The Georgian historical writings composed in the Bagratid era and before the period under consideration were focused on the chronological and sequential narration of events and offered little or no space for articulating the ideology of kingship. In contrast, the *Life of Davit* demonstrates rhetorical sophistication and abandons the simplicity that was central to earlier, chronologically structured historiography. More generally and perhaps more importantly, this text seems a hybrid history that combines elements of classicizing history, encomia, and court biography. The density of intertextual reference/allusions, as well as Biblical and Classical *exempla*, is one of the distinctive features of this narrative. What makes the *Life of Davit* even more interesting is that the anonymous author drew on Byzantine rhetorical traditions of the roles of an ideal Christian ruler. The language of kingship in this Georgian encomiastic text resembles the Byzantine rhetorical language utilized for constructing of an ideal emperor's image. Therefore, due to its high-register language and narration style, richness in rhetorical argumentation, and intertextual allusions, the *Life of Davit* can be safely called a masterpiece of medieval Georgian historiography. The adoption of features of Byzantine imperial rhetoric by the author of *Life of Davit* comes as no surprise if one takes into the account that the Georgian narrative was composed at the time when Byzantium's cultural impact still loomed large in the Christian Caucasus, even though the empire's political hegemony had faded away.

The anonymous panegyrist's main intention in his *Life of Davit* was to convey Davit's political authority via a rhetorical text. He constructs Davit's idealized image by focusing on his cardinal royal virtues of courage, wisdom, moderation, piety, and philanthropy. These qualities of Davit are unfolded as the narrative proceeds. Anonymus' rhetorical strategy aimed to persuade the audience that by practicing and displaying these Christian virtues, king Davit attained perfection and earned divine favor. The appearance of discourse on virtues and the construction of the idealized image of Davit based on qualities that were central to Byzantine imperial rhetoric pinpoints that anonymous was well acquainted with the Byzantine literary traditions and borrowed the Byzantine language of kingship to glorify his protagonist.

Even though the *Life of Davit* is not divided into chapters, content-wise the text can be divided into three distinct units. The first part is a long *prooimion*. The second part deals with Davit's deeds in war and is concerned with celebrating the king's virtue of bravery. The third part is concerned with the king's deeds in peace and lauds Davit's non-military virtues. This part not only abandons the chronological and sequential narration of the events but becomes more rhetorical and adopts a polemical tone. Interestingly, the anonymous' method to structure the text according to deeds in war and then deeds in peace is similar to a scheme advocated by Menander Rhetor in one of the chapters, *basilikos logos*, of his rhetorical manual.²⁷⁶

Before introducing king Davit to the audience as a providential savior, who rescued the Georgian kingdom and its Christian inhabitants from the Turks, the author of the *Life* employs following rhetorical strategy. In the *prooimion* he colorfully describes the dire straits in Georgia before Davit's elevation to power. Consequently, Davit's father, king Giorgi, does not escape criticism and is stigmatized as a weak and feeble ruler. In this way, the anonymous makes a marked contrast between bad and good rulership. Neither is Byzantium spared from being depicted as in a state of decline. The anonymous describes in dark colors the way the Turks prevailed against Byzantium: "As the Turks had grown stronger, the Greeks abandoned the lands, fortresses, and the cities which they possessed in the east and departed. They let the Turks occupy and settle in them."²⁷⁷ By narrating the poor condition of the empire, the anonymous tried to highlight that the

²⁷⁶ D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, eds., *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 79-94.

²⁷⁷ *The Life of Davit*, 158; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 309.

supra-regional power, i.e., the Byzantine empire, which had held sway over Caucasian affairs declined while Davit's power grew. Furthermore, the fact that Byzantium lost its provinces to the Turks while Davit was triumphant against them was implicitly used by the panegyrist as an argument to demonstrate that the divine favor was transferred from Byzantium to Georgia. This kind of rhetorical introduction served to persuade the audience that Davit's coming to power was a threshold, which marked the end of an old dark era and the beginning of something different and new. To formulate it differently, the *Life of Davit* argues that Davit's reign was a renewal, a period of recovery, renovation, and restoration.

When the anonymus was composing his narrative, the members of Bagratid dynasty probably had kept an ambivalent attitude towards the court of Constantinople. Davit and his supporters were probably informed about the long struggle of the Bagratid family with the Byzantine empire. The Bagratids had the right to blame the imperial court for eroding their power and causing discontent in the kingdom. Davit and his inner circle also knew that the Byzantine imperial court had ceased hostility and re-approached the Georgian kings as their allies and military partners only after the Seljuk Turks posed a threat to the empire's eastern frontier. There is a fair bit of reason to believe that certain individuals at Davit's court blamed the government in Constantinople for abandoning the Georgian kingdom in the face of the Seljuk onslaught.

While the anonymus follows a rhetoric of blame and decay in the *prooimion*, the mood and language changes right after Davit is introduced in the text:

From then the breezes of life began to blow, and the clouds appeared to ascend. After twelve years' prolongation of these various disasters in an eternal gloom, *the sun of all kings/rulers began to rise, the one great in repute and greater in deeds, the namesake of David the father of God, and David's seventy-second descendant – Davit [my emphasis].*²⁷⁸

The panegyrist employs elevated epithets and metaphors to signify the appearance of his hero on the scene. Davit's arrival not only brings air to breathe and salvation for his subjects, but his kingship is going to overshadow all other kings and rulers. Applying the epithet of the rising sun to Davit indicates that the Georgian panegyrist exploited a conventional rhetorical trope used

²⁷⁸ *The Life of Davit*, 173; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 307: რამეთუ ამიერიტგან იწყეს ცხოვრებისათვის მობერვად და ღრუბელთა მაცხოვარებისათა აღმოჭურობად, ვინაითგან ათორმეტ წელ ამათ თვითოსახეთა ჭირთა განგრძობილთა ზნელსა უკუნსა შინა იწყო აღმოცისკრებად მზემან ყოველთა მეფობათამან, დიდმან სახელითა და უდიდესმან საქმითა, სახელმოდგამმან დავით ღმრთისამან, და თვით სამეოცდამეათორმეტმან შვილმან ამის დავითისამან, დავით.

frequently by Byzantine authors to delineate the emperor's authority. There are many examples from Byzantine rhetorical texts (by rhetorical texts I mean all those narratives concerned with imperial representation), when emperors were referred to as the sun and the rising sun.²⁷⁹ An emphasis on the Bagratid Biblical genealogy and a celebration of Davit IV as the seventy-second offspring of the King-Prophet David is another important element in the literary strategy of the *Life of Davit*. By this token, the anonymus sends a strong political message to the audience and reminds them about the sacred nature of Bagratid kingship.

Right after introducing Davit to the audience in this elevated way, the panegyrist switches to description of his protagonist's coronation. "His father (Giorgi) himself placed (on David) the crown of the kingdom, or to speak more truthfully: 'The heavenly father himself found David, his servant, and anointed him with his holy oil; for His hand supported him, and his arm strengthened him.'"²⁸⁰ The anonymus uses the strategy of double legitimacy. On the one hand, Davit is legitimized as the single successor of Giorgi II and his father approves his kinship. On the other hand, the panegyrist accentuates the divine ordination of Davit's rule and declares him God's adopted.

After introducing Davit as a providential savior, God's anointed and the offspring of the Biblical David, the anonymus concludes the *prooimion* of his narrative by stating: Davit was God's elect and chosen, and this explains why he rose above the kings and rulers of the world and placed his "right hand on the sea and left the hand on the rivers."²⁸¹ Davit's great achievements, however, came at the cost of days of tireless labor and strong efforts "as the following account will demonstrate."²⁸² With these words, the anonymus finishes one part of the text and guides the reader to the central part of his work, which aims to prove Davit's greatness.

²⁷⁹ G. Dagron. *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); P. Magdalino. *Empire of Manuel I Komnenos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); F. Dvornik. *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background, vol. 2* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 1966).

²⁸⁰ *The Life of Davit*, 166; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 315: ამას მარტოდ შობილსა გიორგისგან, თვით მამამან დაადგა გვირგვინი მეფობისაი; - უჭემშარიტესი ითქვენ: თვით მამამან ზეცათამან პოვა დავით, მონაი თვისი, და საცხებელი მისი წმიდაი სცხო. რამეთუ ხელი მისი შეეწია და მკლავმან მისმან განაძლიერა იგი;

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

A New Alexander: The Image of a Soldier-King and an Exceptional Army Commander

The *Life of Davit* dedicates one third of the entire narrative to Davit's virtue of bravery. His literary persona resembles Old Testament and Classical Greek heroes as he shares with them outstanding military skills. The first detailed description of Davit's performance on the battlefield comes when the anonymus describes the battle of 1104. One is persuaded that the king led his army personally in the battle and this quality distinguished him from the other rulers: "The king himself, unlike some others, did not lead his troops from behind, nor did he shout orders from a distance like one of the princes. But he went in front of the head of all."²⁸³ Davit fights like a fearless hero, and by demonstrating his outstanding martial skills, he encourages his soldiers and raises their morale. During the battle, Davit roars like a lion and moves from one place to another with swiftness like the wind.

*He advanced as a giant, and with the strong arm he struck down the champions; he destroyed and cut down all who stood before him. From the great slaughter, as 'in the time' of David of old, the hand of Eleazar stuck to the guard of his sword, so too were his loins filled from the river of blood that followed his sword. After the battle, when he dismounted and unbuckled his belt, it was noted that such a mass of freshly congealed blood fell to the ground that at first sight we thought it came from his own body [my emphasis].*²⁸⁴

This vivid and colorful description of king's performance on the battlefield was enriched with biblical *exemplum*. The anonymus panegyrist re-enacted the Old Testament past for his audience by setting an imitative mode between Davit and Eleazar – one of the three best warriors in the army of the King-Prophet David. The *exemplum* was a rhetorical tool used frequently by the Byzantine authors; it is difficult to imagine a Byzantine rhetorical text that does not utilize either classical or Biblical *exempla*.²⁸⁵ This hermeneutical technique aimed to associate contemporary reality, characters and situations with equivalents from the past.²⁸⁶ Among those narratives that were composed before 1100 and are part of the Georgian royal annals, only the *Life of Davit*

²⁸³ *The Life of Davit*, 172-3; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 320.

²⁸⁴ *The Life of Davit*, 172-3; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 321: თვით გოლიათებრ მიჰმართებდა, და მკლავითა მტკიცითა დაამხობდა ახოვანთა, სრვიდა და დასცემდა წინა-დამთხეულთა ყოველთა, ვიდრემდის ფრიადისა ცემისაგან არა თუ ვითარცა ბუელსა ელიაზარს დ[უდეაის]სა ხელი ხრმლისა ვადასა ოდენ დაეწება, არამედ ხრმლით მისით უკომოდინართა სისხლითა წიაღნი აღსავსედ ეტვირთნეს.

²⁸⁵ S. Efthymiadis, "Greek and Biblical Exempla in the Service of an Artful Writer," in *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, eds., A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (Geneva: La Pomme d'Or, 2009), 102.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

dedicates one third of the text to narrating its protagonist's military prowess and achievements. The tendency to view an ideal ruler as an archetypal warrior and great general needs to be discussed in a broad context. What I argue here is that Davit's military image as constructed and portrayed in the *Life of Davit* bears a striking resemblance to the representation of the ideal soldier-emperor in the Byzantine narratives.

If, in the ninth and beginning of the tenth century, the concept of emperor was left without much emphasis on his military abilities, in the later tenth century a chivalric image began to infiltrate the traditional view of the ideal emperor.²⁸⁷ Notably, while *Vita Basilii* avoided discussing the military deeds of Basil I at length, Leo the Deacon established the authority of Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes by bringing to the fore their knightly virtues and outstanding abilities in warfare.²⁸⁸ Leo the Deacon's glorification of military emperors and imperial warfare was a reflection of changes that the Byzantine imperial ideology underwent by the second half of the tenth century. But this novelty – the basileus possessing the martial skills of an outstanding warrior – faded away in the discourse on ideal kingship after the death of Basileios II (ca. 1025). The reason for this was the rule of civilian emperors; several emperors in the eleventh century never left Constantinople to lead the army and participate in battles. Therefore, the eleventh-century rhetorical narratives, portray a non-military image of the emperor, whose great merits are self-control, justice, benevolence to his subjects, patronage of men of literature, and love of rhetoric. For instance, Katakalon Kekaumenos, himself the high-ranking military dignitary, never speaks about the emperor's participation in the battles in his writings. For him, the four primary qualities of the emperor are fortitude, justice, reason, and chastity. In Kekaumenos' writing the imperial virtue of fortitude has nothing to do with military courage but instead spiritual persistence/determination.²⁸⁹ The same applies to the panegyric writings of Michael Psellos, who rarely refers to military qualities as the chief virtue of the ideal emperor. The accession of the Komnenoi dynasty to power (ca.1081), however, resulted in a re-militarization of the imperial image; an ideal Byzantine ruler started to be visualized again as an exemplary army commander and archetypal warrior.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷A. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Changes in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 112.

²⁸⁸ A. Markopoulos, "Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography: Models and Approaches," 192.

²⁸⁹ A. Kazhdan and A. Wharton Epstein, *Change in the Byzantine Culture of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, 112.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 112-113.

Davit's representation as a soldier and noble warrior who leads his army on the battlefield personally and engages with the enemy during battle is very much the behavior that was expected from the military Byzantine emperors. The emperor had to be an example of bravery on the battlefield to encourage his soldiers. Alexios I's contemporary rhetorical media celebrates his military prowess and portrays him as soldier-emperor who spends a great deal of time on military campaigns.²⁹¹

The *Life of Davit* portrays Davit not only as a valiant soldier but asserts his image as that of an exemplary commander. Davit displays the qualities of a gifted tactician in his fight against the Turks. He moves the army from one place to another with great swiftness, but what is more important is that he keeps the army ranks in good order. This sophisticated military tactic allowed Davit to fall on the Turks unexpectedly, exploit their confusion and secure victories: "For the king watched out for an occasion to attack: unexpectedly he would fall on them and make slaughter. This occurred not once, or twice, or three times, but often."²⁹² To achieve the desired end, Davit did not abstain from marching with his army at night or in snow during the winter or through difficult terrains.

Many Turks with their tents had descended in Tao, since they trusted in the severity of the winter and the difficulties of the terrain of the mountains. But the king adopted the following tactic. He commanded the troops of K'artli to make the preparations, while he himself went to Kutaisi, whereby he removed their suspicion. In February he sent words to the army to wait for him at a known place in Klarjeti...Joining together [Davit and his army] they fall unexpectedly upon unsuspecting Turks...Destroying a countless number of them, Davit and his army captured their families and filled the kingdom with all kind of goods.²⁹³

²⁹¹ M. Mullett, "The Imperial Vocabulary of Alexios Komnenos," in *Alexios I Komnenos. Papers of the second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14-16 April 1989*, eds., M. Mullett and D. Smythe. Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 4.1 (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 388.

²⁹² *The Life of Davit*, 178; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 324: რამეთუ მოიმტუირნის მეფემან, რომელთა მოსვრაი ეგებოდის, და უგრძნულად დაესხის, და მოსწყვდნის.

²⁹³ *The Life of Davit*, 179-80; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 324-5: რამეთუ ტაოს ჩამოდგეს დიდნი თურქნი ხარგებითა, ვინათგან ზამთრისა სიფიცხელსა და მათათა სიმაგრესა მიენდვნეს. ხოლო მეფემან მოიხელოვანა ესრეთ, რამეთუ სპათა ქართლისათა მზაობაი უბრძანა და თვით ქუთაისს გარდავიდა, რომლითა უქჳველ-ყვნა იგინი, და თითუესა ფებერვალსა აცნობა ქართულთა და მესხთა, რაითა კლარჯეთის დახუდნენ პაემანსა... შეკრბეს ერთად და უგრძნულად დაესხნეს მათ ზედა, უშიშად გულდებით და სასოებით მსხდმარეთა ბასიანადმდე და მათ კარნიფორისა; მოსრეს სიმრავლე მათი ურიცხვი და აღილეს ცხენები ... რომლითა აღივსო ყოველი სამეფოი მისი ყოვლითა კეთილითა.

The rest of the narrative focusing on Davit's warfare – colorfully describing his encounters with enemy forces and emphasizing skill at marching the army at high speed, using the tactic of deception and unexpectedness – was meant to persuade the audience that the king was a prudent strategist, a great conqueror and contemporary Alexander the Great. According to the anonymous panegyrist, the only hero from the past who could equal Davit is Alexander the Great.

For although the book compares the Macedonian to winged panther because of the speed of his attack and his rapid march over many lands, and for the tremendous variety of his movements and plants' *yet our crowned king and new Alexander, thought he was later in time, none the less was not the less in deeds, or consouls, or valor. In those very deeds for which Alexander is called a conqueror, the latter was not inferior, but I think him superior for their number* [my emphasis].²⁹⁴

Davit, like Alexander the Great, was a pre-eminent and superior ruler of his time. As Alexander surpassed his contemporaries in his achievements in “temporal and bodily matters,” so did Davit, outshines his peer rulers in temporal and spiritual matters. The anonymous brings further examples to reinforce Davit's image as a far-sighted general.

The king had the custom that he would go down from Apxazeti on purpose and decoy out Turks in their winter-quarter on the banks of Mtkuari. For their scouts followed the king and spied on his journeys ... when they knew he was at distance, they came down to Botora, very many in number, and settled for the winter. However, the king was not sleeping, but swooped down on them...and unexpectedly fell on them. Hardly any had time to mount their horse and escape.²⁹⁵

Davit is claimed to have repeated the same maneuver in winter when Turks came and settled near the fertile pastures of Mtkvari. The panegyrist relates that the “valiant lion [i.e., Davit] was not lazy neither was he asleep.” He marched with his army from western Georgia and despite serious obstacles caused by heavy snow – the army had to cut a path in the snow on Mount Lixi – Davit

²⁹⁴ *The Life of Davit*, 185; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 329: რამეთუ დაღათუ წერილმან ფროთოვანსა ვეფხვსა მიაშგავსა მაკედონელი იგი სიფიცხლით მიმმართველობისათვის და მსწრაფლ მიმოვლისა ქუეყანათა შინდა და ჭრელად მრავალფერობისათვის ქცევათა და განზრახვათა მისთასა, არამედ ჩუენი ესე გვირგვინოსანი და ახალი ალექსანდრე, დაღათუ ჟამითა შემდგომ, არამედ არა საქმითა, არცა განზრახვითა, არცა სიმხნოთ უმცირე.

²⁹⁵ *The Life of Davit*, 186-7; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 330: აქუნდის ჩუეულებად ესე მეფესა, რამეთუ განგებულებით გარდავიდის აფხაზეთად და ჩამოიტყევენის თურქმანნი საზამთროთა ადგილთა მტკუურის პირისათა, რამეთუ მათნიცა მსტოვარნი ზედა-ადგიან მეფესა და იკუევიდინ გზათა მისთა ... ხოლო მათ ცნეს რაი სიშორე მისი, ჩამოდგეს ბოტორსა დიდნი ფრიად და დაიზამთრეს. და არა ჰრულოდა არცა მეფესა, არამედ გარდამოაფრინვა ფებერვალსა ათოთხმეტსა და უცნაურად დაესხა მათ ზედა; და ძლით ვინმე შეესწრა ცხენსა და გარდიხუეწა.

attacked and destroyed the Turks: “they [Davit’s soldiers] put them all on the edge of sword so that none was left to tell the tale.”²⁹⁶ In spring Davit attacked the Turks in the Mtkvari valley; although the river was swollen, and dangerous to cross, Davit demonstrated fearlessness, crossed the river with his soldiers and defeated the Turks.²⁹⁷

The *Life of Davit* dedicates special attention to Davit’s triumph in the battle of 1121. This is represented as a manifestation of Davit’s bravery, prudence and military genius; when a large Muslim coalition army entered southern Kartli, Davit was fearless and immovable in his heart:

King Davit, *fearless and completely imperturbable of hear, drew up his army, how appropriately and thoughtfully he managed every action, how calmly he organized, without confusion but with experience and total wisdom, and how he protected his troops from harm. To describe all these things properly nor only is our tongue incapable, but also – I think – the tongues of all wise men of the world. At the first encounter he routed the army and put it to flight [My emphasis].*²⁹⁸

After Davit destroyed the enemy camp in the first encounter and slaughtered celebrated heroes of the Muslim world with his physical strength, he chased the fleeing enemy and filled valleys and hills with their corpses.²⁹⁹ Davit’s panegyrist becomes even bolder when he finishes narration of battle of 1121. He states:

When I come to begin my story, I consider worthy of lamentation those narrators, I mean the Hellenes Homer and Aristobulus, and also the Hebrew Josephus. The first of these composed the accounts of the Trojans and of Achilles – how Agamemnon and Priam, or Achilles and Hector, or again Odysseus and Orestes fought, and who defeated whom. The second narrated the valor and invincibility of Alexander. And the third told the story the way Vespasian and Titus brought suffering/ a scourge to his fellow tribesmen.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ *The Life of Davit*, 189; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 331: და მოსრნეს პირითა მახვილისაითა და არა დაუტევეს მიქცეული კედლან, რომელ არა რომელ არა დაუშთა მთხროი ჰამბავისაი.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 190-1; 332-33: ხოლო მეფემან დავით, უშიშმან და ყოვლად უძრავმან გულითა, თუ ვითარ წინა-განაწყო სპაი თვისი და თუ ვითარ ყოველი საქმე შეუნიერად და ჭონიერად ყო, რაბამ რაიმე წყნარად და უშფოთველად, გამოცდილებით და ყოვლად ბრძნად განაგო, და თუ ვითარ ზეგარდმოითა შეწევნითა პირველსავე ომსა იოტა ბანაკი მათი სივლტოლად მიდრიკნა იგინი, და ვითარითა ჭონითა მოსრნა სახელოვანნი იგი მბრძოლნი არაბეთისანი, ანუ მეოტთა ვითარ სიმარჯვით და განკრძალულად სდევნა და მოსრნა, რომლითა აღივსნეს ველნი, მთანი და ღელენი მძორებითა, და თუ ვითარ თვისნი სპანი დაიცვნა უვნებლად – ამათ ყოველთათვის არა ჩუენდა, არამედ ვგონებ, ვითარმედ ყოვლისა სოფლისა ბრძენთა ვერ შესაძლებელ არს მოთხრობად ზედა-მიწევნით ყოველსავე, და გამომეტყუელთა ენაი იმხილოს ჯეროვნად გამოწყულილვით თხრობასა ვერ-მიცემად.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *The Life of Davit*, 192-3; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 333-4: ხოლო ამაღ არაი თხრობად მოვიწივე, ვაებისა ღირსად შევრაცხენ დიდნი იგი და სახელოვანნი გამომეტყუელნი, ვიტყვ ეკე უმიტოსს და არისტოვლის

The anonymus argues that all these authors Homer, Aristobulus, and Josephus never had enough information on the events they described, but since they were great rhetoricians, they embellished their narratives with the art of rhetoric. Moreover, Homer’s protagonist’s greatness is nothing but a rhetorical construct. To make his argument more persuasive, anonymus relates: “Alexander himself said somewhere: ‘You were not so great, Achilles, but you had a great eulogizer in the face of Homer.’”³⁰¹ In anonymus’ view, Davit’s single performance during the battle of 1121– the way he smashed the enemy ranks on the first attempt – outweighs the twenty-eight-year story of the siege of Troy, during which nothing praise worthy happened: “If those Greek authors had had the deeds of Davit as their material and had described them with appropriate rhetoric, then indeed they would have been worthy of due praise.”³⁰²

The central message articulated by the panegyrist is that Davit is a great military man, and neither contemporary nor famous past heroes can match him. The single appearance of Davit in the battle of 1121 is more impressive than the Homeric story of the Trojan war. Even the much-revered Achilles cannot be compared to Davit, because he is nothing but a rhetorical construct of Homer. The appearance of Homer as a point of reference and the use of Homeric heroes as rhetorical *exempla* was a novelty in medieval Georgian literary discourse.

Menander Rhetor in his influential *basilikos logos*, articulates the basic principles which rhetoricians had to follow when composing panegyrics. Menander advised his peers to juxtapose their protagonists with Achilles and other Homeric heroes.³⁰³ The allusion to Classical texts and use of Classical exempla was a common practice in Byzantine rhetorical discourse. The Byzantine texts frequently depicted the emperor as a Homeric hero in order to better demonstrate his valor and martial prowess. It has been suggested that the twelfth century was a Homeric century that witnessed a scholarly approach to Homer and the active use of Homeric themes in Byzantine

ელლინთა, ხოლო იოსიპოს ებრაელსა; რომელთაგანმან ერთმან ტროადელთა და აქეველთანი შეამკვნა თხრობანი, თუ ვითარ აღამეწნონ და პრიამოს, ანუ აქილევი და ეკტორ, მერმეცა ოდისეოს და ორესტი ეკუთნეს, და ვინ ვის მძლე ექმნა; და მეორემან ალექსანდრესნი წარმოთქუნა მხნე-კაცებანი და ძლევა-შემოსილობანი; ხოლო მესამემან ვესპასიანე-ტიტოსმიერნი მეტომეთა თვისთა ზედანი ჭირნი მისცნა აღწერასა.

³⁰¹ *The Life of Davit*, 193; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 334: ვითარცა იტყვს თვთ სადამე ალექსანდრე: ‘არა დიდ იყავ, აქილევი, არამედ დიდსა მიემთხვე მაქებელსა - უმიროსს.’

³⁰² *Ibid.* ჰქონებოდესმცა ამათ ბრძენთა ნივთად თხრობათა საქმენი დავითისანი და მათმცა აღწერნეს ჯეროვნად მათისებრ რიტორობისა, და მაშინდამცა ღირს-ქმნილ იყვნეს ჯეროვანსა ქებასა;

³⁰³ Russell and N. G. Wilson, eds., *Menander Rhetor*, 87-8.

rhetoric.³⁰⁴ According to Kaldellis, the revived interest in the Homer and his Iliad in twelfth-century Byzantium was caused by the Komnenian aristocracy's need for heroic models which the scripture and saints' lives could not provide.³⁰⁵ With this context in mind, it becomes apparent that Davit's anonymous biographer followed literary norms long established in the Byzantine empire.

Davit's relationship with his classical prototype Alexander the Great, gets a final treatment in the third and concluding part of the *Life of Davit*. Anonymous masterfully uses the story of Alexander's conquests to demonstrate Davit's superiority to him. The narrative relates that when Davit assumed power, he controlled a small kingdom, which could not defend itself from an enemy; the Turks pressed the kingdom from many directions and the Georgian army was feeble and unable to respond to challenges. Davit, however, re-created the army; he trained and instructed the soldiers day and night. He then led the troops in small-scale skirmishes against the Turks, and by securing victories he restored confidence among them. If Davit had not initiated numerous campaigns against the Turks, the Georgian army would not have received sufficient training and experience to become strong enough to conquer vast territories. Alexander the Great, in contrast, inherited the powerful kingdom and a large and well-trained army when he assumed power, which enabled him to conquer enormous territories.

He [Alexander] captured the west – Europe, Italy, Rome, and Africa. Having overcome these he sized Egypt, marching from Carthage, and from Egypt Palestine and Phoenicia. And after making Cilicia his, he attacked Darius. When he gained Persia, he conquered Poros and India. And in this way, one after the other, he covered the whole world.³⁰⁶

Although Alexander was a great conqueror, had he been in Davit's place with demoralized army and destroyed kingdom at the beginning of his reign, he would not have achieved anything significant. If Davit had had Alexander's army under his command, however, the scale of his accomplishments would overshadow the achievements of most famous men.³⁰⁷ According to the

³⁰⁴ A. Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Greek identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 243.

³⁰⁵ A. Kaldellis, "Classical Scholarship in Twelfth-Century Byzantium," in *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*, eds., C. Barber and D. Jenkins (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 21.

³⁰⁶ *The Life of Davit*, 217; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 349: რამეთუ პირველ მამულისა თვისისანი შეკრიბნა და მით დაიპყრნა დასავალისანი ევროპი, იტალია, ჰრომი და აფრიკეთი: და მათითა თანა-წარტანებითა დაიპყრნა ეგვიპტე შესრულმან კარქედონით; და მიერ ეგვიპტით-პალესტინე და ფინიკე; და კილიკიასა თუისად შემქმნელი, წინა-განეწყო დარიოსს, და რაჟამს სპარსეთი მოირთო, მაშინდა ჰბრძო პუროს ჰინდოსა, და ეგრეთღა ამით ყოვლითა მოვლო ყოველი ქუეყანაი და ქმნა, რაი-იგი ქმნა.

³⁰⁷ *The Life of Davit*, 217; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 349.

anonymus, although Davit never conquered as large territories as Alexander, he was a great monarch and military man; he made the Seljuk sultan pay him tribute and the Byzantine emperor “like a member of his household.”³⁰⁸

He crushed heathens, eliminated barbarians, humbled kings, enslaved monarchs, routed the Arabs, defeated the Ishmaelites, scattered Persians like ashes and turned their rulers into peasants, and to cut a long story into short, *all the former kings, judges, heroes, warriors, and all the people distinguished from ancient times for their valiance and power, or celebrated for their good deeds, all of them look like dumb brutes in comparison to Davit* [my emphasis].³⁰⁹

To buttress Davit’s image further as an exceptionally successful ruler and a great conqueror, the anonymus forges a metaphorical link between the Old Testament past and Georgian present. He asserts that the kingdom created by Davit, which united different people and linguistic groups, is nothing but the colossal tree which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream.

Nebuchadnezzar saw a tree in the middle of the world rising to the summit of heaven, and its branches stretched to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit numerous and nourishing to all around it. Beneath it dwelt the beasts of the land, and among its branches dwelt the birds of the sky, and from it, all bodily things were nourished.³¹⁰

It is noteworthy that this is the first direct and longest quotation of the Old Testament text in the *Life of Davit*. In the previous sections, anonymus made indirect reference to the Old Testament and used various scriptural metaphors as rhetorical tropes.

Davit himself reinforced his image as a great conqueror in his iambic poem *Hymns of Repentance*. Although the poem was meant to communicate the king’s piety and royal humility to the audience, Davit thought it important to style himself as a subjugator of great territories. He explicitly states that he imitated the kings of Israel in this endeavor but sees his expansionist

³⁰⁸ *The Life of Davit*, 206; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 342;

³⁰⁹ Ibid. დასცა წარმართნი, მოსრნა ბარბაროზნი; მრწმედ მოიყვანა მეფენი, ხოლო მონად წელმწიფენი; მეოტად წარიქცივნა არაბნი, იავარად ისმაიტელნი, მტურად დასხნა სპარსნი, ხოლო გლეხად მთავარნი მათნი, და - რაითა მოკლდე ვთქუა, - პირველყოფილი მეფენი, მსახულნი, გოლიათნი, გმირნი კაცნი იგი, საუკუნითგან სახელოვანნი, მხნენი და ძლიერნი, და რათაცა საქმეთა ზედა სახელოვან ქმნილნი, ყოველნივე ესრეთ დასხნა, პირუტყუნი ყოველ საქმეთა და ყოველ სახლსა შინა.

³¹⁰ *The Life of Davit*, 219; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 350: ვხედვედო, - იტრვის - ხესა შორის ქუეყანისა სიმაღლედ ცისა მიმწდომსა და რტოთა მისთა კიდემდე ქუეყანისა. ფურცელნი მისნი შუენიერ და ნაყოფი მისი ფრიად, და საზრდელი ყოველთაი მის შორის ქუეშე კერძო მისა დაიმკვიდრეს მხეცთა ქუეყანისათა და შორის რტოთა მისთა მკვიდრობა-ყვეს მფრინველთა ცისათა, მისგან იზარდებოდა ყოველი ხორციელი.

campaigns as a great sin and asks for the forgiveness. Aggressive militarism is reflected in the panegyric oration composed by Davit's monk Arsen. This highly eulogistic but concise narrative puts Davit's and Octavian Augustus' conquests on the same scale.³¹¹

As we have seen, the part of the *Life of Davit* that deals with Davit's deeds in war, tends to draw on the Byzantine rules of imperial rhetoric. The virtue of bravery and the military prowess of the king are discussed in the Classical and the Old Testament context. The author tries to maintain explicit and implicit parallels between his protagonist and Biblical and Classical heroes to assert Davit's grandeur. The first literary description of Davit's encounter with the enemy was discussed in an Old Testament context; the Georgian king's military intelligence and generalship is buttressed through references to the Classical past. The *Life of Davit* is the first Georgian text that utilizes classical exempla on a large scale to align imitative behavior between Davit and past heroes. This rhetorical strategy aimed to catch the attention of a targeted audience and engender a close association between the present and the distant past. In the literature that praises Davit's contemporary Alexios Komnenos, the emperor's military art is greatly acknowledged.³¹² For instance, Theophylact of Ohrid advised the emperor to lead the army himself, to avoid pleasure, and to prefer the discomforts of campaigning to the delights of the palace and capital.³¹³ The most exalted literary image of Alexios as an exemplary commander and fighter is represented in the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene. This long classicizing history/panegyric dedicates considerable space to Alexios' virtue of courage and his campaigns in the east, north, and west. Anna presents Alexios as an exemplary soldier-emperor who possesses excellent skills of command and shares hardship with his soldiers.³¹⁴ Classicizing, the *Alexiad* draws attention to Alexios's prowess and associates him with Homeric heroes such as Heracles, and Odysseus.³¹⁵ While Alexios resembles a Homeric hero, his contemporary, Davit IV, is celebrated as a new reincarnated Alexander the Great. Thus, the literary taste of Davit's and Alexios' panegyrists diverged. While Anna adhered to Homeric figures, the anonymous questioned the grandeur of Homeric heroes. For the Georgian rhetor, only Alexander was equal to Davit.

³¹¹ [Great Nomokanon] დიდი სჯულისკანონი, ed. E. Gabidzashvili (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1975), 557.

³¹² M. Mullett, "The Imperial Vocabulary of Alexios Komnenos," 371-5 and 388-90.

³¹³ Theophylact of Ohrid, *Théophylacte d'Achrida: Discours, Traités, Poésies*, ed. P. Gautier. CFHB, 16.1 (Thessaloniki, 1980), 207.14-18.

³¹⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, II. 7 (Frankopan, 66-7).

³¹⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, III. 9; X. 9 (Frankopan, 99-100, and 287); On Anna's literary strategy of associating Alexios with Homeric heroes see. P. Buckley, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene: Artistic Strategy in the Making of a Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 16, 85, 101 and 143.

Hence, the rhetorical strategy and argumentation employed by Davit's biographer in his narrative demonstrate the adoption of Byzantine rhetorical traditions and panegyric writing strategy. In Byzantium, rhetoric was highly revered and Byzantine intellectuals greatly admired the persuasive possibilities which rhetoric offered them. Rhetoric was a tool in the hands of the author to present his arguments as effectively as possible. According to Byzantine thought, rhetoric was not only the art of persuasive speaking, but also a political discourse.³¹⁶ Rhetoric could transform and manipulate the audience and thus undermine established ways of viewing reality.³¹⁷ In this light, I assume that the *Life of Davit*, which was probably composed close to the end of Davit's rule, was rhetorical media designed for oral performance. Public delivery of this concise and highly eulogistic narrative was aimed to impress the audience and reinforce Davit's royal authority. Besides, frequent allusion to Biblical and particularly ancient texts, may indicate that the audience of the *Life of Davit* comprised courtiers and high-ranking ecclesiastics who had a profound education and would understand the meaning of the allusions, the metaphors, and the exempla. In addition, by employing high-register rhetoric with allusions to authoritative texts, the anonymus presented himself as an excellent rhetorician and learned gentleman, in this way securing his position at court. A lack of evidence makes it impossible to elaborate on the author's social standing, but doubtless he was a close associate of Davit and probably educated in the Byzantine empire. Maybe he was among those literati whom Davit invited from the Byzantine empire to Georgia. The fact that the *Life of Davit* was integrated into the *Life of Kartli/Georgian Royal Annals* indicates that the anonymus' narrative was greatly appreciated at the royal court and that his career must have been successful.

3.3 Davit's virtues of Piety, Philanthropy, and Justice

As I have already pointed out, the anonymus portrays Davit as a personification of virtues and a model king, and thus his piety, one of the essential Christian virtues, gets special treatment in *the Life of Davit*. Davit manifests his piety in multiple ways: he guards the purity of the faith; reforms the Church and patronizes and founds monasteries.

³¹⁶ J. Connolly, "The New world order: Greek Rhetoric in Rome", in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. I. Worthington (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 140.

³¹⁷ P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglosia: A Poetic of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Washington, DC: Harvard University Press, 2006), 29.

Contemporary writing attest that patronage of the monasteries was a hallmark of Davit's rule.

He filled with benefits lavras, convents, and monasteries – not only those of his own realm but also those of Greece, of the Holy Mountain, of Bulgaria, of Syria and Cyprus, of the Black Mountain, and of Palestine. He especially honored the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ and the inhabitants of Jerusalem with multifarious offerings.³¹⁸

Monastic patronage was a visible manifestation of a person's piety and philanthropy, but one also should not underestimate its ideological and propagandistic value. Religious patronage served Davit to gain symbolic capital in the circles of Georgian monastic communities scattered all over Eastern Christendom. By the large-scale patronage of the monasteries in Holy Land, Byzantium and Syria, the Georgian king exercised ideological power and thus succeeded in building a support groups among the influential Georgian ecclesiastics who resided outside of Georgia. Many of these ecclesiastics became Davit's close associates and stood with the king when he reformed the Church.

Davit was not only a patron but also a founder of churches and monasteries. Like patronage, building was a political act through which the ruler's leadership became visible. This is probably why Davit founded a monastery on the Sinai: “for on the mountain of Sinai, where Moses and Elias saw God, he built a monastery, and granted it many thousands of gold (coins), loads of curtains, a complete set of ecclesiastic books, and holy vessels of refined gold.”³¹⁹

Apart from enhancing monastic foundation and monastic piety in Eastern Christendom, Davit sought to build a monastery in Georgia that would symbolize his rulership. Around 1106/7 Davit laid the foundation of the Gelati monastery near the royal capital of Kutaisi. Gelati was designed as a multifunctional complex that contained a monastery proper, a school, and a hospice (xenon) for the poor and orphans. This type of monastic complex that included several institutions was a novelty in medieval Georgia and therefore it is believed that Gelati was inspired by a

³¹⁸ *The Life of Davit*, 208; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 343: რამეთუ ლავრანი და საკრებულონი და მონასტერნი არა თვისისა ოდენ სამეფოსანი, არამედ საბერძნეთისანი მთაწმინდისა და ბორღალეთისანი, მერმეცა ასურეთისა და კვიპრისა, შავისა მთისა და პალესტინისანი აღვსნა კეთილთა, უფროსდა საფლავი მეუფისაი და მყოფნი იერუსალიმისანი თვითოფერთა მიერ შესაწირავთა განამდიდრნა.

³¹⁹ *The Life of Davit*, 208; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 344: რამეთუ მთასა სინასა, სადა იხილეს ღმერთი მოსე და ელია, აღაშენა მონასტერი და წარსცა ოქროი მრავალათასეული და მოსაკიდელნი ოქსინონი და წიგნები საეკლესიოი სრულებით და სამსახურებელი სიწმიდეთაი ოქროისა რჩეულისაი.

Byzantine model, possibly the St. George of Mangana monastery founded by emperor Konstantinos IX.³²⁰ According to the *Life of Davit*, the size, importance, and beauty of Gelati surpassed all the other monasteries constructed before its time: “This is now a foreshadowing of the second Jerusalem in the whole East, a school of all virtue, and academy of instruction, another Athens but much superior to it in a divine doctrine, a promoter of all ecclesiastic good order.”³²¹ Athens refers to the monastery’s adopted role as a place of learning and Jerusalem stands for Gelati’s sacredness which the monastery started to accumulate from the very beginning of its foundation. Davit was interested in turning the monastery associated with his name into a center of spirituality, in this way making it a symbol of his royal program of renewal.

Gelati probably became one of the foci of pilgrimage and relic veneration during Davit’s rule.

He filled it with holy things, with revered relics of the saints, with holy images and holy vessels that were totally glorious, and other materials most difficult to find. In addition, he established there the thrones and seats of the great Xosroid kings, the lamps and hangings of various colors he had sized as booty, the crowns and collars, the cups and bowls which he had taken from the kings of Arabia, when he himself had led them captive.³²²

The anonymus does not discuss which relics and sacred objects were housed in the monastery, but he records that Davit placed the “thrones and seats of the Xosroid kings” in Gelati. The Xosrovids were a pre-Bagratid royal dynasty who ruled Kartli from ancient times until Sasanian Iran abolished the kingship in Kartli in 523/or 580. Davit probably transferred the Xosrovid royal insignia to Gelati to display these objects for the public, in order to make a visual association between the Bagratid kings and the legendary Xosrovids. Moreover, Davit set the custom of donating the spoils of wars to the Gelati monastery. After the battle of Didgori (1121), Davit sent to Gelati the most valuable items which the defeated enemy had left on the battlefield, including a necklace, made of pearls and rare precious stones worn by a commanders of the

³²⁰ A. Eastmond. *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 59.

³²¹ *The Life of Davit*, 174; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 322.

³²² Ibid. და აღავსო სიწმიდეთა მიერ: პატოსანთა ნაწილთა წმიდათაისა, წმიდათა ხატთა და სიწმიდისა სამსახურებელთა ყოვლად დიდებულთა და სხუათა ნივთთა ძვრად საპოვნებელთა. ამათ თანა დასხნა მუნვე დიდთა და ხუასროვანთა მეფეთა ტახტნი და საყდარნი, სასანთლები და საკიდელნი ფერად-ფერადნი, იავარად მოხუმულნი თვსნი; და კულად გვრგვნი და მანიაკნი, და ფიალნი და სასუმელნი, რომელნი მოუხუნე მეფეთა არაბეთისათა, რაჟამს თვთ იგინიცა ტყუედ მოიყვანა, მასვე ტაძარსა შინა შეწირნა ღმრთისა, სახსენოდ და სამადლობელად ძღვევისა მის საკვირველისა.

Muslim coalition army. Davit's son, Demetre I (r.1125–1156), continued this tradition and when he defeated the ruler of Ganja he removed the city gate and donated it to Gelati monastery.³²³

The foundation of the monasteries and generous patronage during Davit's reign was very much in line with the twelfth-century Byzantine monastic revival. Monastic renewal and the concomitant bolstering of monastic piety was one of the cornerstones of Komnenoi family policy.³²⁴ Perhaps Davit followed in the footsteps of the Komnenoi emperors; the Byzantine trend could have had an impression on his monastic policy. Alexios Komnenos positioned himself as a founder and re-founder of monasteries, and his political strength is claimed to have derived much from the support he received from monasteries and monastic leaders.³²⁵ The patronage of monasteries and nunneries was one of the ways the Byzantine ruling elite impressed society.³²⁶ It has been argued that Alexios was not especially interested in either holy men or monasteries; political considerations governed his dealing with them.³²⁷

Alexios' reorganization/refoundation of the Orphanage of St. Paul (often referred to as the Orphanotropheion) was in line with his intention to fashion himself as a pious and philanthropic ruler. This complex, which contained multiple buildings became a symbol of Alexios's rule and a vivid expression of imperial philanthropy.³²⁸ In the twelfth century, certain imperial ceremonies were deliberately diverted to the Orphanotropheion in order to maintain the association of the Komnenian rulers with this massive complex.³²⁹ While Georgian royal rhetoric modeled Gelati as a new Jerusalem of the east, Komnenian rhetoric hailed Alexios's foundation of the Orphanotropheion as a city of God and Solomon's Porch.³³⁰ It is worth emphasizing that Alexios build a nunnery for Georgian nuns within the complex of the Orphanotropheion, specifically, next to the school.³³¹ This covenant is believed to have been added to the already existing church of St. Nicolas the Iberian.³³² The *Alexiad* relates that the Georgian nuns used to wander around the city

³²³ The gate of Ganja which Demetre donated to the Gelati still hangs at the entrance of the monastery.

³²⁴ Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 265-301; P. Armstrong, "Alexios I Komnenos, Holy Man and Monasticism," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, 219-31.

³²⁵ Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 274-6.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

³²⁷ Armstrong, "Alexios I Komnenos, Holy Man and Monasticism," 231.

³²⁸ Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 57.

³²⁹ Magdalino, "Innovation in Government," 163-4.

³³⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 7 (Frankopan, 452-3). On Anna Komnene's literary strategy aiming at associating Orphanotropheion with a New Jerusalem see P. Buckley. *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene*, 269.

³³¹ P. Magdalino, "Innovation in Government," 157.

³³² *Ibid.*, 160-61.

and beg before the emperor erected a nunnery for them. Thus, the Bagratid court must have been aware of Alexios's charitable policy and his huge foundation.

Davit's and Alexios's images also seemed to have been buttressed by public display of philanthropy. Both rulers took good care to demonstrate that they practiced this fundamental Christian virtue, that was so central for an ideal ruler. Davit manifested his *philanthropia* in various ways: the construction of churches and monasteries, the erection of a poorhouse, the establishment of a monastic school, and permanent care for his subjects. Before discussing the image of the philanthropic ruler in twelfth-century Georgia and Byzantium, it is necessary to discuss briefly the concept of philanthropy in Eastern Christian thought.

Philanthropia – demonstration of love for mankind in imitation of God – was as a vital duty of the emperor. The display of this virtue was a marker of a correct imperial behavior and a source of power.³³³ Themistius, a fourth-century pagan philosopher and rhetorician, argued that philanthropy was the most exalted virtues because love and compassion for humankind could make a person god-like. “Themistius championed through his career to use *philanthropia* – love of mankind – as a term for single quality which made an emperor God-like because it had stoic roots and a pre-eminent position in the Christian tradition.”³³⁴ Love of humankind was so central to Themistius's discourse that he considered justice a part of philanthropy. Themistius's first oration to emperor Constantius is entirely dedicated to the virtue of philanthropy. Themistius, a pagan court philosopher, was much revered by subsequent generations and his legacy enjoyed the reception in the Byzantine world. Gregory of Nazianzus considered Themistius “the king of words.”³³⁵ By the fourth century, the term and concept of philanthropy ceased to be uniquely Hellenistic and was generally in use by Christian and pagan writers. As early as the third century, Christian thinkers like Origen and Clement of Alexandria adopted the notion of philanthropy to describe a particular kind of love that God demonstrated to humankind.³³⁶ Christian thinkers considered philanthropy a unique characteristic of God that made incarnation and salvation possible.³³⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea made great use of the concept of philanthropy for promoting his

³³³ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 156.

³³⁴ P. Heather and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 66.

³³⁵ P. Heather and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century*, 6.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

protagonist's image. According to Eusebius, Constantine the Great was imitating God's philanthropy.³³⁸

Philanthropy is repeatedly commented by the sixth-century author Agapetus, who, in his advice to emperor Justinian stresses the importance of the emperor loving humankind.³³⁹ He considered *philanthropia* a central virtue that pleases God. A philanthropic emperor would not only attain a divine sanction for his rule but would cultivate the goodwill of his subjects and thus secure his position.³⁴⁰ Therefore, it became a firmly established tradition in Byzantine thought that an emperor could demonstrate the best his likeness to Christ through the display of philanthropy.

The anonymous panegyrist represents Davit as a philanthropic ruler, who permanently displays his love and care for his subjects. Like his contemporary, Alexios Komnenos, Davit thought it necessary to build a charitable institution, a hospice/poorhouse within the monastic complex of Gelati. The king is said to have always demonstrated his “God-like compassion” towards the poor and orphans when he visits Gelati monastery.

He would come in person and visit them, greet and embrace each one like a doting father, would be compassionate and wish them well, would urge them to patience, and would oversee with his own hands their beds, clothing, bedding, plates, and all their needs. He would give each one sufficient money, would watch over their superintendents, and administer everything for them in proper order and in the service of God.³⁴¹

Another indicator of Davit's exemplary philanthropy was his constant care for the well-being of the poor; he frequently distributed alms and money to the poor.

For he had a little bag; he would fill it with money daily by his own reliable hand, and in the evening, he would bring it (back) empty with joyful heart and countenance...Now he did not make this offering from the (taxes) of his officials, nor from his stores, but from the profit of his own hands. From this (source) he once

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ N. Bell, *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 36.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 115-6; A. Simpson, “Propaganda Value if Imperial Patronage,” 203-4.

³⁴¹ *The Life of Davit*, 176; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 322: ყოვლადვე თვით მივიდის, მოიხილნის, მოიკითხნის და ამბორს-უყვის თითოეულსა, ჰფუფუნებდის მამებრ, სწყალობდის და ჰნატრიდის, განამზნის მოთმინებისა მიმართ, მანხის თვისთა ხელითა ცხედრები, სამოსელები და საგებელი, პინაკი და ყოველი სახმარი მადი; და მისცის თითოეულსა ოქროი კმა-საყოფი და განკრძალნის ზედა-მდგომელნი მათნი და განაგის ყოველი საქმე მათი დიდა შუენიერად და ღმრთისმსახურებით.

gave to his father – confessor John about 24,000 drachmas for him to distribute to the poor.³⁴²

When Davit failed to empty his small bag and deliver everything to the paupers, he would plunge deep into sorrow and say: “Today I gave nothing to Christ through the fault of my sins.”³⁴³ The rhetorized narration of king’s philanthropy was meant to assert Davit’s image as the Christ-like king during the oral performance of the *Life of Davit*. The establishment of a school as part of the Gelati monastic complex was also a manifestation of royal philanthropy. The Gelati school was not confined to social elite only but served to educate children from a lower stratum of society. Gelati school inspired by the Byzantine example, either Mangana school or perhaps the grammar school of the Orphanotropheion, served educational and philanthropic purposes together.

Alexios Komnenos strengthened his image as a lover of humankind and drawing a more similarity between him and Christ after founding the Orphanotropheion. Anna, in her *Alexiad*, compares Alexios’s care and compassion for the inhabitants of the Orphanotropheion to one of Christ’s miracle. While Christ feeds thousands of the hungry after he performed a miracle, Alexios managed to secure the well-being of thousands of the Orphanotropheion dwellers through charity and proper administration.

I would say that the emperor’s work could be compared with my Savior’s miracles (the feeding of the seven and five thousand). In this case of course, thousands were satisfied with five loaves, for it was God who performed the miracle, whereas here the work of charity was the result of the Divine command; moreover, that was a miracle, but here we are dealing with the emperor’s liberality in dispensing sustenance to his brethren.³⁴⁴

Thus, one can say that the charitable institutions of Gelati and Orphanotropheion were places which allowed Davit and Alexios to display publicly their virtue of philanthropy and maybe by this token stress the Christ-oriented and imitating nature of their kingship. It is indicative that both the Gelati and Orphanotropheion could have been inspired by the example of St. George of

³⁴² *The Life of Davit*, 186; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 344: და ამას იქმოდის არათუ ხელოსანთა მორთმეულისაგან, ანუ საჭუჭლით, არამედ ხელთა თვისთა ნადირებულთა, რომელთაგანი ოდესმე თვისსა მოძღუარსა იოვანეს მისცა დრახკანი, ვითერ ოცდახუთათასეული რაითა განუყოს გლახაკთა.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 7 (Frankopan, 453); εἶποι τις ἄν, πρὸς τὸ τοῦ ἐμοῦ σωτῆρος θαῦμα, τὸ τῶν ἑπτακισχιλίων φημί καὶ πεντακισχιλίων, ἀναφέρεσθαι τὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἔργον. Ἄλλ’ ἐκεῖσε ἐκ πέντε ἄρτων ἐκορέσθησαν χιλιάδες, καθὼ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ὁ θαυματουργῶν· ἐνταῦθα δὲ τὰ μὲν τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τῆς θείας ἐξέχεται ἐντολῆς. Τὸ δ’ ἄλλο, ἐκεῖσε μὲν θαῦμα, ὧδε δὲ χορηγία βασιλικὴ τὸ αὐταρκες τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς πορίζουσα.

Mangana.³⁴⁵ Like the Orphanotropheion, Mangana was large “campus” comprising several institutions: a monastery, a nursing home, a poor-house, a hospital, and a law school.³⁴⁶

The sacralization of Davit’s persona was an especially remarkable feature of a new kingship ideology. Georgian royal rhetoric promoted the idea that Davit was a Christ-like and even God-like figure. The concise panegyric oration delivered at the council of Ruis-Urbnisi by the monk Arsen employs an elevated vocabulary and classical and scriptural metaphors to enhance the sacred nature of Davit’s kingship.

Visible Sun among the stars ... face of God like the love among the virtues... strong like the Lion among the beasts, famous like Nebroth among the heroes, great like a Phines among the priests...*invincible like Achilles among the Hellenes, wise like Solomon among the kings, peaceful as David among the anointed...genuine like Alexander among the rulers, conqueror like Augustus among the Caesars, the lover of the mankind as our Christ...swift like Paul among the apostles, God by his nature among those created by God’s mercy* [my emphasis]...³⁴⁷

In the *Life of Davit*, the anonymous panegyrist uses a similar vocabulary to present Davit as a personification of justice. Davit, like God, rightly judges people, and, like Solomon, he never bends “balance of the scales.” Interestingly, the anonymous asserts the image of Davit as an earthly reflection of God the Father rather than Christ when he hails his protagonist’s virtue of justice.³⁴⁸ In the very concluding part of *the Life of Davit*, anonymous further reinforces Davit’s image as a God-like ruler. He claims that Davit’s actions should not be judged because in all his actions, the king imitated God, and he resembles him. Therefore, if someone wants to judge Davit, he should then judge God, too.³⁴⁹

3.4 The Wisdom of Davit: An Image of a Learned King

Davit was the first monarch in Georgia to make wisdom a cornerstone of his image. The ideal of the wise king was as old as the Old Testament, but this ideal seems to have made inroads in medieval Georgia only by the end of the eleventh century. Wisdom is the most prominent and celebrated royal quality that characterizes his kingship in the *Life of Davit*. The panegyrist

³⁴⁵ Magdalino, “Innovations in Government,” 161.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁴⁷ Gabidzashvili, *the Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 193-4.

³⁴⁸ *The Life of Davit*, 206-7; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 343.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 218; 350.

continually acclaims Davit as a wise, prudent, and intelligent ruler. He considers Davit a wise ruler who governs the realm prudently and works tirelessly for the glory of his realm and the well-being of his subjects. Repeatedly, the anonymus biographer asks the rhetorical question of how Davit managed to handle a multiplicity of royal tasks and maintained control over governmental affairs while spending a great deal of time on military campaigns.

Who can count tasks that the king is required to do? Conquest of the countries, reinforce frontiers, prevent revolts, ensure tranquility in the country, launch campaigns, catch the intrigue of the aristocracy, command the troops, take care of the people's affairs, appoint officials and judges, look after the income of the treasury, receive envoys and give them answers, reward properly those who present the gifts, instruct wrongdoers kindly, show generosity towards the servants, ensure fair trial for the accused, demand reports and organize the army for skillful raids.³⁵⁰

Davit fulfills all these royal duties excellently and neither past rulers nor his contemporary ones can compete with him in these endeavors. As anonymus puts it, Davit's deeds, achieved with his prudence, "shines more brilliantly than the rays of the sun."³⁵¹ Although the theme of the emperor's hard labor to maintain the glory of the empire was cultivated in Byzantine encomiastic narratives, it became especially prevalent in the Komnenian imperial rhetoric. One of Alexios's great merits in the *Alexiad* is his constant and hard labor to save and restore the Roman empire to its past glory.³⁵²

In anonymus' discourse on ideal kingship, Davit's wisdom is manifested in numerous ways. He is not only a divinely inspired ruler who possesses divine wisdom, but also genuinely interested in learning. Davit is also a promoter of education, a patron of learned men, and a church builder. To better understand the manifestation of the idea of a wise ruler in Georgia, it is essential to turn to the Byzantine context. As will be argued below, the language of wise kingship articulated and disseminated in Georgian rhetorical media was modeled on that of the Byzantine empire.

³⁵⁰ *The Life of Davit*, 205-6; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 342: და ვითარ ვინ აღრაცხნეს, რაოდენი საქმენი ეთხოვებთან მეფობასა, რაოდენნი მართებანი და განსაგებელნი? კიდეთა პერობანი, ნაპირთა მჭირვანი, განხეთქილობათა კრძალვანი, სამეფოსა წყნარებისა ღონენი, ლაშქრობათა მეცადინობანი, მთავართა ზაკვისა ცნობანი, მხედართა განწესებანი, საერონი შიშნი, სახელოთა და საბჭოთა სჯანი, საჭურჭლეთა შემოსავალი, მოციქულთა შემთხვევანი და პასუხნი, მეძღუნეთა ჯერობანი მისაგებელნი, შემცოდეთა წყალობითნი წურთანი, მსახურებულთა ნიჭ-მრავლობანი, მოჩივართა მართალი გამოძიებანი, მოსაკითხავთა შესატყვისი მოკითხვანი, სპათა დაწყობანი და ღონიერი მიმართებანი.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 206; 342.

³⁵² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, III. 11; IV. 2; VI. 3 (Frankopan, 105, 111, and 157)

The long history of Byzantium includes several emperors who attempted to make their prudence and knowledge part of their image-making strategy. It was only during the reign of Leon VI (r. 886–912), however, that the ideal of the wise ruler was manifested in Byzantium. No emperor before or after him placed such an emphasis on his wisdom.³⁵³ Because of his knowledge and love for learning, Leon earned the epithet of *sophos* in his lifetime and was considered the wisest among the emperors.³⁵⁴ Leon tried to downplay his lack of military experience by presenting himself as a worthy emperor based on his wisdom and public piety.³⁵⁵ Nikephoros the Philosopher, in his *Life of Anthony Kauleas*, praises Leon’s erudition and skill to “marry” philosophy and rhetoric. In the eleventh century Leon was remembered as an erudite emperor. Michael Psellos, despite his negative attitude towards Leon’s personality, admits that the emperor not only produced literary works but occupied himself with philosophy and the art of rhetoric.³⁵⁶

Leon presented himself as wiser than Solomon in his writings, namely, in his homilies. His habit of writing and delivering religious sermons served to underpin his wisdom and piety and link him directly with the Biblical Solomon. Leon’s imperial throne in the palace of Magnaura mimicked the throne of Solomon and served to represent the emperor as the new Solomon.³⁵⁷

In the eleventh century, learned gentlemen at the imperial court cultivated the idea that literary patronage and the promotion of education could enhance imperial prestige.³⁵⁸ Michael Psellos, in his *Chronographia*, praises emperor Romanos III’s cultural policy and claims that when he emulated the glorious Roman emperors he paid attention to two things: the study of letters and the science of war.³⁵⁹ Psellos in his imperial oration portrays a similar image of Romanos III, as dedicating himself to literature and the study of philosophy. Another recurrent motif in the eleventh

³⁵³ S. F. Tougher, “The Wisdom of Leo VI,” in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries. Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews* ed. P. Magdalino (Ashgate: Variorum, 1994), 171-79; Idem., *The Reign of Leo VI: Politics and People* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 110-11.

³⁵⁴ T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 78-79.

³⁵⁵ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity: Writings of an Unexpected Emperor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 148.

³⁵⁶ M. Aerts, ed. and trans. *Michaelis Pselli Historia Syntomos*, CFHB 30 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 88-89; See also P. Magdalino, “Knowledge in Authority and Authorised History: The Imperial Intellectual Programme of Leo VI and Constantine VII,” in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. A. Armstrong (Ashgate, 2013), 190-92.

³⁵⁷ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 119; S. F. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI*, 125.

³⁵⁸ F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 295.

³⁵⁹ Michael Psellos, *The Chronographia*, Book III (Sewter, 63-4).

century discourse on ideal rulership was the emperor as a restorer of learning; the emperor was expected to profess knowledge, promote learning, and patronize learned men.³⁶⁰

To give Davit more authority and enhance his sacred kingship, the anonymous panegyrist invests him with divine wisdom. We are told that Davit followed wholeheartedly biblical David's commandment: "the fear of God is the source of wisdom."³⁶¹ As an exemplary and pious Christian, Davit learned the fear of God in childhood and it matured as he grew. The idea that the fear of God is the source of wisdom was well established in eastern Christian thought. For instance, Agapetus, in his *Advice to Justinian I* (r.527–565), instructs the emperor that "the fear of Lord" is the beginning of the wisdom.³⁶² The emperor Basileios, in the second paraenesis, harnessed the same quotation to enlighten Leon VI. He tells his son: "for the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord."³⁶³ Thus, the anonymous author drew on a long tradition of alluding to this scriptural passage to better formulate the source of an ideal ruler's wisdom. The source of Davit's wisdom, however, was not only a fear of God, but his great love for the books and learning.

Hear with understanding he found the fear of the Lord to be the mother of wisdom, and the divine scripture the mother of divine things. These he collected in great number, as many as he found translated into the Georgian language from other tongues, both old and new. *Like another Ptolemy he placed his trust in them; he so loved them and made them his own that you might say that his life was in them and in them he moved* [my emphasis].³⁶⁴

Books became the king's most delicious nourishment and sweet and desired drink and reading his favorite pastime: "They were his leisure, his regular profitable enjoyment. In his daily comings and goings by day and night, in his never-ending expeditions, in his relentless labors, he loaded books on numerous mules and camels."³⁶⁵ Davit was so obsessed with reading that when he dismounted from a horse, he would first take a book in his hands and read until he exhausted

³⁶⁰ Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry*, 297.

³⁶¹ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 339; *The Life of Davit*, 200.

³⁶² N. Bell, *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian*, 33.

³⁶³ S. F. Tougher, "The Wisdom of Leo VI," 176. On the importance of a divine wisdom for the emperors see Z. Gavrilović, "Divine Wisdom as part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology," *Zograf* 11 (1980), 44.

³⁶⁴ *The Life of Davit*, 200-201; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 339: ხოლო ისმენდი, თუ ვითარ გონიერად - დედად სიბრძნისა - რაი პოვა შიში უფლისაი, შიშისად ღმრთისა საღმრთონი წერილნი - და ესენი დიდრა შეკრიბა, რაოდენნი პოვნა გარდამოღებულად, ენასა ქართულსა სხუათა ენათგან, ძუელნი და ახალნი, ვითარცა სხუამან კტოლემეოს, ამას ზედა ოდენ სახოვან ქმნილმან; და ესეოდენ შეიყუარნა და შეითვისნა, რომელ სთქუმცა, თუმათ შინა ცხოველ არს, და მათ შინა იძვრის.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* იგინი იყვნეს მისა საზრდელ ყოველთა გემოვან და სასუმელ ტკბილ და საწადელ; იგინი შუება, განცხრომა, საწურთელ და სარგებელ. დღე და ღამე მიმოსვლათა შინა მიმღებთა, ლაშქრობათა მოუწყენელთა, შრომათა განუსუენებელთა წიგნები ეტვრთის სიმრავლესა ჯორთა და აქლემთასა;

himself. After the evening meal, Davit read instead of sleeping, and when his eyes got tired someone else would read to him while he listened carefully: “Not inattentively, but extremely carefully he listened to his reader. He inquired, questioned, and even more would himself explain their import and profundity.”³⁶⁶ Anonymus refers to another example to illustrate Davit’s bookishness. He notes that the king frequently read the Book of the Apostles, and “when he finished, he would put a mark at the end of the books. At the end of the year we added up the marks: it had been read twenty-four times.”³⁶⁷ Thus, the anonymus invests Davit with two types of wisdom. On the one hand, the source of Davit’s wisdom is Christian piety and knowledge of the divine, while his outer wisdom is related to his deep erudition acquired from constant reading. It is illuminating to compare Davit’s devotion to books and zeal for inquiry to the rhetorical representation of Alexios I Komnenos’ learnedness and interest in the Holy Scripture in the *Alexiad*. These two stories have certain similarities. According to the *Alexiad*, after tiring day Alexios would relax, read, and study the books. “For most of the day, he laboured hard, but he would relax too, only his relaxation was itself a second labour – the reading of the books and their study, the diligent observance of the command to search the Scriptures.”³⁶⁸ Interestingly, both Davit and Alexios were occupied with studying holy scripture. By juxtaposing the two rulers’ literary representations, I do not want to claim that the Georgian author had any knowledge of the *Alexiad*. First, the *Alexiad* was composed decades after the *Life of Davit*. Second, even if these two narratives were composed in the same period it would still be implausible to state that the Georgian author had access to the text of the *Alexiad* and borrowed some literary strategies from it. One can hypothesize, however, that some literary strategies utilized in the *Alexiad* and the *Life of Davit* derived from the same source/s. Furthermore, since I argue that the anonymus had a Byzantine education, it is likely that he adopted Byzantine style of narrating an imperial biography.

According to the *Life of Davit*, the king was so preoccupied with books that he would not stop reading even when he was hunting.

The most amazing is this: *All you know how enjoyable a hunt is for everyone, how it makes slaves and captives of its enthusiasts*, so that in the hunt they aim at nothing

³⁶⁶ Ibid და არა გარეწარად, არამედ ფრიადცა ფრთხილად ისმენნ წინაშე თვისა მკითხველისასა, გამოეძიებნ, ჰკითხავნ, უფროსლა თვით განჰმარტებნ ძალსა და სიღრმესა მათსა.

³⁶⁷ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 339; *The Life of Davit*, წინადაიდვის ოდესმე წიგნი სამოციქულოი წარკითხვად; და რა ჟამს დაასრულის, ნიშანი დასვის ბოლოსა წიგნისასა. ხოლო მოქცევასა წელიწდისასა მით ნიშნით აღვთუალეთ: ოცდაოთხჯერ წარეკითხა.

³⁶⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 7 (Frankopan, 423).

else save the sight and pursuit of the game and how they may lay hands on it. *But he even overcame this passion. For during the hunt, he would hold books in his hands, and when it was right moment, he would give them to a servant...*[my emphasis]³⁶⁹

In this episode the anonymus argues not only for Davit's bookishness but also for his stoic-behavior and ability to surpass his passions. Davit stands above his emotions and earthly desires, and unlike others, he does not become enslaved by the passion of the hunt. In another part of the *Life of Davit*, the anonymus again returns to Davit's royal quality of self-control. We are told that the king did not allow his eyes to sleep and his body to rest. Neither did he submit to the pleasure of eating and drinking, nor did he enjoy "idle songs and anything devilish."³⁷⁰ In the Byzantine thought self-control was a vital virtue which an ideal emperor was expected to master; the emperor had to control his body and emotions.³⁷¹ Anna Komnene, in her *Alexiad*, considers self-control one of the merits of Alexios Komnenos. She relates: "Only occasionally did he seek physical relaxation through hunting or other amusement; even then, as in all else, he was the true philosopher, conditioning his body and making it more obedient to his will."³⁷²

The Georgian panegyrist brings into his narrative another story to portray an image of Davit as a learned king devoted to books. Once Davit went to ambush a Turkish forces close to Tp'ilisi. While the troops waited for the enemy, Davit took a "book of theology" and unarmed went to find a place to read. The king became absorbed in the book and failed to notice the approaching Turkish forces.

He turned to his reading and was so disrupted by this in his mind that he completely forgot what had occurred previously, until the noise of shouting reached his ears. Immediately he left the book on the spot, mounted his horse, and made for the shouts. When he came upon his retainers who were in such hard straits... He rapidly swooped on them like an eagle and scattered them like pigeons. In short measures

³⁶⁹ *The Life of Davit*, 201-2; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 339-40: უწყით ყოველთა, თუ ვითარ სასწრაფო არს ყოველთადა საქმე ნადირობისაი, და თუ ვითარ დაიმონებს შედგომილსა თვისსა და წარტყუნულ-ჰყოფს და ნადირობასა შინა არა რასა სხუასა, გარნა ხოლვასა ნადირისასა და დევნასა, და თუ ვითარ ხელთ იგდოს, მიმხედველ-ჰყოფს. გარნა მისი გულსმოდგინებაი ამასცა სძლევადა, რამეთუ თვით ნადირობასა შინა წიგნნი აქუნდიან ხელთა და, რაჟამს ჟამი იყვის, მისცნის ვისმე მსახურსა და ესრეთ დევნა-უყვის.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 207; 343.

³⁷¹ S. Dimitriev, "John Lydus' Political Message and Idea of the Byzantine Idea of Imperial Rule." *BMGS*, 39:1 (2015), 6-7.

³⁷² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 7 (Frankopan, 423).

he slew as many as horses were sufficient for his retainers...*Notice, I ask you, how he regarded a book as the most urgent thing in such an affair of little leisure [my emphasis].*³⁷³

The anonymous panegyrist ends his discourse on Davit's wisdom by the following story. He states that Davit's comprehension of bookish wisdom and knowledge of past events, as well as his awareness of the deeds and mistake of the past kings significantly enhanced his successes. Davit is claimed to have used the experience of "past kings" to foresee the future. In this respect, Davit followed the Biblical Solomon's proverb "Know the changes of the times, remember the meaning of parables, and liken the future to the past."³⁷⁴ Hence, the *Life of Davit* argues that if Davit had not possessed this scale of intellectual comprehension and wisdom, which was "far greater than that of Old Testament Bezaleel's and Etham's," and if he had failed to follow Solomon's wisdom, he would not have been victorious and triumphant.³⁷⁵

It is important to emphasize that the *Life of Davit* draws similarities between Davit and the Old Testament David and Solomon several times in different episodes of the narrative. When the panegyrist praises Davit's wisdom and interest in learning, he sets Solomon as a point of reference and the Georgian king is acclaimed as a second Solomon, while the moderation of the Georgian king equates him with the Biblical King-Prophet David. In this way, Davit's biographer exploits Old Testament kingship imagery to nurture a co-relation between Georgian and Biblical kingship.

Adopting the Old Testament imagery of kingship for constructing Davit's authority was another marker of a new conception of kingship that developed in the post-1089 Georgian world. Before 1100, employment of Old Testament models for articulating and narrating an idealized image of Georgian kings was not so present in the Georgian literary tradition. From Davit's reign onwards, Old Testament allusions became a persistent feature of Georgian rhetorical texts and Georgian rulership was frequently cast in Old Testament terms. This tendency points not only to the gradual sacralization of royal power in Georgia but also to the growing assertion of the Bagratid

³⁷³ *The Life of Davit*, 203-4; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 339: შეექცა კითხვასა და ესეოდენ წარიტყუნა მისგან გონებითა, რომელ ყოვლად დაჰვიწყდა წინამდებარე საქმე, ვიდრემდის ხმაი რაიმე კვილისაი შემოესმა ყურთა. მყის დაუტევა წიგნი მუნვე და ამხედრებული მიჰყვა მას ხმასა და ზედა-წარადგა მონათა თვისთა, ესევითარსა ღუაწლოსა შინა მყოფთა...მყის შთაბრიალდა ვითარცა არწივი და დააბნივნა ვითარცა კაკაბნი და მსწრაფლ ესეოდენნი მოსწყვიდნა, რომელ მათნი ცხენნი კმა ეყვნეს მათ მონათა ... განიცადეთლა ჩემდად, რომელ ესე-ვითარსა საქმესა შინა ესეოდენ უცალოსა წიგნივე აქუნდეს უსასწრაფოესად საქმედ! და ესენი ესეოდენ.

³⁷⁴ *The Life of Davit*, 205; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 341-2.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

rulers that they ruled over a chosen people. Also, in a very Byzantine fashion, the Georgian royal office's sacerdotal character was inspired by Old Testament ideas of kingship, which eventually became central to Bagratid royal identity.

The rhetorical juxtaposition of the Georgian king with his claimed biblical ancestors, namely, David and Solomon, not only appear in the *Life of Davit*. The short panegyric oration composed by the monk Arsen for public delivery during the Ruis-Urbnisi council (ca. 1105) hails the Georgian king as equal to the biblical David and Solomon. More specifically, the oration hails Davit IV's Solomon-like wisdom and his David-like calmness and moderation.³⁷⁶ The Byzantine context makes it possible to better understand the centrality of Old Testament models for the Georgian kingship.

In Byzantium the imperial office's sacerdotal character was heavily inspired by Old Testament royal models. The Byzantine emperors were expected to emulate the Old Testament David, Solomon, and Moses, and adopt their virtues. As Dagron notes the Old Testament “had a constitutional value in Byzantium; it had the same normative role in the political sphere as the New Testament in the moral sphere.”³⁷⁷ Many Byzantine emperors embraced the role of the Biblical David, a paradigmatic ruler par excellence.³⁷⁸ Thus, the idea of an emperor as an icon of David and a “new David” was permanently present in Byzantine imperial rhetoric.³⁷⁹ Encomiastic narratives, particularly historiography, invoked the biblical David's name in relation to the emperor in order to emphasize his adoption by God.³⁸⁰ In Byzantine art the Biblical David was represented as a preeminent ruler whose reign was characterized by political successes as well as absolute piety and obedience to God.³⁸¹ From the fourth century, Old Testament paradigms of ideal kingship, namely, David and Solomon, were invoked in relation to the emperor, and the arrival of the Macedonian dynasty witnessed further exploitation of Old Testament models. The first

³⁷⁶ Gabidzashvili, *The Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 192-3.

³⁷⁷ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 50; C. Rapp, “Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium,” in *Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), 193-196.

³⁷⁸ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 120; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 50.

³⁷⁹ A. Eastmond, “‘it began with picture’: Imperial art, texts and subversion between East and West in the twelfth century,” in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed., D. Angelov and M. Saxby (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 138.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁸¹ L. Kalavrezou, N. Trahoulia, and S. Sabar, “Critique of Emperor in Vatican Psalter gr. 752”, *DOP vol. 47* (1993), 201.

Macedonian emperors associated themselves with Old Testament ideal kings.³⁸² Basileios I crafted his image as a Davidic figure, and his son Leon VI cultivated a Solomonic ideal.³⁸³

Davit's image as a wise king was not a rhetorical construct of the anonymous monk Arsen only, but was cultivated in other rhetorical media as well. It seems that wisdom was so central to Davit's royal authority that the king himself sought to uphold the Solomonic ideal of wisdom by composing a short iambic poem, *Hymns of Repentance*, which he dedicated to the Theotokos. Although Davit's iambic poem is not very long – it consists of 35 strophes with five to six verses in each strophe – it communicates multiple messages. The main idea of *Hymns* was to represent David in the guise of the repentant ruler who maintains profound humility and, like the Biblical David, considers himself a great sinner and asks for forgiveness. It has been argued that a simple humility and repentance can easily be understood as Christian virtues, and the image of a repentant emperor should not come as a surprise. Humility was a “truly imperial.”³⁸⁴ According to Christian thought, repentance was the beginning of a man's substantial transformation. Each act of repentance signified the death of the old and the birth of the new, in this way providing firm ground for a new man.³⁸⁵ The *Hymns* seems to have been inspired by the biblical David's Psalm 50, since many motifs of the Biblical king's writings are reflected in this Georgian iambic poem. It could be that the *Hymns of Repentance* is the only surviving piece of the total output of Davit's works; perhaps he wrote more iambic poems, or maybe sermons and homilies like emperor Leon VI.

Leon VI was famous as a prolific writer and the author of a vast corpus of texts – homilies, sermons, a law code, and a military manual – that earned him the epithets of *sophos* and the New Solomon during his lifetime. Among Leon's writings, his religious sermons and homilies had the most significant impact on his contemporaries; he personally delivered most of them in public on the feast days and special occasions.³⁸⁶ For instance, Leon is claimed to have delivered an oration on Monday of the first week of Lent every year in the palace of Magnaura in front of clergy,

³⁸² Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI*, 78.

³⁸³ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 169.

³⁸⁴ G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 120.

³⁸⁵ [L. Grigolashvili] ლ. გრიგოლაშვილი, დავით აღმაშენებლის “გალობანი სინანულისანი“ (the Hymns of Repentance of David the Builder) (Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 2005), 119.

³⁸⁶ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 141; T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Emperor Leo VI*, 26-27;

senators, and other governmental officials.³⁸⁷ Taking into the account the Byzantine context and the tradition established during Leon’s reign, it becomes plausible that Davit himself performed his *Hymns of Repentance* to strengthen his image as a repentant, humble, pious, and prudent ruler in the eyes of the public. To further persuade his listeners of his wisdom and learnedness, Davit displays his knowledge of dogmatic theology in his religious poem. He stresses the importance of a correct understanding of the incarnation and the Chalcedonian perspective on the two nature Christology. Further, Davit polemicizes the Nestorians and exposes their wrong teachings on the Theotokos. Especially remarkable and interesting is Davit’s statement that in the past he had been interested in astrology, although, he now considers his past hobby as sin and asks God for the forgiveness. In his *Hymns of Repentance*, Davit touches upon the question of kingship and fashions himself as a divinely ordained ruler. In one of the verses he states: “Apart from the purple which I possessed by birth, God has entrusted me with the halo (*sharavandedi*) of kingship.”³⁸⁸ It must be emphasized that Davit was not the only ruler who communicated his viewpoint concerning kingship in his religious writing. Leon VI the Wise also supported the idea of imperial sacrality in his homilies.³⁸⁹ The vocabulary of divine appointment to the imperial office and the emperor’s pastoral role appears often in the epilogues of the homilies.³⁹⁰ In one of his homilies, Leon even demonstrates his determination to dominate the patriarch.³⁹¹ In Homily 14, the emperor expresses the view that the charismata of kingship are not far from those of the priesthood.³⁹²

There is no doubt that the iambic poem *Hymns of Repentance* was a medium of royal propaganda. Composition of this religious poem would have strengthened the image of Davit’s Solomonic wisdom and the thematic similarities between the *Hymns* and Psalm 50 would have drawn a parallel between him and the Biblical David. In this short writing, king Davit also emphasized his learnedness in theology and accentuated the divine ordination of his kingship.

Davit’s authority as a learned ruler was further strengthened by his zeal to promote education in his kingdom. The anonymous panegyrist colorfully narrates Davit’s central role in

³⁸⁷ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 143.

³⁸⁸ [David the Builder] დავით აღმაშენებელი, გალობანი სინანულისანი (The Hymns of Repentance) ed. G. Tevzadze (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1989), 2: ბუნებოთსა რაისა პორფირსა თვითმფლობელობასა თანა მეფობისაგა შარავანდედი მარწმუნენ.

³⁸⁹ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 137.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139-40; T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Emperor Leo VI*, 72.

³⁹¹ M. Riedel, *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity*, 150.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 152.

founding the center of learning at Gelati monastery as well as his patronage of intellectuals. Davit is said to have gathered several learned men “adorned with all the virtues” in this monastery. Some of these learned men were among the “king’s subjects” [i.e. lived in Georgia] the others came to Georgia from different parts of the Byzantine empire at the king’s request. Davit turned Gelati into an “academy of instruction,” and took all these learned men under his patronage and personal care. As the anonymous panegyrist puts it, the Gelati monastic school was a “new Athens.”³⁹³ The paucity of sources, however, is an obstacle to identify the literati whom Davit invited to Georgia.

Davit’s contemporary, Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos, was also associated with the revival and promotion of education; “When he [Alexios] found here a general neglect of culture and literary skills, with the art of literature seemingly banished, he was eager to revive whatever sparks still remained hidden beneath the ashes.”³⁹⁴ The account of the *Alexiad* may sound exaggerated, but the grammar school of the Orphanotropheion raised literacy among the poor and orphans and increased social mobility.³⁹⁵ Anna claimed that Alexios did his best to educate not only Byzantine but foreign children as well. It seems that the grammar school of the Orphanotropheion offered an opportunity to everyone who wished to receive primary education. The teachers at the grammar school, both *didaskaloi*, and *paidagogoi*, received wages from the endowment.³⁹⁶ Alexios even had an opinion about the youngsters’ education; he believed that pupils had to learn the Scripture thoroughly first and engage in studying classical philosophy afterwards.³⁹⁷

Even though Alexios and Davit are projected as promoters of learning by contemporary rhetorical media, one cannot say that Alexios’ rule was a watershed for the cultural and intellectual landscape of the Byzantine empire. Davit’s reign, on the contrary, can safely be regarded as a period that witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of intellectual activities. Furthermore, Alexios’ and Davit’s educational policies seem to have differed from each other. First, Davit’s promotion of education and literary patronage was more significant in its scope than the contemporary Byzantine emperor’s. Second, while Alexios took a hard line towards literati who adhered to Neoplatonic philosophy (John Italos and Eustatios of Nicaea) and persecuted heterodox groups

³⁹³ *The Life of Davit*, 174-5; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 322.

³⁹⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, V. 9 (Frankopan, 151).

³⁹⁵ Magdalino, “Innovation in Government,” 163.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, V. 9 (Frankopan, 151).

whose teachings were thought to deviate from Orthodoxy, Davit was much milder in this regard. Browning states that he counted at least twenty-five trials of various intellectuals during the rule of Alexios and his successors.³⁹⁸

In contrast, Davit is believed to have been benevolent towards the Neoplatonic philosopher and intellectual Ioane Petric'i. Little is known about Ioane Petric'i, but he was a twelfth-century philosopher and intellectual who was probably education at the Mangana school in the 1080s.³⁹⁹ Petric'i translated and wrote comments on works of the Neoplatonic philosophers, Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and Nemesios of Emesa's *On Human Nature*. He was probably the first Georgian intellectual who also made Aristotle's *Categories* available in a Georgian translation.⁴⁰⁰ Petric'i also translated hagiographical, historiographical and exegetical texts, including Theophylact of Ohrid's commentary on the Gospels commissioned by Maria of Alania.⁴⁰¹

Since Petric'i was Neoplatonist and translated Neoplatonic authors, scholars assume that he was student/close associate of John Italos.⁴⁰² John Italos' letter addressing his former student, Abazg grammarian, reinforces the assumption that Petric'i was indeed this grammarian. In this letter, Italos asks Abazg grammarian to help him solve a philosophical question because he thinks that his former student has considerable expertise.⁴⁰³ Petric'i made a great impression on subsequent generations. In the eighteenth century, prince Teimuraz Bagrationi (Bagratid), himself a literatus and learned man, considered Ioane Petric'i the supreme philosopher and a great translator.

One may speculate that by inviting Petric'i to his court, Davit emphasized that he was eager to patronize intellectuals who felt uneasy in Byzantium and was ready to tolerate literati with different worldviews. The fact that Davit was a tolerant Christian ruler and promoter of learning

³⁹⁸ R. Browning, "Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," 19.

³⁹⁹ [I. Lolashvili] ი. ლოლაშვილი, იოანე პეტრიჭი: სათნოებათა კობე (Ioane Petritsi: 'The Leader of Virtues') (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1980), 72; L. Gigineishvili, *The Platonic Theology of Ioane Petritsi*. Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 4 (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), xi; On Petritsi see further: M. Tarchnishvili, Geschichte E. Chelidze "On the Life and Literary Activity of Ioane Petritsi, part II," *Religia* 1–3 (1995):76-89; L. Alexidze "Ioane Petritsi," in *Interpreting Proclus from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. S. Gersh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 229-244; D. Melikishvili, "Ioane Petritsi and John Italos On Two Original Causes," in *Georgian Christian Thought and its Cultural Context. Memorial Volume for the 125th anniversary of Shalva Nutsubidze* (1888–1969), eds., T. Nutsubidze, C. Horn, and B. Laurie, Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 2 (Leiden/Boston MA: Brill, 2014), 236-43.

⁴⁰⁰ I. Lolashvili, *Ioane Petritsi: 'The Leader of Virtues'*, 74-76.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 72.

⁴⁰³ L. Gigineishvili, *The Platonic Theology of Ioane Petritsi*, 17.

is corroborated by twelfth- and thirteenth- century Muslim and Armenian sources. The thirteenth-century Armenian historian, Vardan Arevelc‘i, claims that Davit sent 40 young boys to the Byzantine empire so that they could be educated in the imperial schools, learn Greek, and acquire the necessary skills to become qualified translators.⁴⁰⁴ Even more relevant information about Davit’s patronage of learned men is attested in the account of Ibn al-Jawzi. According to him, Davit erected a hospice in Tp‘ilisi (Tbilisi) for Muslim poets and Sufi scholars and organized a banquet in their honor. To demonstrate his respect for his Muslim subjects, Davit with his son, Demetre, frequently attended Friday prayers at the mosque. Another Muslim scholar, Al-Fariqī, tells that Davit treated the Muslims of Tp‘ilisi exceptionally well, much better than they were treated in Bagdad. Of particular interest is Yaqut al-Hamawī’s information about Davit. Al-Hamawī tells that the Georgian king knew Islamic theology well and even debated the origin of the Quran with the qadi of Ganja.⁴⁰⁵

The great emphasis on the virtue of wisdom in Davit’s image-making discourse was probably inspired by the Byzantine tradition. The ideal Byzantine emperor was expected to profess wisdom and intellectual knowledge.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, the Byzantine ideal of the ruler-writer inclined towards learning seems to have had an impact on the Bagratid royal court during Davit’s reign. Davit exploited his education and literary activities to enhance his sacred kingship; his religious writing served to reinforce his spiritual authority and communicate his vision of the nature of his royal power. When discussing the adoption of Byzantine models of power representation in Georgia, the legitimate question arises as to what extent the case of Leon VI served as an example for Davit’s image. Probably, the example of Leon was not the only source of inspiration for the Georgian king and his retinue. It is certain, however, that the Bagratid royal court was well informed about the Byzantine emperor who fashioned himself as a new Solomon.

⁴⁰⁴ [Vardan Arevelc‘i] ვარდან არაველცი. მსოფლიო ისტორია [World History] trans. N. Shoshiashvili and E. Kvachantiradze (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishers, 2002), 140.

⁴⁰⁵ [V. Puturidze] ვ. ფუტურიძე. არაბი ისტორიკოსი XIII ს. თბილისის შესახებ [Arab Historian on XII century Tbilisi, in *Enimkis Moambe XIII*] (Tbilisi, 1943), 144.

⁴⁰⁶ P. Magdalino, “Knowledge of Authority and Authorised History: The Imperial Intellectual Programme of Leo VI and Constantine VII,” in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. P. Armstrong, 187-8.

3.5 Guardian of Orthodoxy and the New Constantine: The ecclesiastical policies of Davit IV and Alexios I Komnenos

The similarities between Davit IV's and Alexios I Komnenos's styles of kingship is best demonstrated by comparing their ecclesiastical policies and public displays of Orthodoxy. Davit and Alexios seem to have applied similar strategies when attempting to impose royal/imperial authority over the Church and assert their central role in religious matters.

After Davit ascended to the throne, he positioned himself as a reformer of the Church and concerned himself with ecclesiastical affairs from the early years of his reign. He used various methods to increase the royal office's authority and succeeded in renegotiating a new balance of power between the royal crown and the Church. Despite a deep political and economic crisis that unfolded in the eleventh century, the Georgian Church remained a powerful and wealthy institution under the leadership of the *katholikos*-patriarch. The borders of the Georgian kingdom and Georgian Church were different by the 1090s. The see of Mcx'et'a had jurisdictional authority over the entire Georgian-speaking area, which was far larger than the territories under Bagratid control. While the Bagratid capital was in Kutaisi, western Georgia, the residence of the *katholikos*-patriarch was in Mcx'et'a, in eastern Georgia. By the end of the eleventh century, the areas around Mcx'et'a were vulnerable to Seljuk invasions and the head of the Church may have moved his residence to western Georgia.

The fragmentary evidence makes it difficult to discuss the nature of the relationship between the Bagratid kings and the *katholikos* of the Georgian Church in the tenth and the eleventh centuries. Neither it is possible to elaborate in depth to what extent the Bagratid rulers were successful in imposing their authority over the Church. Only Davit's reign yields a clue about the dynamics of the Church-state relationship. But before proceeding further with Davit's ecclesiastical policy, we need to look briefly at Alexios I Komnenos's administrative reforms, which guaranteed his ascendancy over the Church.

Although one can debate whether Alexios was a successful ruler or not and whether he laid the foundations for a new political system, he certainly managed to recover Byzantium from a profound political and military crisis. The elevation of Alexios to power is claimed as a turning point in the administrative and social history of Byzantium. Like Davit's reign, his rule can be characterized as a renewal that witnessed a reconfiguration of governmental apparatus, and

reforms of the taxation system, episcopal hierarchy and patriarchal administration.⁴⁰⁷ When Alexios assumed the throne the relationship between the emperor and the Church was far from perfect.⁴⁰⁸ Owing to a continuing political crisis in the eleventh century, the imperial office's authority suffered a blow whereas several patriarchs managed to extend their power; the growth of patriarchal influence came at the expense of imperial authority.⁴⁰⁹ After Alexios assumed power, one of his priorities was to recover the imperial office's prestige and restore the emperor's traditional role in the Church. Alexios needed desperately to legitimize himself after he seized Constantinople by force and his army looted the imperial capital. When he took the imperial throne, two essential traditions were neglected and violated; he was not invited to take power by either the senate or by the people of Constantinople.⁴¹⁰ Alexios's precarious position was further exacerbated when he confiscated Church property to finance a defensive military campaign against the Norman army led by Robert Guiscard.⁴¹¹ Despite the difficulties, in the first years of his rule Alexios issued imperial edicts that restricted the independence of the patriarch and patriarchal administration.

In the second half of the eleventh-century, Isaakios I Komnenos moved the two chief ecclesiastical offices, *megas oikonomos* and the *megas skeuophylax*, from imperial to patriarchal control, after which the imperial office lost leverage to influence the patriarchal administration. In order to compensate for this loss, Alexios decided to increase the role of the *chartophylax* of the Great Church, whose appointment was an imperial prerogative. Alexios issued a legislative act defining the function of the *chartophylax* not only as archivist and registrar of the Great Church but as the patriarch's right hand.⁴¹² Consequently, the *chartophylax* was modeled as the patriarch's living image, his hands, mouth, and tongue, and he took precedence over bishops and metropolitans during ceremonies and processions in Hagia Sophia.⁴¹³ The high-ranking ecclesiastics, backed by the patriarch of Constantinople, opposed the promotion of the

⁴⁰⁷ P. Frankopan, "Re-Interpreting the Role of Family in Komnenian Byzantium: Where Blood is not thicker than water", in *Byzantium in the eleventh century: being in between*, ed. M. Lauthermann and M. Whittow, (London: Routledge, 2017), 181; M. Mullett, "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal", in *New Constantines*, ed. P. Magdalino, 260.

⁴⁰⁸ M. Angold, "Alexios Komnenos: an afterward," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed M. Mullett, 411.

⁴⁰⁹ M. Angold, "Belle Epoque of Crisis?" in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine empire*, ed. J. Shephard, 613.

⁴¹⁰ P. Magdalino, "*Basileia*: The Idea of Monarchy in Byzantium, 600–1200," in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, eds., A. Kaldellis and N. Siniosoglou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 594.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 594.

⁴¹² M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 59.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

chartophylax's position and subsequent change in the patriarchal administration. They further complained that during the essential ceremonies and processions the *chartophylax* had the right to take precedence over the high dignitaries of Hagia Sophia. The emperor responded that the *chartophylax* had this privilege because he was acting as the patriarch's deputy.⁴¹⁴ Through this reform, Alexios created a secured institutional base to keep the patriarch and his administration in check.

The insufficient information provided by contemporary Georgian written sources makes it difficult to elaborate on Davit's ecclesiastical policy as extensively as is possible for Alexios I Komnenos. Some observations can be made regarding Davit's administrative reforms, however, which created a solid foundation for permanent royal involvement in Church affairs. Presumably around 1104/5, Davit created a new office in the court administration by merging the offices of the chief administrative secretary (*mc'ignobartuxucesi*) and the bishop of Č'q'ondidi.⁴¹⁵ The head of the new office became one of the most influential court hierarchs in the kingdom; he was in charge of the royal chancellery and also controlled one of the most prominent bishoprics in western Georgia. Davit entrusted this new office to his close associate, Giorgi; this reform of Davit is rightly believed to have increased the king's influence in the Church.⁴¹⁶ Moreover, by creating this new office, Davit curtailed the influence of *katholikos*-patriarch of the Georgian church. It is noteworthy that in the *Life of Davit*, Giorgi is mentioned several times with elevated epithets, whereas the head of the Georgian Church is mentioned only once, when the anonymus lists the high-ranking ecclesiastics who participated in the Georgian-Armenian synod.⁴¹⁷ Therefore, it is logical to draw parallels between the reforms of Davit and Alexios. Even though the offices of *chartophylax* and chancellor-bishop of Č'q'ondidi were different, they served the same purpose. These offices secured the king's and emperor's access to the Church and thus made the Church more vulnerable to secular intervention.⁴¹⁸ It is far from easy to state if Davit was informed about Alexios' reform of the patriarchal administration, and if he was, the question arises to what extent the Byzantine case inspired Davit. Taking into account that in this period the Bagratid royal court

⁴¹⁴ M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 59.

⁴¹⁵ D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 88; S. H. Rapp, Jr., "Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium, and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past," 586.

⁴¹⁶ M. Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 83-4; D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, 88.

⁴¹⁷ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 347; *the Life of Davit*, 213.

⁴¹⁸ Georgian scholars never attempted at juxtaposing Alexios' and Davit's reigns, their style of kingship and reforms.

kept ties with the imperial court of Constantinople, the possibility that Davit's reforms drew some inspiration from those of Alexios Komnenos cannot be ruled out.

The practice of inter-dynastic marriages between the Georgian and Byzantine ruling dynasties established in the eleventh century continued into the twelfth century. Around 1118, Davit married his daughter, Kata, to Alexios, son of Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryenios.⁴¹⁹ Even before this marriage, the Bagratids and Komnenoi were already each other's kin. Alexios Komnenos' older brother, Isaakios, was married to Irene, a relative of Maria of Alania and probably the member of the Bagratid family. The importance of the personality of Maria of Alania in creating a network of communication between the Byzantine and Georgian courts should not pass without comment. Maria maintained ties with her Georgian kin and patronized Georgian secular and the monastic communities in Constantinople. Some scholars even assume that Maria of Alania returned to Georgia twice, in 1072 and 1081.⁴²⁰ Maria enjoyed such great authority that her name was inserted in the Synodikon of Ruis-Urbnisi council which was convoked by her nephew, Davit, in 1105. In this document, Maria is eulogized as: "the God protected virtuous king [mepe] Maria Augusta."⁴²¹ In this way, Davit paid homage to his aunt.

*
**

The convocation of ecclesiastical councils and participation in theological polemics with members of heterodox groups was a hallmark of Davit's and Alexios I Komnenos's rules. Even though Alexios had problems with legitimacy and could not pursue a hard line against the Church in the first years of his rule, when certain circles in the Byzantine Church became alarmed by the teachings of the intellectual Ioannes Italos, the emperor masterfully exploited the concerns of the ecclesiastics. He initiated the convocation of a church synod and took a leading role in the trial of Italos and condemnation of his teachings. The *Alexiad* relates that Alexios, as a true apostle and representative of God, was alarmed by Italos' dogma and decided to act swiftly when he realized

⁴¹⁹ R. Prinke, "Kata of Georgia, daughter of Davit IV the Builder as a wife of *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos," *Foundations* 3 (6), (2011): 489-502; C. Toumanoff, "On the relationship between the founder of the Empire of Trebizond and Queen Tamar," *Speculum* XV (1940): 300.

⁴²⁰ A. Alexidze, "Martha-Maria: A Striking Figure in the Cultural History of Georgia and Byzantium" in *The Greeks in the Black Beas from the Bronze Age to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. M. Koromila (Athens: Panorama, 1991), 207-10;

⁴²¹ Gabidzashvili, *the Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 195.

that his teaching was gaining ground in the imperial capital.⁴²² The *Alexiad* portrays the emperor not only as a guardian of the faith but as a competent theologian who detected deviation from Orthodoxy in Italos' works. Apart from the *Alexiad*, Alexios's own writing about Italos' teachings (the *pittakion*) which he submitted to the synod for approval also affirms that the emperor was interested and claimed expertise in theology.⁴²³ After Italos' trial, an appendix was added to the *Synodikon* of the Orthodox Church anathematizing Italos' teachings.⁴²⁴ The entire drama of Italos' case played into Alexios's hands and affirmed his image as a righteous emperor.

It took Davit several years to prepare the ground for ecclesiastical reform. In 1105, under his auspice one of the largest church council was convened on territory of the Ruisi and Urbnisi bishoprics, gathering ecclesiastics from all the Georgian-speaking lands. The council had an ambitious agenda to execute an administrative and moral reform of the Church, eliminate simony and reinforce the obedience of ecclesiastics to canon law. Restoring the royal office's authority and affirming Davit's position as a divinely ordained ruler and a new Constantine was of primary importance. This council had great significance because its canons became the foundation of the reformed Georgian Church. Summoning of a council of this importance could not occur without comprehensive preparation. Davit ordered the Georgian/Byzantine intellectual, Arsen of Iq'alto, to translate Byzantine *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles* into Georgian – a first and vital step which he undertook before the council.⁴²⁵ By making the Byzantine collection of canon laws available in Georgian, Davit prepared a legal ground for the church reform and embraced the role of legislator, a sign of the king's supreme authority given to him by God. Davit and his entourage aimed to make Georgian ecclesiastics submit to unconditional obedience to canon law and by this token to make canon law an instrument of control. It is important to emphasize that the Byzantine *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles* contains several statements in which the emperor's special position in Christendom is emphasized and clearly defined.⁴²⁶ For instance, the proems of the ecumenical council canons state that the councils were convened under the emperors' auspices and leadership.

⁴²² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, V. 8 (Frankopan 146); Also see D. Smythe, "Alexios I and Heretics: the account of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," in *Alexios Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett, 244-45.

⁴²³ M. Trizio, "Trials of Philosophers and Theologians under the Komnenoi" in *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, 463.

⁴²⁴ M. Trizio, "Trials of Philosophers and Theologians under the Komnenoi," 463.

⁴²⁵ On Byzantine canon law see W. Hartmann and K. Pennington eds., *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012);

⁴²⁶ D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 400–1453* (New York, Washington: Prager Publishers, 1971), 321.

The translated *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles* was a powerful instrument in the hands of Davit and his supporters and created a legal base for the king's intervention in ecclesiastical matters. This is why I contend that the translation of the *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles* was a royal project, ordered and financed by king Davit rather than an independent initiative of the literatus monk, Arsen of Iq'alto. During the opening of the Ruis-Urbnisi council, in his introductory speech, Davit probably referred to legal precedents for when a secular ruler convened a council and attended and chaired its first meeting.

When initiating the convocation of the ecclesiastical council, Davit may have followed a Byzantine example where the convocation of councils usually had a good effect on the emperor's image. The councils served to legitimize the emperor as a pious and God-loving ruler and promote his role as a defender/guardian of the faith.⁴²⁷ When Davit ordered the assembly of ecclesiastics in 1105, he was waging war against the Seljuk Turks and pursuing the goal of unifying the Georgian lands into a single kingdom. In this endeavor, Davit sought the moral and political support of the Church. During the council, Davit probably presented himself as the only legitimate sovereign of Georgian lands and asserted his authority as a lawgiver king who gave the Church a collection of canon laws as essential as the *Nomokanon*. This council, which brought together churchmen from all over the Georgian-speaking territories, was a perfect occasion that Davit likely used to further display his royal authority to the ecclesiastics of the kingdom of K'axeti, conquered and annexed a year before this event.

According to Davit's biographer, the king's main objective was to implement order in the Church.

At that time, the holy churches, the house of God was turned into something like robbers' dens; with the help of unworthy and dishonorable men, rather than through their virtues, these villains sized the episcopacies, not entering the doors as behooves an honest shepherd, by devious means, as is the custom of robbers. The installed priests and *chorepiskopoi* who, instead of adhering God's way, set about instructing their charges with iniquity. And the iniquities came from God's house and the priests themselves, and as a result, the all-seeing God grew angry as our words have shown.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 302.

⁴²⁸ *The Life of Davit*, 170; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 318: რამეთუ წმიდანი ეკლესიანი, სახლნი ღმრთისანი, ქუაბ ავაზაკთა ქმნილ იყვნეს; და უღირსთა და უწესთა მამულობით უფროის, ვიდრე ღირსებით, დაეპყრნეს უფროისანი საეპისკოპოსონი, არა კარით მწყემსებრ შესრულთა, არამედ ავაზაკებრ ერდოით; და მათნივე მსგავსი ხუცესნი და ქორეპისკოპოსნი დაედგინეს, რომელნი, ნაცვლად სჯულთა საღმრთოთა პყრობისა, უსხულოებასა აწურთიდეს მათქუეშეთა.

Although the *Life of Davit* describes the condition of the church in dark colors, caution must be exercised before taking encomiastic exaggeration of the anonymus at face value. There is no doubt, however, that the situation was far from perfect in the church, as shown by a careful reading of Ruis-Urbnisi canons.

The very first lines of the Ruis-Urbnisi canons relate that Davit played a central role in the convocation of the council: “These are the canons of the holy and God-guarded council, which was convoked by the order of our virtuous and God-protected king Davit, king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Ranians, and Kaxetians.”⁴²⁹ The council promulgated 19 canons dealing with a number of issues. Canon 1, 2, 3, and 11 focus on the organization of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Canon 1 summarizes briefly the outcome of the council; dishonorable bishops and high-ranking ecclesiastics who obtained their positions uncanonically were to be deposed, and honorable and virtuous men to be appointed instead. Thus, it seems that Davit prevailed against his opponents in the Church and secured their dismissals.⁴³⁰ Although little is known about Davit’s conflict with high-ranking ecclesiastics; neither the *Life of Davit* nor the canons of Ruis-Urbnisi provide detailed information.

Canons 4, 7, 14, and 15 regulate liturgical discipline. The moral rule of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is outlined in canons 5, 6, 9, 13, and 18. Rules concerning weddings of the laity are discussed in canons 8, 10, 16, 17. Among the canons issued by the Ruis-Urbnisi council, only canon 19 deals with dogmatic issues. This canon stresses the centrality of icon veneration and condemns those who disrespect holy images. “The one who insults an icon insults God himself, as it was written by St. Basil. So, we define that this God-disturbing and God-insulting sin should be totally annihilated among our people.”⁴³¹ Apart from canon 19 promulgated by the Ruis-Urbnisi council, the importance of icon veneration and its proper treatment is also argued by king Davit in *Hymns of Repentance*.⁴³² A legitimate question arises as to why this twelfth-century council adopted this law and who was the target of the anti-iconoclast rhetoric. In the eleventh century, Eptvime the Athonite associated iconoclasm with the Armenian Church and stated that holy icons

⁴²⁹ *The Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 176: “მეგლისწერაი წმიდისა და ღმრთივ შეკრებულისა კრებისაი, რომელი შემოკრება ბრძანებითა კეთილად მსახურისა და ღმრთივ დასცულისა მეფისა ჩუენისა დავით აფხაზთა და ქართველთა, რანთა და კახთა მეფისაითა...”

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 184-5.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴³² *The Hymns of Repentance*, 27.

were not venerated among the non-Chalcedonian Armenians.⁴³³ Neither canon 19 of Ruis-Urbnisi nor king Davit in his *Hymns of Repentance*, however, accuse the Armenians of iconoclasm. These two sources never hint that disrespect towards the icons in the Georgian church has to do with Armenian influence.

The theme about the proper treatment of the sacred images was also brought to the fore in Byzantium during Alexios Komnenos's reign. Although, the Byzantine and Georgian cases seem different at first glance. While the mistreatment of icons may have been an issue in Georgian church, in Byzantium disrespect towards the holy images was not practiced during Alexios' reign. The "Komnenian iconoclasm" was nothing but a conflict between Alexios Komnenos and Leon, metropolitan bishop of Chalcedon.⁴³⁴ Leon decided to challenge Alexios's authority over the Church and attacked him when, during the Norman invasion (1082), the emperor ordered the church treasure to be expropriated and melted down to finance a military campaign. Alexios received support from the patriarch of Constantinople, Eustratios of Garidas, but Leon demanded the patriarch's resignation and condemnation, and launched a campaign against the emperor, accusing him of iconoclasm.⁴³⁵ Alexios convened a synod in 1083 to acquit himself and promised to never again use church property for military purposes, but in 1085 and 1091, when the empire faced external threats, the emperor confiscated church property again for military needs.⁴³⁶ Five centuries prior to Alexios, emperor Herakleios (r.610–641), with the support and permission of Patriarch Sergios, melted down valuable church objects to raise an army and fight the Persians. In the face of the Persian menace, Byzantine church officials wholeheartedly backed Herakleios. Yet in the eleventh century, in a period when the empire again struggled for survival, the high-ranking ecclesiastics were not as supportive as their peers been in the seventh century.

⁴³³ *The Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 155.

⁴³⁴ On "Komnenian Iconoclasm" See: P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 271–272; M. Angold, *Church and Society under the Comneni*, 46-50; A. W. Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons," 579–601; C. Barber, "Leo of Chalcedon, Euthymios Zigabenos and the Return of the Past", *Contesting the Logic of Painting. Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Leiden, 2007), 131–157; J. Ryder, "Leo of Chalcedon. Conflicting Ecclesiastical Models in the Byzantine Eleventh Century", *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century. Being in between. Papers from the 45th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Oxford, 24-26 March 2012*, ed. M. D. Lauxtermann, M. Whittow (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 169–180.

⁴³⁵ Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons", 579-80; C. Barber, "Leo of Chalcedon, Euthymios Zigabenos and the Return of the Past", 133-35;

⁴³⁶ Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons", 579; Ryder, "Leo of Chalcedon. Conflicting Ecclesiastical Models in the Byzantine Eleventh Century", 172.

Leon of Chalcedon, a high-ranking ecclesiastic, had formidable reputation and support from the emperor's opposition, but his dubious theology arguing for the sanctity of the material bearing holy images enabled Alexios Komnenos to gain a victory.⁴³⁷ Leon insisted that it was sacrilege to use matter once imprinted with a holy image for any other purpose.⁴³⁸ His incorrect theological argument, outlined in a letter composed in 1093/4, sealed his fate and provided Alexios and his supporters with solid evidence to accuse the metropolitan of Chalcedon of heresy. The synod of Blachernae convened by Alexios in 1094, finally resolved Leon's case. The members of the synod read the rulings of the Second Council of Nicaea (c.787) and affirmed that veneration was given to the icons and prototypes worshiped, while veneration was not transferred to the material of the icon.⁴³⁹ This statement of the council was directed against Leon of Chalcedon and his supporters.⁴⁴⁰ Leon was allowed to return to Constantinople from exile; he accepted the decisions of the Second Council of Nicaea on the correct veneration of icons and thus made peace with the emperor.⁴⁴¹

There may be another reason why the Ruis-Urbnisi council promulgated the canon concerning icon veneration. Although no specific evidence speaks for this, one can hypothesize that Davit, like Alexios, also expropriated church property to raise funds to recruit soldiers and fight the Seljuk Turks. Davit's panegyrist several times points out that the king needed manpower and he never had enough soldiers to muster a strong army for a large-scale offensive against the Seljuks until 1116/8. Furthermore, ecclesiastics who had connections with Georgian monastic communities of the Byzantine empire may have been well informed about the current imperial affairs and, inspired by Leon of Chalcedon and his supporters' fierce struggle, criticized Davit for mistreating icons and sacred objects and even accused him of iconoclasm.

The council of Ruis-Urbnisi was an event of vital importance not only because it promulgated the laws which became the foundation of the reformed Georgian Church, but also

⁴³⁷ A. W. Carr, "Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons," 579.

⁴³⁸ C. Barber, "Leo of Chalcedon, Euthymios Zigabenos and the Return of the Past," 136.

⁴³⁹ J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, 149.

⁴⁴⁰ In her recent article, Judith Ryder proposed a different viewpoint concerning Komnenian Iconoclasm. She questions the scale of Alexios's confiscation of church property and argues that sources mention only the removal of the golden and silver doors of the Chalkoprateria and consecrated objects from the church of St. Abericus. She also contends that Leon's primary object of critique and attack was Patriarch Eustratios of Garidas, and theological discussion on icons developed later. More importantly, Leon's concern was not a theological debate, but rather theologically attached as a part of political maneuvering. See J. Ryder, "Leo of Chalcedon. Conflicting Ecclesiastical Models in the Byzantine Eleventh Century," 173-4.

⁴⁴¹ J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, 149.

because Davit's supporters championed representing him as a new Constantine and Christ-like ruler. Davit's monk, Arsen, an enigmatic figure, composed a short but highly eulogistic oration for this particular event. The oration barely comprises a page and a half in a modern Georgian edition, but it is a unique piece of royal propaganda.⁴⁴² No other surviving rhetorical source like this seems to have been composed prior to or after Davit's rein. This rhetorical text was probably read out at the very last and concluding session of Ruis-Urbnisi council to reinforce Davit's critical role in the eyes of the participants. The first lines of the oration address the king. Conciliar decisions and the canons are presented to Davit so that the "wise and intelligent king" evaluates them and expresses his opinion. This oration confirms that Davit not only convoked the council but played a central role in approving the conciliar decisions. The panegyric oration represents Davit as a guardian of faith and eulogizes him as "impeccable in Christian faith like a Constantine the Great, and a God-serving scepter bearer like Theodosius."⁴⁴³ Furthermore, Davit is portrayed as a radiant sun, the face of God, and a God-like ruler. It might well be that the delivery of this oration was the culmination of the council. The audience witnessed something new for the Georgian world. The king was the center of attention and received the most elevated eulogy. Thus, the oration composed by the monk Arsen was one of the vehicles of propaganda that enunciated a new ideology of kingship and defined a new boundary between the king and Church. Interestingly, in all surviving manuscripts the panegyric oration follows the canons of Ruis-Urbnisi council. The transition between the canons of the council and the panegyric oration is done so masterfully in all the manuscripts that one gets an impression that the oration was a vital part of the Ruis-Urbnisi council and its acts.⁴⁴⁴

The proceedings of the Ruis-Urbnisi council (canons, panegyric oration, and Synodikon) survive only within the manuscripts of Georgian translation of the *Nomokanon*. It seems that Davit and his supporters ordered the integration of the council's decisions into the *Nomokanon* soon after 1105 in order to make the canons of the Ruis-Urbnisi council more authoritative in the eyes of Georgian ecclesiastics. Probably during the council, the churchmen who supported the reform had the translated *Nomokanon* with them in order to persuade their opponents that the conciliar

⁴⁴² Surprisingly, the panegyric oration composed by Arsen has received no attention until now. It is a neglected source even though it is the first panegyric oration written in such a Byzantine manner. This rhetorical text highlights the sacralization of Davit's persona.

⁴⁴³ Gabidzashvili, *The Acts of Ruis-Urbnisi Council*, 194.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

decisions of Ruis-Urbnisi and canons adopted were in harmony with the laws of the *Nomokanon*. Examining the *Nomokanon*, there is no discrepancy between the Georgian translation of the original Greek text and the canons of the Ruis-Urbnisi council. The transition between these texts is quite natural and one gets the impression that it was the conciliar decisions of Ruis-Urbnisi that finally shaped and perfected the collocation of the canon laws of the Eastern Church.

Davit's central role in summoning the Ruis-Urbnisi council is highlighted by his anonymous panegyrist; the *Life of Davit* praises Davit for reforming the Church and compares him with Constantine: "Davit accomplished this in imitation of Constantine the Great."⁴⁴⁵ Hence, the political vocabulary of the *Life of Davit* and the panegyric oration of the monk Arsen are similar; both authors considered Davit a new Constantine. It should be noted that Constantine did not serve as a paragon of the ideal ruler to the Bagratid kings before the twelfth century, indicating that this novelty was introduced in Georgia during Davit's reign. Davit's likeness to Constantine, however, was not confined to narrative sources only. The royal imagery from Boč'orma Church in K'axeti bears witness that the Bagratid court exploited Constantinian imagery to glorify the Georgian king.

The Boč'orma fresco is the earliest surviving item of visual media which shows an image of Davit standing next to Constantine the Great and Helena.⁴⁴⁶ Boč'orma was one of the main churches in the K'axeti region, conquered, and annexed by Davit in 1104/5. The Bagratid king needed to lay foundations to his legitimacy and authority in the recently conquered land. Therefore, it is reasonable to date the fresco soon after the conquest of K'axeti and ascribe to it a clear propagandistic purpose. The royal imagery was a source of visual rhetoric and aimed to forge parallels between Davit and his achievements and Constantine the Great. Constantine the Great and Helena, however, may not have been as widely known and recognizable in the easternmost regions of Georgia as in the Byzantine empire. A tiny circle of high-ranking ecclesiastics and secular elite probably knew who Constantine and his mother Helena were, but the majority of upper strata of society in K'axeti would have had difficulties in recognizing them. It is possible, however, that the clergy of Boč'orma interpreted the meaning of the imagery for the congregation and drew parallels between Davit and Constantine. After Davit succeeded in strengthening his

⁴⁴⁵ *The Life of Davit*, 171-2; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 319.

⁴⁴⁶ The Boč'orma frescoes are very damaged, but Asmat Okropiridze has identified images of Davit, Constantine and Helena. See [A. Okropiridze] ა. ოკროპირიძე, ქტიტორის გამოსახულება ბოჭორმის წმინდა გიორგის სახელობის ეკლესიაში [The Image of the donor in the Church of St George of Bochorma] *Literature and Art* 1 (1990): 235-251; A. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 67.

position in the Church, he may have used institutional support of the Church to propagate his image as a guardian of the faith and a new Constantine. It is plausible that during the liturgy Davit was acclaimed as a divinely ordained, God-loving ruler, and benefactor of the Church all over the Georgian-speaking lands. Apart from Boč'orma, Davit's image next to Constantine and Helena has survived in the Gelati monastery.⁴⁴⁷ The Gelati fresco further corroborates that the Bagratid court set in motion a strategy that aimed to forge a likeness between Davit and the first Christian emperor. The fact that the persona of Constantine the Great became so central for Davit's renewed image was a consequence of the conceptual reformulation and sacralization of the Georgian kingship. If the figure of Constantine as a paradigm of an ideal ruler was something new for the Georgian context, his image was already well established in the Byzantine empire.

Constantine was a paradigm of Christian kingship and served as a role model for the Byzantine emperors. The tradition of likening the reigning emperor with Constantine the Great originated in the fifth century, but his name and reputation witnessed a revival between the seventh and tenth centuries. It was in this period when Constantine became a figure of hagiography.⁴⁴⁸ The emergence of Constantine as a model ruler for emperors and the phenomenon of the "New Constantine" was the consequence of his elevation to sainthood, when his excellent reputation as a saint superseded the memory of his sins, especially the murder of his son, Crispus, and wife, Fausta.⁴⁴⁹ During the rule of the first Macedonian emperors, the figure of Constantine was very much present in Macedonian dynastic propaganda. Emperor Basileios I was claimed to have kinship ties with Constantine on his mother's side. The persona of the first Christian emperor was a vital element of the imperial tradition.⁴⁵⁰ When the Byzantine emperors needed to legitimize meddling in ecclesiastical and dogmatic affairs, they could justify their actions by referring to the example of Constantine the Great whose unique role in the Church was widely recognized. Even though the "Constantinian fever" was over by the eleventh century, emperor Konstantinos VIII tried to fashion himself as a "second Constantine." He was the last emperor to be buried in the

⁴⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the images of Constantine and Helene close to the image of Davit in Gelati monastery received a very little attention. I am grateful to Irene Giviashvili who pinpointed to me about the imagery of Constantine and Helene.

⁴⁴⁸ P. Magdalino, "Introduction," in *New Constantines*, 6.

⁴⁴⁹ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium*, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ J. Haldon, "Constantine or Justinian? Crisis and Identity in imperial propaganda in the seventh century" In *New Constantines*, 102.

Mausoleum of Constantine and Justinian.⁴⁵¹ Constantinian imagery re-acquired importance during the Komnenian regime.⁴⁵² Anna Komnene, in her *Alexiad*, presents her father as a New Constantine and the first Christian emperor's successor. She constructs Alexios's likeness to Constantine gradually and brings it at the climax in book fourteen.⁴⁵³ As early as book six, Alexios is praised as the thirteenth apostle and high priest, eager to convert barbarians to Christianity. He is portrayed as an exceptional emperor and man of God: "One can truly say that the emperor was a most saintly person, ... a high priest ... with an apostle's faith and message, eager to convert to Christ not only the nomad Scyths but also the whole of Persia and all barbarians who dwelled in Egypt and Libia ..."⁴⁵⁴ Alexios further earned his status as Constantine's successor and the thirteenth apostle through his evangelical effort to convert the Manicheans of Philippopolis to the "sweet doctrine of the Church."⁴⁵⁵ Anna Komnene intentionally re-arranged her narrative and placed the stories of Alexios' rule that could assert his image as a new Constantine, a defender of Orthodoxy, and the thirteenth apostle, at the end of the *Alexiad*.⁴⁵⁶ This is why the trial of Basil the Bogomil, as well as the establishment of the Orphanotropheion, are in the last and climaxing chapters of Anna's history. Although written decades after the events it describes, the *Alexiad* does reflect the features of Alexios' contemporary image-making discourse. In all likelihood, Constantine served as a model for Alexios, who justified the gradual imposition of his authority over the Church by referring to the example of Constantine the Great. If Alexios is celebrated as the thirteenth apostle, ready to convert barbarians, so is Davit in the *Life*. The Georgian king is eulogized as an apostle equal to St. Paul and Constantine the Great because of his contribution to the spread of Christianity and the conversion of thousands of pagan Cumans. Like the *Alexiad*, the *Life of Davit* makes this statement in the concluding part of the narrative.⁴⁵⁷

I am of the opinion that Davit's ecclesiastical policy and Church reform are directly connected to the creation of the *Dogmatikon* by Arsen of Iq'alto.⁴⁵⁸ The *Dogmatikon* is an

⁴⁵¹ Magdalino, "Introduction," 6.

⁴⁵² M. Mullett, "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal," 267.

⁴⁵³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XIV. 7 (Frankophan, 426-28); Buckley. *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene*, 260.

⁴⁵⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, VI. 13; XIV. 8 (Frankopan, 182 and 427).

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., XIV. 8 (Frankopan, 427)

⁴⁵⁶ M. Angold, "Alexios Komnenos: Afterwards," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett, 402.

⁴⁵⁷ *The Life of Davit*, 209; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 345.

⁴⁵⁸ [I. Lolashvili] ი. ლოლაშვილი, *არსენ იყალთოელი* [Arsen of Iqalto: Life and Deeds] (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1978): 104-157.

anthology of early Christian and the Byzantine authors' dogmatic-polemical treatises directed against non-Chalcedonians (Jacobites), Armenians, Jews, Nestorians, and Muslims. The *Dogmatikon* also contains non-polemical and exegetical writings.⁴⁵⁹ Scholars do not link the creation of the *Dogmatikon* with a Church reform launched by Davit and his circle.

The earliest surviving manuscript of the *Dogmatikon* is a late twelfth-century copy of the original; it is missing the last few pages, including the colophons of the author [i.e., Arsen of Iq'alto] and the scribe. The lack of this important information makes it difficult to claim with certainty who commissioned Arsen of Iq'alto to create this significant work. There is unanimous agreement among the scholars that Arsen is the author and originator of the *Dogmatikon*, that composing this kind of work was his own original idea and that he decided which early Christian and Byzantine authors to translate and integrate into his *Dogmatikon*. No such collection and compilation of dogmatic-exegetical treatises is known to have existed in the Byzantine empire. Scholars take Arsen's authorship for granted and have not discussed further who might have sponsored the composition of the *Dogmatikon* and why it was created between the end of the eleventh and the first quarter of the twelfth century. Considering the content of the *Dogmatikon*, it is clear that Arsen had access to a significant number of authors and their works. Arsen would have needed at least financial support to be able to have continuous access to these manuscripts and to have them at his disposal. Moreover, it would have required the lion's share of Arsen's time and energy to go through the early Christian and the Byzantine authors, find relevant treatises and excerpts, and then translate them into Georgian. One should not forget that Arsen was a busy man. Apart from the *Dogmatikon*, Arsen translated the *Nomokanon of Fourteen Titles*, Georgios Hamartolos' *Chronicle*, and the poetry of Andrew of Crete from Greek into Georgian. King Davit commissioned Arsen to translate the latter. Considering the scope of the work required to create the *Dogmatikon*, it is difficult to imagine that the learned monk accomplished this endeavor without considerable material support. Since Arsen was a close associate of Davit, it is logical to believe that the king stood behind this ambitious project. One of the marginalia inserted in the twelfth-century manuscript of the *Dogmatikon* contains valuable information about the relationship between Davit IV and Arsen of Iq'alto. This marginal note re-tells Davit's words, which he allegedly said when he visited Arsen at Šio-Myvime Monastery: "I am a person of the

⁴⁵⁹ I. Lolashvili, *Arsen of Iqalto*, 104-41.

era when Arsen was...reading Gregory of Nyssa and translating the *Dogmatikon*.”⁴⁶⁰ Probably when Arsen finished the *Dogmatikon* he presented this vital work to Davit. This manual armed king and Church to better defend orthodoxy and fight heresy.

The twelfth-century manuscript of *Dogmatikon* contains Arsen’s original comments and marginalium that provide information on how this voluminous work was created. The *Dogmatikon* starts with Anastasios of Sinai’s anti-Monophysite treatise, *Guide Along the Right Path*. Arsen’s marginalia tells that he started and completed the translation of this work at St. George of Mangana in Constantinople.⁴⁶¹ This information leads scholars to believe that Arsen was educated at the school of Mangana, and perhaps studied under Michael Psellos and Ioannes Xiphilinos.⁴⁶² Kekelidze has argued that Arsen could only have received this level of education at the Mangana school, where Michael Psellos and Ioannes Xiphilinos set very high standards.⁴⁶³ Arsen’s in-depth knowledge of theology as well as his legal training – reflected in his translated works – speaks for his Byzantine education. Arsen probably developed legal expertise during his study in Constantinople which enabled him to translate the Byzantine *Nomokanon* into Georgian. Scholars who have made a thorough philological study of the Georgian *Nomokanon* agree that Arsen was competent in the field of canon law.⁴⁶⁴ Another example that can strengthen the hypothesis that Arsen studied at St. George of Mangana is that he integrated a short exegetical treatise into his *Dogmatikon*, the authorship of which he ascribes to Michael Psellos. The title of this work in the *Dogmatikon* is: “Translation of the Great Philosopher Psellos’ Speech Towards his Students.”⁴⁶⁵ This short work that discusses why Christ is referred with the epithet of “the firstborn” survives only in Georgian translation. Psellos probably composed this concise writing solely for a small circle of students, which is why it was never disseminated widely. Arsen probably read this composition when he was at Mangana monastery.

Since I am committed to a comparative approach in this study, it is instructive to draw some parallels between Arsen of Iq‘alto’s *Dogmatikon* and the *Panoplia Dogmatike* of Euthymios Zigabenos. Like the *Dogmatikon*, the *Panoplia Dogmatike* was the compilation of textual

⁴⁶⁰ Zhordania, *Chronicles*, 246.

⁴⁶¹ I. Lolashvili, *Arsen of Iqalto: Life and Deeds*, 107.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 142; K. Kekelidze, *History of Old Georgian Literature*, 278.

⁴⁶³ K. Kekelidze, *History of Old Georgian Literature*, 273.

⁴⁶⁴ *Great Nomokanon*, 35-71.

⁴⁶⁵ For the edited text see: [S. Qauxchishvili] ს. ყაუხჩიშვილი, გეორგიკა: ბიზანტიელი მწერლები საქართველოს შესახებ [Georgika: the Byzantine Authors on Georgia, vol., 6] (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1966), 260-63.

fragments from different authors, aiming at providing Christians with correct knowledge of Christian dogma.⁴⁶⁶ Both writings were composed by ecclesiastics who belonged to king's and emperor's inner circle. Besides, Euthymios and Arsen were each other's contemporaries and both are believed to have been educated at Mangana. Despite the differences in their content, the *Dogmatikon* and *Panoplia Dogmatike* reflected Davit's and Alexios's policy of religious renewal and were thought to be bulwarks of Orthodoxy. Hence, the creation of the *Dogmatikon* was in the tradition of other twelfth-century developments.

In contrast to Arsen's *Dogmatikon*, the *Panoplia Dogmatike* tells much more about the scale of imperial involvement in this project, reflecting Alexios's central role in ecclesiastical matters and his domination of the Church. The *Panoplia* is believed to be an expression of Alexios's program for asserting Orthodoxy, and it also carries a strong political message.⁴⁶⁷ Euthymios Zigabenos, the author of the *Panoplia Dogmatike*, extolls Alexios as a model emperor because he examined doctrinal matters thoroughly and urged future emperors to follow Alexios's path.⁴⁶⁸ In the *Dogmatikon*, there is no reference or indirect implication about the secular ruler's role in matters of faith. Neither is there any mention of Davit's name; the exception is the marginalia, mentioned above. The *Panoplia Dogmatike* was narrower in focus and targeted several heterodox groups, while the *Dogmatikon* was more substantial in scope and its principal aim was to bring together dogmatic-polemical treatises of all the prominent and revered Christian authors.⁴⁶⁹ It is quite surprising that scholars so far have not thought of comparing Arsen's *Dogmatikon* and Zigabenos' *Panoplia Dogmatike*, which is a topic on its own.

The King as a Polemist and Rhetorician

Representing Davit as a skillful polemicist and excellent rhetorician is another indicator that the Georgian conception of kingship had the Byzantine dimension. The only source that portrays Davit as a polemicist and well versed in theology is the *Life of Davit*. We are told that

⁴⁶⁶ H. Kusabu, "Comnenian Orthodoxy and Byzantine Heresiology in the Twelfth Century: A Study of *Panoplia Dogmatica* of Euthymios Zigabenos", Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, Illinois, 2013.

⁴⁶⁷ A. Cameron, *Arguing it Out: Discussion in the Twelfth Century Byzantium* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 74; L. Bossina, "Niketas Choniates as a Theologian", in *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, 173.

⁴⁶⁸ Bossina, "Niketas Choniates as a Theologian", 172.

⁴⁶⁹ Lolashvili, *Arsen of Iqalto*, 141.

Davit participated in theological debate during the ecclesiastical synod which brought together Georgian and Armenian high-ranking churchmen.

When the Georgian king took control of Ani and other Armenian territories ca. 1123, the Armenians asked Davit to convoke an ecclesiastical synod where they could discuss and debate theological matters with their Georgian peers.

There gathered once in presence of the king that perverse nation, a large number of the bishops and abbots of the totally wicked Armenians, who imagined that they themselves had attained the summit of all learning and science. They requested that by his command a council be summoned, and a debate and inquiry held about the religious. If the Armenians were defeated, they would accept the unity of religion and would anathematize their own religions. But if Armenians were victorious, they would only ask that we no longer call them heretics or anathematize them.⁴⁷⁰

In fact, it is far from clear what objectives the high-ranking Armenian and Georgian ecclesiastics pursued, but certainly neither side believed that the synod could or would solve the dogmatic and liturgical differences that had existed between the two Churches for centuries. Neither is there a clear picture of what king David's incentive was to attend the synod.

The *Life of Davit* claims that Davit attended the meeting of the synod but kept silence while two factions debated. When the polemics between the Armenians and Georgians lasted the entire day and came to deadlock, however, Davit intervened. He addressed the audience in a humble way, stating that as a person raised in battles he lacked sufficient knowledge and rhetorical skills.

Fathers you have tackled certain divine and incomprehensible questions, like philosophers. We, unlearned men and complete rustics, have not been able to understand anything. This is to know to you, that I am far from learning and knowledge, as one raised among campaigns. Therefore, I shall propose to your words (understandable) by the unlearned, simple and common people.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ *The Life of Davit*, 213; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 347: შემოკრბა ოდესმე წინაშე მეფისა ნათესავი გულარძნილი, ყოვლად ბოროტთა სომეხთა ეპისკოპოსები და მონასტერთა მათთა წინამძღუარები მრავალი, რომელნი ფრიად აზმანობდეს თავთა თვსთა მიწევნად თავსა ყოვლისა სწავლულებისა და მეცნიერებისასა. და მოახსენეს, რაითამცა ყო ბრძანებითა მისითა კრებაი, და ყვესმცა სიტყვს-გებაი და გამოძიებაი სჯულისაი; და უკეთუ იძლივნენ, იქმნენ თანაერთხმა სჯულისათა, და თვისი შეაჩუენონ; ხოლო უკეთუ სძლონ ესე ოდენ მიემადლოს: 'რაითა არღარა გუხედვიდეთო მწვალებლად და არცა შეგუაჩუენებდეთ', – და სხუასა არარასა ამისსა უმეტესსა.

⁴⁷¹ *The Life of Davit*, 213-214; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 347: 'თქუენ, მამანო, სიღრმეთა სადამე შესრულ ხართ და უცნაურთა ჰხედავთ, ვითარცა ფილოსოფოსნი. და ჩუენ ვერარას უძლებთ ცნობად, ვითარცა უსწავლელნი და ყოვლად მსოფლელნი; და ასე საცნაურ არს თქუენდა, რამეთუ მე შორს ვარ სწავლულებისა და მეცნიერებისაგან, ვითარცა მხედრობათა შინა აღზრდილი; ამისთვისცა უსწავლელთა და ლიტონთა და მარტივთა მიერ სიტყუათა გეზრახო თქუენ.

When Davit spoke, contrary to his claims, he demonstrated great rhetorical skill as well as a knowledge of theology. In his “divinely inspired speech,” Davit “set out such parables and examples (supported) by wonderful arguments that were incontrovertible and incontestable.”⁴⁷² The *Life* relates that Davit drowned the Armenians like Moses did the Egyptians and shut their mouths and made them speechless, as Basil the Great did once in Athens. Davit’s speech is claimed to have secured a Georgian victory, while the defeated Armenians, impressed by king’s talk, hailed him as a “teacher of teachers.” It could be that Davit prepared in advance for the synod and read anti-Armenian and anti-Monophysite treatises from Arsen’s *Dogmatikon*. We know that Arsen himself attended this synod; Davit’s biographer hails him as “translator and scholar in both the Greek and Georgian languages and illuminator of all the churches.”⁴⁷³

This episode in the *Life of Davit* contains illustrative information about the ideology of kingship. Davit’s attendance at the Armenian-Georgian synod was a manifestation of a new type of relationship between the king and Church, formed after 1105. It becomes increasingly apparent that Davit appropriated the role of the guardian of the faith and asserted his supremacy over the Church. Furthermore, Davit secures victory for the Chalcedonians in theological debates, while the ecclesiastics play a marginal role. More importantly, Davit is portrayed in the guise of a learned ruler, a true teacher, an exemplary polemicist, and an orator with superior knowledge of theology. It is worth noting that no Georgian author had nourished the image of the king as a good rhetorician prior to *Life of Davit*. This novelty was possibly introduced in medieval Georgia due to the impact of Byzantine political culture. Maybe the statement about Davit’s excellent rhetorical skills was not a pure invention of anonymus but reflected reality. As I have argued, Davit presented himself as a wise and learned ruler, and thus it is possible that as a part of his education he was trained in rhetoric. Also, if Davit delivered his *Hymns of Repentance* in person, he would have to be eloquent enough to impress his audience.

The use of epithet of “teacher of teachers” in relation to Davit IV is of particular interest as it indicates that the anonymus panegyrist imbued his narrative with a rhetorical tradition of kingship which was absent in medieval Georgia before the twelfth century. The “teacher of teachers” was not a purely eulogistic epithet but had a profound conceptual connotation in the

⁴⁷² *The Life of Davit*, 213; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 347.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

discourse on kingship. To understand better the function of the epithet of “teacher” for a secular ruler one needs to allude to the Byzantine context.

To view the ideal emperor as a teacher and spiritual instructor of his people, responsible to God for the true faith of his flock, was a firmly established tradition in Byzantium. Eusebius of Caesarea, who laid foundation for the Byzantine conception of kingship, nourished an image of Constantine as a philosopher-king and Christian orator. The first Christian emperor is said to have spent much time studying divine doctrine and composing speeches on doctrinal matters. Constantine delivered his speeches in front of a vast audience, gathered for these occasions.⁴⁷⁴ By the nature of his unique relationship with God, Constantine was claimed to mediate between heavenly and earthly worlds. Eusebius’ Constantine was furthermore thought to be the archetypal emperor-teacher who knew the divine mysteries as the “icon” of God on earth.⁴⁷⁵ Eusebian concepts were widely adopted in Byzantium and thus became one of the cornerstones of Byzantine kingship.⁴⁷⁶

The description of the Armeno-Georgian synod in the *Life of Davit* is highly rhetorical, yet it reflects reality. I contend that Davit used this meeting as the perfect opportunity to highlight his central role in ecclesiastical affairs; the synod was convoked at the king’s order and he attended at least the last and concluding session. Moreover, Davit displayed his knowledge of theology and rhetorical skills to buttress further his image as an erudite king and *didaskalos*. At the same time, Davit probably tried to persuade the Armenians that he had high authority in the Church and was in charge of ecclesiastical affairs. In this way the king pacified the Armenian churchmen, who probably had concerns about their future in the Georgian kingdom. It was unclear if the Georgian Church would tolerate the non-Chalcedonian Armenians or persecute them and force them to accept Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. Probably, after Davit’s eloquent speech, some Armenian churchmen praised his erudition and “expertise” in theology to flatter him and thus secure his good disposition. In a new political environment, the Armenian Church needed to secure Davit as patron. Davit was a pragmatic ruler who would want to avoid at any cost sacrificing the good will of his Armenian subjects towards the Bagratid crown at the expense of illusive ecclesiastic unity. The decision-makers at the royal court were probably aware that pressure on the Armenian Church

⁴⁷⁴ T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of Emperor Leo VI*, 105.

⁴⁷⁵ A. Cameron and S. G. Hall, *Eusebius. Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 69.

⁴⁷⁶ D. M. Nicol, “Byzantine Political Thought,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350–1450*, ed., J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 51-55.

could instigate resentment among their secular and ecclesiastical elites. Davit's proper behavior toward the Armenian Church is probably the reason why he receives favorable treatment in contemporary and near-contemporary Armenian sources. For instance, Matte'os Urhaec'i portrays Davit as a pious and saintly king.⁴⁷⁷ He praises Davit for liberating Ani from the Turks and for restoring the city cathedral. The thirteenth-century Armenian translation of the *Life of Davit* also presents Davit as a great benefactor and protector of the Armenians. According to the Armenian version of the *Life of Davit*, the Georgian king used to confess to an Armenian priest and receive holy communion from his hands.⁴⁷⁸

Davit's contemporary Alexios Komnenos also assumed the role of guardian of Orthodoxy. Alexios's rule marked a high point that witnessed an unprecedented scale of imperial involvement in trials of intellectuals and "heretic" leaders. Alexios himself initiated these trials and personally conducted public polemics against members of heterodox religious groups. At Philippopolis, during one of his campaigns, Alexios found time to organize public debates with representatives of Armenians and Manicheans: "From early morning till afternoon or evening, sometimes till the second or third watch of the night, he invited them to visit him and he instructed them in the Orthodox faith, refuting their corrupt heresy." By reason and not by force he succeeded in winning the hearts and minds of the Manicheans and thus fulfilled his apostolic mission. The emperor's persuasive speech and deep knowledge of scripture convinced the heretics to renounce their old belief and convert to Orthodoxy.

On this occasion it was for an apostolic mission, not for operations of war that he armed himself against the Manicheans. And I myself would call him the thirteenth apostle – though some ascribe that honor to Constantine the Great. However, it seems to me that either Alexios ought to be ranked with the Emperor Constantine or ... should follow immediately after Constantine in both roles – Alexios as emperor and apostle.⁴⁷⁹

Davit's biographer uses similar rhetoric when he portrays his protagonist's contribution to the spread of Christianity among the pagan Cumans. For his apostolic zeal king Davit is extolled as a second Paul and Constantine the Great.

How many pagan peoples did he lead to become sons of the holy baptism and receive for Christ! He expanded the most effort for this, that he might win the whole

⁴⁷⁷ *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, 231.

⁴⁷⁸ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 348.

⁴⁷⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XIV. 9 (Frankopan, 426-7).

world away from the devil and consecrate them to God; *whereby he acquired the grace of apostleship like Paul and like the great Constantine* [my emphasis].⁴⁸⁰

The trail of Basil the Bogomil further enhanced Alexios's image as a teacher/*didaskalos* and zealous defender of the faith. If one believes the *Alexiad*, the emperor took matters into his own hands after discovering that the Bogomils were gaining popularity in Constantinople.

For he was in everything superior to all his contemporaries; as a teacher he surpassed the educational experts as a soldier and a general he excelled the professional who were the most admired. The fame of the Bogomils had by now spread to all parts ... then the conference was summoned of all the senate, the chief army commanders and the elders of the Church. The hateful teachings of the Bogomils were read loud. The proof was incontestable ... He [Basil Bogomil] was sent to the prison. Many times Alexios sent for him, many times called upon to abjure his wickedness; but to all the emperor's pleadings he remained as deaf as ever.⁴⁸¹

As at Philippopolis with the Manicheans, Alexios is a teacher in action, he debates with Basil the Bogomil and tries hard to persuade him to change his mind and embrace Orthodoxy, but to no avail. Although the emperor failed with Basil, he was successful with other Bogomils who succumbed to his persuasive speech and intelligence.⁴⁸² Written decades after the events it describes, Anna's account depicts a highly exaggerated image of Alexios. Nonetheless, Alexios's apostolic zeal and adopted role as a second Constantine, which translated into his involvement in the trials of heretics and intellectuals, should not be questioned.

Alexios's ascendancy over the church is reflected in the chrysobull which he issued in 1107.⁴⁸³ In this document, often referred to in scholarship as the Reform Edict, the emperor addresses the synod and patriarch and claims that reform is necessary in order prevent the decline of the Church and Christianity.⁴⁸⁴ Alexios adopts a didactic tone and instructs the Church how to

⁴⁸⁰ *The Life of David*, 209; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 345.

⁴⁸¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 8 (Frankopan, 455-56): Ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τῶν ἀπάντων ἐκράτει· ἐν λόγοις διδακτικοῖς τοὺς περὶ λόγον ἐσπουδακότας ἐνίκα, ἐν μάχαις δὲ καὶ στρατηγίαις λόγον ἐσπουδακότας ἐνίκα, ἐν μάχαις δὲ καὶ στρατηγίαις τῶν ἐν ὀπλοῖς θαυματομένων ὑπερεῖχεν. Ὡς δὲ ἡ τῶν Βογομίλων ἀπανταχοῦ ἤδη διέσπαρτο φήμη ... καὶ τὸ συγκλητικὸν ἅπαν συνήθροιστο καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικὸν συνείλεκτο σύνταγμα καὶ ἡ γερουσία τῆς ἐκκλησίας συνῆν. Καὶ ἀνεγινώσκετο τὰ θεοστυγῆ δόγματα καὶ ὁ ἔλεγχος ἀδιάβλητος... Ἐμφρουρος δὲ γενόμενος καὶ πολλακίς πρὸς τοῦ βασιλέως πεμπόμενος καὶ πολλακίς παρακαλούμενος τὴν ἀσέβειαν ἐξομόσασθαι ὡσαύτως εἶχε πρὸς τὰς τοῦ βασιλέως παρακλήσεις.

⁴⁸² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 9 (Frankopan, 460-61).

⁴⁸³ Some scholars believe that this document, known in modern scholarship as the Reform Edict, was issued in 1092 rather than in 1107.

⁴⁸⁴ P. Magdalino, "the Reform Edict of 1107," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett, 200.

proceed with the reform. He proposes increasing the knowledge and literacy of the clergy and improving their preaching and teaching standards.⁴⁸⁵ Also, unworthy clerics are to be replaced by educated and worthy churchmen. The emperor also recommends that the patriarch and his supporter read the *Nomokanon* in front of the synod; the canons that nurture piety and correspond with dogma are to be kept, while the other canons are to be removed. The synod, furthermore, should inform the emperor about which canons they decide to remove from the *Nomokanon*.⁴⁸⁶ In order to avoid further accusations of the illegality of his involvement in Church affairs, the emperor clarifies for the high clergy and patriarch that he is not doing anything uncanonical but is advising them and helping to bring harmony to the Church. Alexios insists that all his instructions outlined in the document be translated immediately into action because he is convinced that God has charged him with the mission of reforming the church.⁴⁸⁷ It seems that by the time the reform edict was issued, Alexios had the leverage to impose his imperial will on the church. This reform edict is an exciting document which not only characterizes the best of Alexios's authoritarian ecclesiastic policy, but presents him as a regulator of ecclesiastical affairs and a righteous emperor. With this legislation, the emperor demonstrated that the Church reform was far too important to be left in the hands of churchmen.⁴⁸⁸

I argue that like Alexios, Davit also positioned himself as a regulator of ecclesiastic affairs, and careful readings of the *Life of Davit* and a royal charter to the Šio-Myvime monastery illustrates this. The anonymous panegyrist, in one of the episodes of his work states that monasteries, cathedrals, and all the churches received rules and orders from the king on how to conduct proper ecclesiastical administration. In addition, we are told that the court sent canons to the monasteries to explain and instruct about the correct way of performing liturgical services.⁴⁸⁹ In his royal charter to the Šio-Myvime monastery, Davit directly instructs the monastic community to commemorate him during liturgical services; he tells them during which service they must mention him and exactly what text they need to say.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 199.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 204.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ *The Life of Davit*, 207; *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 343.

⁴⁹⁰ *Corpus of the Eleventh- and the Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 56-57.

Davit's and his inner circle's view on the nature of the relationship between the king and the Church is also reflected in the murals at the Gelati monastery that depict seven ecumenical councils (Fig. 8).



Figure 8.

Each ecumenical council fresco is dominated by a central image of the enthroned and crowned emperor who is dressed in Byzantine fashion. On the left and right sides of the enthroned emperor stand the ecclesiastical figures, who are looking at him.⁴⁹¹ Each image of the ecumenical council has a Georgian inscription identifying the council and the emperor who convened it; many iconographic details indicate the secular ruler's pre-eminent position. First, the ruler is depicted in the center of the image whereas the ecclesiastical figures are represented to his left and right. According to the Byzantine iconographic tradition, the dominant figure always enjoyed a central position in the imagery. Furthermore, while the ecclesiastics are standing, the secular ruler sits on the imperial/royal throne and his enthroned image rises above the others. The enthroned figure of

⁴⁹¹ For more detailed description of the frescoes of the seven ecumenical councils from the Gelati monastery see: A. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 59-66.

the emperor was a common motif in Byzantine art.⁴⁹² It served to establish the emperor's iconic and visible relationship with Christ.⁴⁹³ Therefore, Davit could have used the Gelati frescoes to propagate the idea that similar to the emperor he represented Christ on earth, and his authority came directly from Christ.

The idea that the emperor was a deputy of Christ was firmly established in Byzantine imperial thought. The rule of the Komnenoi emperors witnessed a strong emphasis on the Christ-like and Christ-oriented nature of the emperor.⁴⁹⁴ Anna Komnene eulogizes her father as the vicar of Christ and draws a likeness between him and Christ in her *Alexiad*. More parallels between Christ and the emperor appear in the vast corpus of imperial panegyrics in prose and verse dedicated to Manuel I Komnenos.⁴⁹⁵

Conclusion

After examining closely, in comparative perspective, various Georgian media through which Davit's image was conveyed, it becomes apparent that royal rhetoric and discourse on the ideal kingship underwent a profound sophistication. What is essential to bear in mind, however, is that the development and maturation of a new ideology of kingship was a consequence of a gradual adoption and adaptation of the Byzantine literary and visual notions of how to portray the image of an ideal Christian ruler. This resulted in the formation of a distinctive type of royal rhetoric absent in the eleventh century. The language of Davit's contemporary narrative sources, rhetorical technique, and topoi related to rulership was nothing but a reworked and adapted Byzantine rhetorical tradition of kingship. It is reasonable to argue that parallels between Davit IV and other exemplary figures, namely the Biblical David and Solomon and Alexander and Constantine that were used in various Georgian rhetorical media was not only merely rhetorical technique of *synkrisis* (comparison). Probably the Georgian king in a very Byzantine manner, was expected to have merged multiple personalities of past heroes and acquired their grace and virtues. In Byzantine thought, the emperor's persona was not entirely his own. "Rather it was shaped by

⁴⁹² A. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 172.

⁴⁹³ E. Kantorowicz, "Ivories and Litanies," *JWCI*, 5 (1942), 73.

⁴⁹⁴ On the reflection on the relationship between a secular ruler and the church in Byzantium art see L. Kalavrezou, "Imperial Relations with Church in the Art of the Komnenians," in *Byzantium in the 12th Century: Canon Law, State, and Society*, ed., N. Oikonomides (Athens, 1991), 25-36.

⁴⁹⁵ Magdalino, *the Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 413-88.

participation in the mythical personae of earlier rulers, who in their turn, were made present through each new emperor.”⁴⁹⁶ A Byzantine emperor was the temporal incarnation of his hero’s image and possessor of his heroized prototype’s halo.⁴⁹⁷

It should be re-emphasized that rulers before Davit did exploit Byzantine symbols of power to express their authority, but the use of Byzantine imagery and imperial language was limited in scope. While the Bagratids recognized the Byzantine emperor’s supremacy, they abstained from exploiting the elements of imperial representation that were strictly reserved for the Byzantine emperor. The main reason behind this changed attitude towards royal authority, however, was Davit’s successful wars against the Seljuks and conquests, which resulted in the establishment of the Georgian kingdom as the dominant player in the Caucasus. Davit should have been flattered that he had succeeded in fighting Turks better than the Byzantine emperors. While Alexios and his son, Ioannes, struggled without success to reconquer Asia Minor, Davit not only managed to expel the Turks from his domains and unify all the Georgian territories, but he became the dominant sovereign in the Caucasus. By the 1120s, Davit governed not only Georgian but Armenian and Muslim lands. Consequently, as a leader of a newly created Caucasian polity, he had ambitions to be equal to the Byzantine emperor. Accordingly, Davit and his supporters embraced the iconography, symbols, and language of imperial representation to construct an emperor-like authority of the Georgian king. I believe that by utilizing the symbolic universe of the formerly dominant power, Davit wanted not only to model himself as equal to the emperor, but to challenge basileus’ authority of the pre-eminent ruler in the Christian East and the Caucasus. From this time onwards, Georgian kings started to project themselves as heirs of the Byzantine imperial legacy in the Caucasus and the Christian East.

An icon from the Mount Sinai (Fig. 9) not only visually represents Davit in an emperor-like pose, but the Greek inscription acclaims him as “basileus of the entire East.”

⁴⁹⁶ A. Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity*, 153.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.



Figure 9

This icon was another visual statement that reflected the Georgian king's demarche on Byzantine emperor's traditional claim to be the pre-eminent and authoritative ruler in the East. One can see a striking similarity between the image of Davit on this icon and manuscript images of Alexios and Ioannes II Komnenos.

As I have argued, there are certain likenesses between Davit's and Alexios's styles of kingship and resemblances between their contemporary and near-contemporary rhetoric. Alexios and Davit succeeded in re-establishing the moral and spiritual foundation of royal/imperial authority, undermined in the eleventh century, and pursued similar Church policies. They each cemented their role as protectors of Church and guardians of the faith. Furthermore, they publicly displayed their Orthodoxy, positioned themselves as new Constantines and engaged in polemics with non-Orthodox groups. Representation of a ruler as learned and competent in theological disputes became one of the hallmarks of Davit's and Alexios's reigns. In contrast to Alexios, however, Davit's reign was not marked by a hunt for and trials of heterodox groups. Even though

Davit was “victorious” in his polemics against the Armenians and fashioned himself as zealously Orthodox during the Armeno-Georgian synod, the Georgian king was careful in the way he treated his non-Chalcedonian subjects.

The fact that some aspects of Davit’s and Alexios’s methods of rule and image-making strategies are somewhat similar raises the question of whether Alexios’s experience served as a model for Davit and his inner circle? Alternatively, perhaps Davit did not emulate Alexios Komnenos but borrowed general Byzantine paradigms of rulership – a dominant idiom of power in the eastern Mediterranean.

Chapter Four. From Byzantine to Cosmopolitan Kingship: Bagratid Royal Authority in Transition

Davit IV died in 1125 and his older son, Demetre I (r. 1125–56), soon elevated to power, brought drastic changes to the royal representation. In the post-1125 period the Byzantine-oriented kingship gave a way to more diverse, cosmopolitan concept of rulership which united Byzantine/Georgian and Near Eastern/Islamic traditions of ruler's representation. Innovations in the forms of royal representation were a corollary to a rapid expansion launched by Davit IV in the 1120s, which brought the Georgian kingdom into the contact with the Islamic and Near Eastern world. Therefore, to better understand the reasons for the novelties in the Bagratid royal identity, it is essential to examine the historical context. In all likelihood, a transfer of the royal capital from western Georgia to Tp'ilisi (Tbilisi) around 1122/23 was a powerful impetus for the Bagratid kings to rethink the visual and verbal language through which they articulated and communicated their authority. Unlike western Georgia, which was a zone of Roman and Byzantine influence in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, eastern Georgia and Tp'ilisi were exposed to Persian and Islamic cultures. From the seventh century, Tp'ilisi was a residence of the caliph's viceroy in the Caucasus and one of the political and cultural centers of the Muslim Caucasus before Davit captured it and made it the capital of his kingdom. By 1125, the Bagratid dynasty held sway over lands with diverse linguistic and religious groups. The transfer of the royal center from culturally homogeneous Kutaisi to the more cosmopolitan Tp'ilisi plus the incorporation of the Muslim kingdom of Sharvan into the Georgian kingdom had a profound impact on Bagratid royal identity. The Bagratid kings had to coin a language of legitimacy that would be more universal and understandable for their new and non-Christian subjects.

This chapter consists of two parts and is concerned with the ideology of kingship and royal rhetoric from king Demetre I to queen Tamar (r. 1184–1210). The first part discusses changes in the Georgian ruler's representation that were instituted during the reign of Demetre I and his son Giorgi III. Since the narrative source that portrays the style of kingship of these two monarchs is rather fragmentary, I base my study mostly on numismatic evidence and royal charters. The second part, longer than the first, studies the rhetoric of female legitimacy and the language that conveyed Tamar's authority in textual, material, and visual media. I will focus primarily on a rhetorical analysis of Georgian encomiastic texts that portray an idealized image of Tamar, but numismatic evidence and inscriptions will be examined as well. My main concern is not to remove the thick

layers of rhetoric in Georgian encomiastic texts to uncover the “real power” of Tamar; I am more interested in the sophisticated discourse and rhetorical strategies which crafted and communicated image of a powerful Tamar. Nevertheless, I will still address the question of the extent to which the representation of Tamar as a powerful ruler corresponded to historical reality. More importantly, I will take a holistic approach and put the Georgian vision of female power in the Byzantine context to better understand similarities and differences which Georgian and Byzantine authors applied to portray the literary images of powerful women. It will be also instructive to examine what Byzantine patterns of kingship were utilized by the Georgian authors in lauding Tamar.

4.1 The Image of the Christian King of Kings

Demetre’s rule is poorly documented. His rule is summarized in less than two pages in *Kartlis Cxovreba/The Georgian Royal Annals*, while his royal charters are lost to us. A single royal imagery of Demetre survives in the church of Macxvariši, located in the remote mountainous region of Svaneti.⁴⁹⁸ Coinage is the only source material available to study the novelties introduced in the Georgian king’s representation after 1125 (Fig. 10).

⁴⁹⁸ For the detailed analyzes of Demetre’s fresco in English see: Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 73-81.



Figure 10. Copper coin of Demetre I

Obverse: Georgian letter I in center, represents first letter of Demetre’s name. Legend in Arabic outside the frame: ملك الملوك حسام المسيح – “King of Kings, sword of the Messiah”

Reverse: Arabic legend contains the names of caliph al-Muktafi and the Seljuk Sultan Ghias ad-din Masud.

A drastic shift in the style of coin minting occurred soon after Demetre assumed power. In contrast with his predecessors, Demetre abandoned Christian iconography and symbols of power and introduced Islamic patterns on his coinage. The legend in Arabic hails Demetre as “King of Kings” and “Sword of the Messiah.”⁴⁹⁹ The abrupt change in the Bagratid king’s self-promotion and the formulation of a new royal *intitulatio* modeled on Islamic/Near Eastern tradition in a period when the Georgian kingdom was the dominant political and military power in the Caucasus and one of the major players in the northern part of the Near East may seem strange. But the adoption of a coin-minting tradition that had long existed in the Islamic world was the outcome of a new geopolitical configuration. Demetre ruled a cosmopolitan kingdom which encompassed Muslim lands with a considerable Muslim population. The re-shaped coinage that used Arabic, a lingua franca of the Near East, allowed Demetre to communicate his image as a powerful ruler and the defender of Christianity to the target audience. A striking discrepancy on Demetre’s coin, however, creates confusion. Although the Bagratid king is lauded in Arabic as “king of kings” and “the sword of the Messiah,” the sultan’s and caliph’s names are on the coin obverse. It would be wrong

⁴⁹⁹ For the detailed description of the coin see T. Dundua and G. Dundua, *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics* (Tbilisi, 2018), 242.

to assume that the name of the Seljuk sultan implied that the Georgian king was subordinate to the Muslim ruler. There is no evidence indicating that Demetre recognized the supremacy of the Seljuk sultan. Besides, if he was a vassal of sultan, he would not have inscribed on his coin laudatory titles of “king of kings” and “sword of the Messiah.” Some scholars argue that reference to the sultan and caliph gave more economic validity to Demetre’s coinage in the Near Eastern market.⁵⁰⁰ Pure economic motives cannot explain this phenomenon, however, and it is entirely possible that the Bagratid king pursued varying political and ideological agendas. First, Demetre wanted to present himself either as equal to the Seljuk sultan or superior to him by placing the laudatory titles “king of kings” and “sword of the Messiah” on the coinage in Arabic. Second, the name of the caliph on the coin served to demonstrate Demetre’s respect for the spiritual leader of the Islamic world. In this way he could satisfy his Muslim subjects and assure them of his good disposition. Demetre is known for the counterbalancing policy through which he managed to keep the Muslims in check and secure a strong position in the Caucasus for the Georgian kingdom. Muslim historian and learned man Ibn-al-Azraq, who served as Demetre’s secretary for a few years, states that the Bagratid king treated the Muslim population of Tp‘ilisi well; they paid less tax than the Christians and Jews.⁵⁰¹

In contrast to Demetre’s reign, more literary and material sources survive that reflect the rule of Giorgi III (r. 1156–1184). This provides a better insight into the changing nature of the Georgian kingship in the post-1150 period. While Giorgi III’s coinage follows with the tradition introduced by his father and exploits Muslim/Near Eastern symbols and language of authority, an encomiastic historiographical narrative, the *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*, maintains a Christian/Byzantine-oriented discourse on ideal rulership. This text, however, at least the first half of it, was composed during Tamar’s reign and thus Giorgi’s literary image was coined decades after his death. The author extols Giorgi as a defender of Christianity and asserts that his elevation to the throne was prophesized centuries ago by legendary king Vaxtang Gorgasali (r. 447–522?)⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ G. Dundua and T. Dundua, *Georgian Numismatics*, 201-3.

⁵⁰¹ Ibn al Azraq, *Mayyafariqin Chronicle*, in C. Hillenbrand, *A Muslim Principality in Crusade Times: The Early Artuqid State* (Istanbul, 1990), 43.

⁵⁰² Vaxtang Gorgasali was a legendary king of Iberia/Kartli who earned his authority as a warrior-ruler because of his battles against the domination of the Sasanian Persians in Kartli and the eastern Caucasus. By the twelfth century, the Bagratids seem to have revived the legend of Vaxtang Gorgasali; royal propaganda furthermore claimed that the Bagratid family had kinship ties with Vaxtang and the Xosrovid dynasty. From the twelfth century onwards, Vaxtang Gorgasali became the model of kingship in Georgia, and consequently, he is invoked in relation to the Georgian rulers in rhetorical narratives. Also, the anonymous author in his *Histories and Eulogies* refers to an encomiastic poem dedicated to Vaxtang and quotes several verses in his text. As it turns out, by the twelfth century, Vaxtang was

who foresaw that a ruler from his seed would become the ruler of the East and West.⁵⁰³ Giorgi's representation as a ruler of "East and West" mirrors the Bagratid royal titlature contrived in the second half of the twelfth century. From this time onwards, Georgian kings fashioned themselves as "king of kings of the East and West."

Military prowess and good generalship are the qualities that enhance Giorgi's authority in the encomiastic *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*. He is lauded as a defender of Christianity, and his martial skills are claimed to equal those of Achilles, Samson, and Nimrod.⁵⁰⁴ In battle, Giorgi fights like an Achilles: "And when the enemy saw their banner thrown down by the arm of Achilles [i.e., Giorgi] and swords in the hands of their enemies they fled, running as fast as the speed of horses allowed them."⁵⁰⁵ As a great army commander, Giorgi resembles Alexander the Great and the Persian epic hero Khaikhosro. Like Alexander the Great, he marches through difficult terrain in the high mountains to attack the enemy unexpectedly; endowed with the luck of Alexander, Giorgi secures a magnificent victory.⁵⁰⁶ The rhetorically elaborated representation of Giorgi's martial skills and his juxtaposition with the Classical heroes likely reflects Giorgi's contemporary royal propaganda. If we believe the author of the *Histories and Eulogies*, the Bagratid royal palace of Isani (located in medieval T'p'ilisi but exact location unknown) was decorated with image that celebrated Giorgi's wars and victories. The king himself was portrayed on the palace wall in the posture of Vaxtang Gorgasali, his right hand raised like Achilles.⁵⁰⁷ The description of the royal palace in this historiographical text is vague. Therefore, we cannot state certainty whether the palace walls contained images only of Giorgi's battles or whether Classical and Old Testament warfare scenes also embellished the walls to reinforce Giorgi's heroic image

remembered not as a fighter against the Persians, but as an archetypal soldier-king who fought against the Muslims and defended the Christians. On Vaxtang Gorgasali and his time, see: C. Hass, "Geopolitics and Georgian Identity in Late Antiquity: The Dangerous World of Vakhtang Gorgasali", in *Georgian Christian Thought and Its Cultural Context*, eds., T. Nutsbidze, C. Horn and B. Lourie (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 23-44; S. Rapp, "Images of Royal Authority in Early Christian Georgia: The Impact of Monotheism?" in *Monotheistic Kingship*, eds., J. Back and A. Al Azmeh (Budapest. Central European University Press, 2004):

⁵⁰³ *The Life of Kartli*, ed. R. Metreveli, 380; English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones, 228.

⁵⁰⁴ On Nimrod in Medieval Georgian narratives see S. H. Rapp, jr., "The Georgian Nimrod" in *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective*, eds., K. Bardakjian and S. La Porta (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 188-216.

⁵⁰⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 384; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 231.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 384; 231.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 400; 238. In English version of the *Life of Kartli*, this episode is translated inaccurately, which confuse the reader. For a more accurate translation, see: R. Mepishasvili and V. Cincadze, *The Art of Ancient Georgia* (London, 1979), 49-50.

further and liken him to ancient heroes. The twelfth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel Komnenos used visual rhetoric and publicly displayed his military prowess through decorating the walls of his imperial palace with pictorial representations of his battles and victories.⁵⁰⁸ Considering the close ties of the Bagratid and the Komnenoi families in the twelfth century, one cannot rule out the possibility that the Bagratids followed the practice established in Byzantium.⁵⁰⁹

Giorgi's literary image as an ideal Christian ruler in the *Histories and Eulogies* it reinforced not only by his prowess, physical strength, and good generalship, but by his prudence as well. The anonymous historian extolls Giorgi as a wise ruler like Solomon, Plato, and Socrates, although never discusses Giorgi's education nor gives information how he acquired this level of intelligence.⁵¹⁰ There is a single episode in the *Histories and Eulogies* that supports Giorgi's claimed learnedness. He delivers a rhetorical speech before battle to encourage his soldiers. In his eloquent speech, Giorgi alludes to Classical and scriptural stories:

People, brothers ... we have heard from the ancient chroniclers how because of the Lord's law the tribe of Hebrews suffered many misfortunes at the time of Artakserks; so, did the Ancient Greeks, led by the experienced commander Themistocles at the time of Xerxes, the conqueror of the world. Themistocles with his men commanded the sea without a fight, and Xerxes was obliged to retreat due just to the town of the Athenians. Now my winged lions, take the pikes and lances and strike the ones who do not believe in the divinity of the One, who sacrificed himself for our sake.⁵¹¹

The militaristic rhetoric and Christian triumphalism so present in the encomiastic representation of Giorgi in the *Histories and Eulogies* does reflect historical reality. In contrast to his father, Demetre I, Giorgi III chose a more aggressive policy towards his Muslim neighbors and his reign witnessed further expansion of the Georgian kingdom's frontiers southwards and eastwards. Giorgi's military campaigns aimed at strengthening the leading position of the Georgian kingdom in the Caucasus. One of Giorgi III's strategic goals was the recovery of the Armenian

⁵⁰⁸ P. Magdalino, "Manuel I Komnenos and the Great Palace," *BMGS* 4 (1978): 101-114.

⁵⁰⁹ Nelson and Magdalino, "The Emperor in the Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century," *BF* 8 (1982): 123-83.

⁵¹⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, 379; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 228.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 383-4; 230: 'კურთხეულო ძმანო, ერთსულნო და ერთრჯულნო!... რამეთუ გუასმიეს ძუელთა მომთხოვრებელთაგან, თუ რაოდენნი კუეთებანი თავს-ისხნეს საღმრთოთა სხულთათვის ტომმან ებრაელთამან, არტაქსერქსის ზე – ელენთა, ოდეს-იგი იძლუანებოდეს თემისტოკლეოს მიერ, უცთომელისა სპასპეტისაგან, და სოფლისა მქონებელსა სძლეს არტაქსერქსის, რომელმან ზღუაცა მტკიცე ყო უომრად სპათათვის, ხოლო ათინელთა ერთისა ოდენ ქალაქისაგან უკუნრღუეულ იქმნა. აწ ფროთვანო ლომნო ჩემნო, ჩუენთვის განლახურულისათვის აღვიხუნეთ ლახუარნი და ჰოროლნი და უგმირნეთ ურწმუნოთა ღმრთაებისა მისისათა.'

city of Ani and its adjacent territories lost to the Muslims during Demetre's kingship. Reintegration of this old Christian city into the Georgian kingdom was also a matter of prestige for the Bagratid royal court.

The coinage issued during Giorgi's reign is probably the most reliable source for studying his contemporary royal image. Giorgi's copper coinage in three issues represents him as a powerful Christian monarch. The majority of Giorgi's coins repeat the patterns introduced during Demetre's rule with only one exception, the sultan's name never appears on his coins. In the early years of his rule, however, until ca. 1160, Giorgi thought it essential to keep the name of the caliph on his coins. Among the three types of coins which Giorgi minted during his long reign, one type stands out (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Copper coin of Giorgi III.

Obverse: the image of Giorgi III in mixed Byzantine/Oriental style. The king is bearded with a mustache and sits crossed-legged in loose trousers. He wears a crown which is surmounted by the cross and looks like a stemma. Giorgi's left-hand rests on his waist, and a falcon sits on his raised right arm. To the right of Giorgi's head is his abbreviated name in Georgian.

Reverse: legend in Arabic: حسام المسيح كيوركى بن ديمطرى ملك الملوك – “King of Kings Giorgi, son of Dimitri, the sword of the Messiah.”

This copper coin was issued in 1174, probably to celebrate Giorgi's victory over the Muslim army that resulted in the final integration of Ani into the Georgian kingdom. Giorgi's representation in mixed Byzantine/Christian and oriental style reflects well the cosmopolitan nature of Georgian kingship and the multicultural landscape of medieval Georgia.

Giorgi III's royal titulature was not uniform, and it varied depending on the audience it addressed. In contrast to the coinage, which offered relatively limited space for a rhetorically embellished *intitulatio*, a royal charter was a medium that could accommodate long phrases. In a royal charter to the Georgian church (ca. 1177), Giorgi III models himself as a great Christian monarch of the East and formulates his royal titulature as: "By the will of God, king of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Ranians, K'axeti and Armenians, Sharvan Šāh and Šāhān Šāh and ruler of the entire East and West."⁵¹² Titles such as Sharvan Šāh and Šāhān Šāh in the exalted *intitulatio* of Giorgi should not pass without comment. While Sharvan Šāh implied the Bagratid crown holding sway over the Muslim kingdom of Sharvan, more confusion is created by Šāhān Šāh. The title Šāhān Šāh was an official title of Persian kings, and at first glance, it may seem that the Georgian rulers claimed to inherit the Persian kingship. This epithet, however, has more to do with an Armenian rather than a Persian legacy. After the abolition of the Persian kingship, the title of Šāhān Šāh was adopted by Armenian rulers and when the Armenian territories fell under the Georgian crown this epithet was integrated into the Bagratid royal titulature. Nonetheless, the Georgian royal court may have been aware that the title of Šāhān Šāh was related not only to Armenian kingship but originated from Sasanian Persia.

Demetre I and Giorgi III adapted to the new demographic, cultural, and religious environment created after the Georgian kingdom's expansion in the 1120s, which forced the Bagratid kings to re-shape their coinage and adopt Near Eastern/Islamic patterns of power representation in order to better communicate their political authority. The Byzantine dimension of Georgian kingship gave way to a more diverse cosmopolitan kingship.

⁵¹² *Corpus of the Eleventh- and Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 71-3.

4.2 Creating the Authority of a Female Ruler in Georgia: A Comparative Approach to the Representation of Queen Tamar (r.1184 –1213) and Byzantine Imperial Women

If someone among you goes again and again through the chronicles that narrates the lives of old and new kings, he will see that not one of them exceeds by his deeds those performed by Tamar.

Life of Tamar, King of Kings

The High Middle Ages witnessed a growing number of women who were socially active, exercised power, and participated directly and indirectly in the governance of states. This change occurred not only in medieval Western Europe and the Byzantine empire, but on the distant periphery of Eastern Christendom, namely in medieval Georgia.⁵¹³ Several influential women are known from the high medieval West and Byzantium, but only one woman stands out in Georgia. This woman is queen Tamar, or king Tamar, as she was called in twelfth- and thirteenth- century Georgia. In contrast to high medieval Western and Byzantine women, Tamar is believed to have ruled in her own right and to have exercised full power during her entire reign. She is considered one of the most successful Georgian rulers and architect of Georgia's "Golden Age." During Tamar's reign medieval Georgia reached the apex of its military and political power. Tamar was canonized soon after her death and her name was held in high esteem for centuries. The question arises, however, how and why a female ruler attained such fame so as to become one of the dominant figures in Georgian history. In the context of a male-centered medieval society where Christian ideology emphasized the domination of man over woman, Tamar's exceptional status is a compelling case. Contemporary Georgian scholars take Tamar's reign for granted and fail to

⁵¹³ About Byzantine empresses/imperial women and medieval queenship see: D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium*. (California: University of California Press, 2015); L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001); Idem, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London: Routledge, 1997); L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium A.D. 527–1204* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Idem, "The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women: a Further Note on Conventions of Behavior and Social Reality as Reflected in the Eleventh- and Twelfth Century Historical Sources", *B* 58 (1988): 361-93; J. Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Idem, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); A. L. McClanan, *Representation of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Z. Rohr and L. Benz, eds., *Queenship, Gender, and Reputation, in the Medieval and Early Modern West, 1060–1600* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); A. Alexidze, "Martha-Maria: A Striking Figure in the Cultural History of Georgia and Byzantium", in *The Greeks in the Black Sea from the Bronze Age to the Early Twentieth Century*. Ed. M. Koromila, (Athens: Panorama, 1991): 204-212.

provide an in-depth analysis as to how she managed to retain her grip on power – challenged several times – and rule male-centered Georgian society. The strategy through which Tamar legitimized herself and imposed her authority over various strata of society remains un-researched.⁵¹⁴ More importantly, there is still no answer to the question as to why Tamar is one of the most celebrated Georgian rulers.

A crisis of succession and a female ruler on “Solomon’s Throne”

King Giorgi III did not have a son but two daughters, Tamar and Rusudan, and by the rule of primogeniture Tamar, as the elder daughter, could have claimed the throne for herself. Her gender, however, was a significant obstacle that disqualified her from ruling in her own right and governing the kingdom. Medieval Georgian society valorized masculine virtues; the kingdom was traditionally governed by martial rulers whose authority rested heavily on their charisma. To prove that they were worthy leaders, the Georgian kings had to demonstrate good generalship and achieve victories on the battlefields. During the coronation ceremony, the king received a sword which symbolized his role as the head of the army. By the end of the twelfth century, the Georgian kingdom was one of the dominant powers in the region, surrounded by a belt of dependent and semi-dependent Muslim polities. In an anarchic environment where the balance of power was fragile, the Georgian royal court had to make efforts to maintain the kingdom’s dominant position in the region. During the second half of the twelfth century, the leaders of the Muslim world made several attempts to challenge Bagratid power; however, Giorgi III was successful in his military campaigns, kept his Muslim foes in check, and owed his authority and prestige to his military victories.

Although narratives contemporary to Tamar diminish the scale of the resistance to the idea of female rulership, one can imagine the difficulties she encountered in legitimizing herself as the rightful heir of her father and asserting her rights to govern the kingdom. In 1184, the groups that played a prominent role in Georgian power politics would have had legitimate concerns; the country was left without a male ruler, and a woman assumed power for the first time in the kingdom’s history. Because of her gender, Tamar could not claim to be the commander of the army, neither could she lead the troops in battle and demonstrate military prowess. Muslim

subjects and foes of the kingdom would perceive Tamar's reign as a sign of weakness; male-dominated and theocentric medieval Georgian society would have had difficulties in accepting a woman as sovereign. One should also bear in mind that Christian ideology was directly opposed to the idea of a woman's active participation in public life let alone a woman in charge of the kingdom. To better understand the scope of the resistance to Tamar's rule and the problems she likely encountered in legitimizing herself because of her gender, a brief overview of Christian discourse about the place and role of a woman in society is instructive.

Christianity from a very early period articulated the idea of hierarchy between men and women. Apostle Paul in his letters used a misogynistic rhetoric and stated: "I do not permit the woman to teach or have authority over a man: she must be silent."⁵¹⁵ From this time onwards, references to scripture were mainly made to define the role of women in a restricted capacity.⁵¹⁶ This attitude of Paul towards women arose from the teachings of scripture which claimed that women's subjugation was owing to original sin as well as notion of women's imperfect participation in the *imago dei*.⁵¹⁷ According to the scripture, man alone was made in the image of God and woman derived only from man. In his letter to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul is more explicit about the unequal nature of man and woman: "the head of every man is Christ and the head of every woman is a man."⁵¹⁸ In another place, Paul says that "a man does not need to cover his head because he reflects the image and glory of God. However, a woman reflects the glory of man."⁵¹⁹ Paul's teachings formed a backbone for the idea that due to their insubstantial link with the divine, women lacked some essential qualities that man shared with the Godhead.⁵²⁰ Paul's views further shaped patristic notions on what was wrong and what was right with women.⁵²¹ The Church Fathers considered womenkind as inherently sinful, prone to temptation, vain, inconstant and deceitful. From the patristic age, therefore, the ideal attributes of women were considered modesty, silence, faithfulness, and purity, and women were expected to practice these modes of behavior as necessities.⁵²²

⁵¹⁵ Paul, I, Tim. 2:12.

⁵¹⁶ G. Cloke, *'This Female Man of God': Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350–450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 15.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹⁸ I Cor. 11:3

⁵¹⁹ I Cor. 11:7

⁵²⁰ G. Cloke, *'This Female Man of God': Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age*, 16.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 16.

John Chrysostom, one of the most revered Church Fathers in the Eastern Christian world, was a vehement spokesman against women. In his commentary on Paul's letters, Chrysostom agreed and repeated the statements of the apostle that the female gender was weak and vain, and a woman's mind somewhat infantile.⁵²³ He represented women as cruel, uncertain, and of a contemptible nature.⁵²⁴ Chrysostom's conflict with the influential and ambitious empress Eudoxia was much determined by his misogynistic rhetoric. After silver statue of Eudoxia was erected on a porphyry column and celebrated with music and rituals in according to an ancient custom, Chrysostom was heavily critical and disapproving in one of his homilies. Chrysostom went even further when he gave a sermon on the weakness of the female sex, during which he publicly insulted the empress by comparing her with Herodias – the mastermind in the decapitation of John the Baptist.⁵²⁵

Neither did Tertullian have a different viewpoint about women and their nature. In his view, a woman was inherently dangerous.⁵²⁶ The inferiority of female nature was also articulated in law. The law regarded women as passive, feeble and intellectually lower than men;⁵²⁷ moreover, they were thought to be incapable of public life and to require protection.⁵²⁸ Despite these stereotypes, however, women of high standing in the medieval world fought to overcome the socio-cultural obstacles in a masculine society and found ways to participate in the governance of states and exert power.

Most likely in 1184, Georgian aristocrats and high-ranking ecclesiastics raised two major arguments to question Tamar's right to rule – her female gender and the ambiguous legitimacy of her father, Giorgi III. A short overview of the inter-dynastic struggle in the Bagratid family makes it possible to understand better the controversy around Giorgi III's legitimacy.

Giorgi III was a younger son of king Demetre I, not the first in the line of succession to the Georgian crown. According to the established practice in the Bagratid kingdom, the throne was to

⁵²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies. 9 on Tim.1; G. Cloke, *'This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age*, 16-17.

⁵²⁴ C. Galatariotou, "Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of Byzantine Conception of Gender," 66.

⁵²⁵ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium*, 216.

⁵²⁶ Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* (On female Dress), ed. and trans. S. Thelwall in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. 15 (Edinburgh: T&T Clack, 1869), 2.2;

⁵²⁷ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 73.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

pass to Giorgi's older brother, Davit. For unknown reasons, Davit organized a coup in 1155 and dethroned his father, Demetre, who became a monk and went into monastic seclusion. After several months, Davit died, and Giorgi managed to secure throne for himself. Giorgi's position was not secure, however, since Davit had an infant child, Demetre/Demna, who had far more rights to claim the kingship than his uncle. It seems that Giorgi took the position of regent-king and was supposed to pass power to Demetre/Demna after he reached adulthood. While Georgian historical sources are silent on this issue, the Armenian historian, Step'anos Orbelean, states that Giorgi III swore an oath in front of the patriarch and court officials that he would pass power to Demna after he came of age.⁵²⁹ But, Giorgi decided to stay in charge of the realm and sent Demna to southern Georgia, the domain of Ivane Orbeli, who was a close associate of the king and the minister of war (*amirspasalar*). Giorgi hoped to marginalize Demna by keeping him remote from the royal court under the surveillance of his close ally. But Ivane Orbeli married Demna to his daughter. In 1177/8, Demna, with the support of Ivane Orbeli and other powerful aristocrats, organized a rebellion to claim the throne for himself. Giorgi was unaware of the preparations and was caught by surprise when the rebels started storming his summer palace. The highly encomiastic and propagandistic narrative, the *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*, which glorifies Giorgi III's reign, admits that king experienced considerable difficulty in quelling the rebellion. The king punished the leaders of the rebellion severely; Demna was blinded and castrated and soon died from his injuries. It is not difficult to imagine the fury Giorgi's actions caused in the upper echelons of Georgian society. By this action, Giorgi disqualified the only rightful male heir to the throne and triggered a crisis of succession in the kingdom.

The reason for the rebellion in 1177 is believed to be the political ambitions of Ivane Orbeli, who allegedly wanted to become the de facto ruler of the kingdom by placing his son-in-law Demna on the throne. But this version seems highly unlikely because as early as 1177/8 Ivane Orbeli was already a high-ranking courtier and the second person in the kingdom in his capacity as the commander-in-chief of the army. Although Giorgi usurped the throne and refused to share power with his cousin, it was probably expected that Demna would become king anyway after Giorgi III's death. Since Giorgi did not have a son, Demna was the only legitimate male in the line of succession and thus his position looked quite secure. But perhaps the reason for the rebellion was Giorgi's wish to pass the throne to Tamar or the rumors that started to circulate in the kingdom

⁵²⁹ Step'anos Orbelean, *History of the State of Sisakan*, trans. R. Bedrosian (Long Branch, NJ, 2015), 198-99.

On this coinage, Giorgi's abbreviated name and royal title "king of kings" is inscribed on the obverse, while the reverse contains Tamar's name, who is acclaimed as "king and queen."⁵³¹ Prior to Tamar, no Georgian queen's name or imagery appears on the coin; thus, she is the first woman whose authority was reflected on highly communicative media like coins. In contrast to medieval Georgia, in Byzantium the empresses were often represented on coins and seals. The eleventh-century empresses, Zoe and Theodora, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, and Maria Alania promoted their images through coins and seals. They appeared on the coins either with their husbands or alone.

It seems that Giorgi III wanted Tamar to become sole ruler, and this explains why, during their six years of joint rulership, no marriage/betrothal was arranged for her. In this way, Giorgi tried to guarantee that Tamar would not become a pawn in the hands of a male ruler. Unlike emperor Konstantinos VIII, who did not prepare his daughters Zoe and Theodora for rulership and turned the former into an instrument of legitimacy for the male pretenders to the imperial throne, Giorgi believed that Tamar could become a ruler in her own right. One should take into account that before Tamar no woman in Georgia had aspired to and wielded power in her own right, and few women participated in governing the Georgian kingdom. Georgia contrasted with Byzantium, where women had access to power and were more involved in the politics of the empire.

After Giorgi's death (1184) a political crisis erupted in the kingdom. The majority of influential aristocrats opposed Tamar and questioned her ability to govern the realm. Georgian historical sources do not reveal a full picture of the nature of the disagreement between Tamar and her opposition. Nevertheless, it seems that in 1184 Tamar had two significant problems. First, she would have to assure skeptics that despite her gender she was capable of ruling. Second, she would have to work hard to revive Giorgi's name and re-establish his image posthumously. The most logical strategy for the opposition would be to condemn the dead king as a usurper and declare him illegitimate posthumously. This would allow the opposition to undermine Tamar's right to govern and make her more submissive to their demands. This context probably explains why Tamar made significant concessions in the first years of her reign. Many aristocrats and court officials who lost power and privilege after the events of 1177/8 were reinstated to their old dignities. Furthermore, Tamar had to comply with the request of the military aristocracy and court officials and marry Iurii Bogolubsky against her will. Tamar was not naïve to believe that a power transfer would be smooth, however. The six years of co-rulership with her father (1178-84) gave

⁵³¹ For a detailed description of this coin see *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three*, 245.

her experience and knowledge about the peculiarities of court politics. She likely expected fierce resistance to her rule and had a strategy ready to overcome the obstacles. Although challenged by powerful groups in the realm, Tamar was ready to strike back.

4. 3 The Language of Female Authority: Multidimensional Propaganda of Legitimation

Giorgi III's decision to make Tamar an heir to his throne and ruler in her own right is the background against which one should discuss the unprecedented scale of royal propaganda initiated and conducted by the Bagratid royal court. It seems that Giorgi took active measures to assure that at least a certain number of high-ranking ecclesiastics, court officials, and military aristocrats would accept a woman as the legitimate ruler after his death. Therefore, an ideological campaign aiming at changing the attitude towards a female ruler started soon after 1178. The Georgian court needed to justify the claim of a woman to the throne and find models that could serve to strengthen Tamar's image. Some Georgian courtiers or ecclesiastics who supported Tamar in their debates with the opposition might have brought examples of the Byzantine empresses who ruled in their own right and governed the empire. Considering the networks of communication between the Bagratid and the Komnenoi imperial courts, as well as the long-existing cultural and ecclesiastical ties between Georgia and Byzantium, one should not rule out the possibility that the experience of the Byzantine empresses/imperial women served as one of the models for Tamar. Tamar and her supporters, while preparing the ground for her sole rulership, perhaps inquired into the way Byzantine imperial women attained the authority and crafted their public image and how they maintained their visibility. I do not argue, however, that the Georgian queen and her entourage had overwhelming information about the Byzantine empresses and knew each case in detail.

By the time Tamar assumed power, in 1184, she had secured the loyalty of certain influential players. Even though there are few sources, they make it possible to identify many of her supporters as well as to elaborate their social status; it seems that some of them were second-tier aristocrats, ecclesiastics, and men of literature. Credit for this goes to Tamar's father, Giorgi III – the main architect who brought Tamar to the power. It is difficult to trace how Giorgi III justified Tamar's right to the throne, but one can imagine the debates it caused in the kingdom.

In the first years of co-rulership, Giorgi promoted a powerful woman at his court and entrusted the supervision of Tamar to his sister, Rusudan, who enjoyed considerable authority in

the Georgian kingdom. Rusudan was a wife of Seljuk ruler of Mosul and spent years at Seljuk court which gave her a great experience.⁵³² Giorgi probably thought that Tamar would benefit and learn from her aunt. Rusudan retained a strong position at the royal court after Giorgi's death; when Tamar met fierce resistance in the first months of her sole reign from influential court officials and military aristocrats, who categorically demanded that she choose a male consort and marry, Rusudan persuaded Tamar to accede to their demands.

The high-ranking learned ecclesiastic Nikoloz Gulaberize was another influential figure in Tamar's circle. Gulaberisdze was a patriarch of the Georgian Church (1150–1178) during Giorgi's reign. In 1178 he abdicated and went to Jerusalem, but when Tamar assumed power, she recalled Gulaberize from Jerusalem and with his help summoned an ecclesiastical council.⁵³³ It is also possible that Tamar wanted to reinstate Gulaberize as head of the Church. Nikoloz Gulaberize's rhetorical text, *Sermon on the Living Pillar, Christ's Tunic and the Catholic Church*, was a contribution to strengthening Tamar's position. In this sermon, the ex-patriarch brings to the fore the memory of Saint Nino, an apostolic saint of Georgia, and emphasizes the role of a woman in the Christianization of Georgia.⁵³⁴ He argues that God chose a woman as an evangelist of Georgia because the country was allotted to the Mother of God. According to the *Sermon*, the Theotokos herself wanted to come to Georgia and preach God's words, but since this plan never materialized, Christ sent a woman, Saint Nino, instead.⁵³⁵ The invention/resuscitation of the legend that Georgia was allotted to the Theotokos and the stress on Saint Nino's central role in Christianizing the country had significant ideological value. The emphasis on a woman's role in the country's history enhanced Tamar's legitimacy as female ruler. The text probably aimed to associate Tamar with the Mother of God and Saint Nino and liken her to them.

While discussing Tamar's circle and the individuals who contributed to the creation of her public image one cannot neglect the personality of Šota Rustaveli. Due to the limited information, we cannot say much about Rustaveli and his position at the royal court. But what can be claimed with confidence is that Tamar was a patron of Rustaveli, and she commissioned his epic poem, the

⁵³² D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 100.

⁵³³ [N. Sulava] ნ. სულავა, ნიკოლოზ გულაბერიძის მოღვაწეობა ათონის მთასა და იერუსალიმის ჯვრის მონასტერში [Nikoloz Gulaberisdze's Activities on Mt. Athos and Cross Monastery of Jerusalem, *Georgian Source Studies XIX/XX*] (Tbilisi: Meridiani Publisher, 2018), 218-22.

⁵³⁴ Kekelidze, *History of Old Georgian Literature 1*, 318-19.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 319.

Knight in the Panther's Skin.⁵³⁶ Through the centuries Rustaveli's poem became one of the most popular and revered pieces of secular literature in Georgia, and it contributed significantly to popularizing Tamar's personality. In the preface to the poem, Rustaveli not only eulogizes Tamar as a "sun-king" and emphasizes the divine ordination of the monarchy, but he constructs an image of a strong female monarch in the face of Tinatin – the female heroine of the poem and the literary prototype of Tamar.

Tamar relied on men of literature to craft her powerful public image and good reputation. She was the benefactor and patron of intellectuals and her court was a comfortable place for prominent learned men. Tamar could have deliberately tried to associate her reign with a golden age to increase her public image. In the Byzantine empire this was a known practice and imperial women not infrequently bolstered their authority through patronage.⁵³⁷ Thus, the blossom of literary activism during Tamar's rule had a clear-cut ideological purpose.

Rhetorical texts in both prose and verse dedicated to Tamar and composed by her contemporary and near-contemporary intellectuals dwarf the rhetorical narratives that are dedicated to her predecessors and successors. She is the only Georgian ruler whose reign is represented in *Kartlis Cxovreba/the Georgian Royal Annals* by two historiographical narratives: the *Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns* and Pseudo-Basil's *Life of Tamar, King of Kings*. Tamar's great-grandfather, Davit, was praised in one historiographical narrative in *Kartlis Cxovreba/ the Georgian Royal Annals*. More importantly, Tamar was the subject of laudation of two unique panegyric poems, Ioane Šavteli's *Abdulmesiani* and Grigol Čaxruxaze's *In Praise of King Tamar*. Tamar not only dominates her contemporary Georgian literary narratives, but she receives a more extolling treatment than her contemporary and near-contemporary male relatives; namely, her father, Giorgi, and her second husband, Davit Soslan.

⁵³⁶ [E. Khintibidze] ხინთიბიძე, ე. თანამედროვე რუსთველოლოგიური კვლევებით კომენტარებული ვებხსტყაოსანი [Comments on the *Knight in the Panther's Skin* on the bases of Contemporary Rustvelological Researches] (Tbilisi: Šota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, 2018), 36-37.

⁵³⁷ It is argued that empress Irene's artistic/literary patronage and building activity was a deliberate attempt to create a "Golden Age" as a sense of glory and splendor associated with her name. Irene wanted to underline her fitness to rule and her close standing with God. See L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 159; S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1991), 263-5.

The Authorship and the Audience of the Encomiastic Narratives

In what follows, I propose and argue that one of the cornerstones of Tamar's reign was carefully staged propaganda of legitimation aiming at persuading Tamar's subjects of her ability to govern. Georgian royal rhetoric was multidimensional, and Tamar's image was communicated and negotiated through various media: encomiastic rhetorical narratives, coinage, epigraphic and mural inscriptions, and royal charters.

The panegyric poems, *Abdulmesiani* and *In Praise of King Tamar*, written in high-register classical Georgian, are the only surviving medieval Georgian court poems. They are interesting literary products that utilize sophisticated rhetorical methods to portray and glorify an ideal image of Tamar. Apart from Tamar, these poems dedicate some space to praise her second husband, Davit Soslan, and son, Giorgi-Laša. These panegyric poems do not elaborate on theories of kingship nor contain elements of wisdom literature nor moral advice to the ruler; they focus on lauding the qualities of an ideal ruler. Unlike historical writings, the poems composed at Tamar's court do not follow a specific scheme; the strophes of the poems are often overloaded with repetitive words aiming at creating a certain rhythm and musicality. These poems were supposed to catch the ear of the audience and deliver political messages. The authorship of *In Praise of King Tamar* is ascribed to Grigol Čaxruxaḡe; apart from his name, nothing else is known about his social status or his relation to the queen.⁵³⁸ More can be said, however, about Ioane Šavteli, author of the *Abdulmesiani*, a Georgianized version of Arabic epithet *Abdul Messiah* which translates as “servant/slave of the Messiah.” The Georgian kings started to fashion themselves as “sword of the Messiah” from the second quarter of the twelfth century and this laudatory phrase was integrated into the Bagratid royal titlature. Through this formula the Georgian kings communicated their authority to the Muslim audience. There are only two references to Ioane Šavteli in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Georgian narrative sources. The first reference to Šavteli appears in Šota Rustaveli's epic poem the *Knight in the Panther's Skin*. Rustaveli, in the epilogue of his poem, mentions and praises his contemporary poets. He says that “the *Abdulmesiani* was praised by Šavteli.”⁵³⁹ The second reference to Šavteli appears in the *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs*. The author claims that when Tamar saw the Georgian army off to the battlefield she was

⁵³⁸ I. Lolashvili, ed. *Old Georgian Panegyrists I: In Praise of King Tamar*, 9-23.

⁵³⁹ Šota Rustaveli, *the Knight in the Panther's Skin*. English trans V. Urushadze (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1971), 222.

accompanied by “Ioane Šavteli, a great poet and famous rhetor.”⁵⁴⁰ This reference indicates that Šavteli was Tamar’s court poet and thus it is likely that she commissioned the poem. Apart from these two sources, no other information survives about Šavteli and his intellectual endeavor. Over the centuries Šavteli’s poem retained great popularity at the Bagratid royal court.

When talking about poets in twelfth-century Georgia we should bear in mind that they were probably not poets in the strict meaning of the word, but rather rhetoricians/literati able to compose rhetorical texts in both prose and verse. As F. Bernard points out, the eleventh- and the twelfth-century Byzantines who we refer to as poets would not have called themselves poets, but rather men of literature or rhetoricians.⁵⁴¹ Poetry/verse writing was one of the sub-branches of rhetoric which enabled the learned Byzantine to display the scope of his intellectual ability. Verse was favored in Byzantium because it had an aesthetically pleasing advantage; it could appeal to mind as well as to the senses.⁵⁴² A learned gentleman was expected to be equally proficient in composing verse and prose; verse-writing in twelfth-century Byzantium was to a large extent motivated by one’s desire to demonstrate that he was a “member of the guild of literati.”⁵⁴³ A similar view about the function of the poetry existed in twelfth-century Georgia. Rustaveli in the *Knight in the Panther’s Skin* speaks of the concept of poetry; he claims that verse composition has always been one of the branches of philosophy/wisdom (*sibrdzne*) and that the purpose of poetry is to articulate long and complicated ideas briefly and make them appealing to the audience.

Poetry, first of all, is a branch of divine wisdom, conceived by and known to the godly, a comfort for all who hear it. It pleases and instructs the worthy and virtuous man. The pre-eminence of poetry is that it can say things shortly.

A verse or two composed by chance do not make a poet; and he is scribbling fool who equates himself with great bards, even though, now and then, he may write a few discordant verses; Yet if he says, “truly, mine is the better,” he is a stubborn mule.

There are also some poets whose verses are powerless to penetrate deep into one’s heart; They are like the bad arrows of youthful hunters who cannot bring down big beasts but kill only small game.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, ed. R. Metreveli, 464; English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones, 268.

⁵⁴¹ F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry*, 43-4 and 56.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 340.

⁵⁴³ E. Jeffreys, “Why Produce Verse in Twelfth-Century Constantinople?”, in “*Doux remede...*” *Poesie et Poetique a Byzance, Actes du IVe colloque international philologique, Paris, 23-24-25 fevrier*, eds., P. Odorico, M. Hinterberger, and P. Agapitos (Paris, 2008), 221.

⁵⁴⁴ Šota Rustaveli, *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, 16: შაირობა პირველადზე სიბრძნისაა ერთი დარგი, |სადმრთო სადმრთოდ გასაგონი, მსმენელთათვის დიდი მარგი, | კვლა აქაცა ეამების, ვინცა ისმენს კაცი ვარგი; | გრძელი სიტყვა მოკლედ ითქმის, შაირია ამაღ კარგი. | მოშაირე არა ჰქვია თუ სადმე თქვას

With this context in mind, I argue that the poems *Abdulmesiani* and *In Praise of King Tamar* were ceremonial panegyrics performed orally at the royal court. The appearance of rhetorical narratives of this kind in Georgia implies that theatricality became one of the effective means that expressed public political life at Tamar's royal court. Probably, as in the Byzantine empire, these Georgian literati used their poems as a means for social advancement and promotion.⁵⁴⁵ By composing panegyric poems imbued with political messages, these literati proved their learnedness and asserted their right to have status at Tamar's court. It is well known that in eleventh- and the twelfth-century Byzantium an individual's intellectual abilities often determined his social success and earned him a powerful position at the imperial court.⁵⁴⁶ The scarcity of sources, however, does not make it possible to elaborate whether this process occurred in medieval Georgia on a similar scale. Medieval Georgia was a strictly hierarchical society with low social mobility. The advancement on social ladder was a complicated process and depended on the king's and royal court's goodwill to grant higher social status to the family or to an individual. Giorgi III raised the prominence of a number of men of lower social standing after the 1177 rebellion and granted them high status at court. After Giorgi's death, however, the powerful landowning aristocracy managed to regain lost political positions. In 1184/5 they not only forced Tamar to reinstate them to their previous positions but tried to get rid of all those who did not have a noble birth. In medieval Georgia, *genos* played a more significant role than in the Byzantine empire.

While it is likely that the panegyric poems, *Abdulmesiani* and *In Praise of King Tamar*, were composed during Tamar's lifetime and performed orally in front of the queen and court officials, one cannot claim the same with a high degree of certainty when it comes to the encomiastic historiographical texts. We lack information not only about the authors, and it is also complicated to define when these narratives were composed. The anonymous' *Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs* was probably written in two separate parts. The first half of the narrative was finished by the 1190s and the second part close to the end of Tamar's rule or soon after her death. Pseudo-Basil's concise text, the *Life of Tamar*, was written down by a contemporary of

ერთი, ორი;| თავი ყოლა ნუ გონია მელექსეთა კარგთა სწორი;| განაღა თქვას ერთი ორი, უმსგავსო და შორი-შორი;| მაგრა იტყვის: „ჩემი სჯობსო“, უცილობლობს ვითა ჯორი.|მეორე ლექსი ცოტაი, ნაწილი მოშაირეთა, |არ ძალ-უც სრულ-ქმნა სიტყვათა, გულისა გასაგმირეთა, |ვამსგავსე მშვილდი ბედიითი ყმაწვლითა მონადირეთა;|დიდსა ვერ მოჰკვლენ, ხელად აქვთ, ხოცა ნადირთა მცირეთა.

⁵⁴⁵ F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry*, 155.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

Tamar and eyewitness of the events, possibly in the first years after her death. It is apparent that both historiographical texts had the same goal: to portray an idealized rule by Tamar. Although serving one purpose, these encomiastic narratives differ from each other in content, focus, language, and rhetorical strategy. The *Histories and Eulogies* can be characterized as classicizing history.⁵⁴⁷ The author focuses on warfare and dedicates significant space to narrating the heroic performances of the Georgian army and its leaders on the battlefield. The anonymous author buttresses Tamar's legitimacy and authority based on her sacred origin and noble lineage. Consequently, the text not only highlights Tamar's Biblical genealogy but dedicates a great deal of space to portraying the idealized reign of Giorgi III, who is extolled as a defender of Christians, an exemplary warrior equal to Achilles, and a good general resembling Alexander the Great. The reign of Giorgi III serves as reinforcement for Tamar's legitimacy. Pseudo-Basil's concise *Life of Tamar* combines features of imperial/royal biography and hagiography.⁵⁴⁸ Consequently, the narrative constructs an image of saintly Tamar and focuses on the rhetorical celebration of Tamar's virtues of piety, philanthropy, justice, moderation, and wisdom.

All four rhetorical narratives were composed by Tamar's inner circle and performed orally on special occasions at the royal court. These texts functioned as media that propagated the positive image and political authority of a female ruler to the high echelons of medieval Georgian society; namely, court officials, military aristocrats, and high-ranking ecclesiastics. During the public performance, the panegyrists used rhetorical strategies to manipulate the public audience, which was expected to accept the propaganda and absorb the messages communicated. Probably, like in Byzantium, *theatra* became an integral element of medieval Georgian court culture.⁵⁴⁹

While the use of panegyric poems to construct and negotiate a positive image of the ruler was something new in medieval Georgia, it had a long tradition in Byzantium, where the oral performance of rhetorical compositions played a crucial role in displaying the power of the emperor. In ritualized Byzantine court culture, the gathering of intellectuals who read aloud and performed their literary compositions (encomia in prose and verse) in the presence of the emperor

⁵⁴⁷*The Life of Kartli*, 377-482; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 227-286.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 483-522; 287-314. One can also characterize pseudo-Basil's *The Life of Tamar, King of Kings* as Life-with-encomia that combines the elements of encomiastic/homiletic and biographical/hagiographical genres. This type of narrative was popular in the ninth and the tenth century Byzantine empire. See T. Antonopoulou "What Arguments has the temple of God with Idols," 599.

⁵⁴⁹ On Byzantine *theatron* see P. Marciniak, "Byzantine *Theatron* – A Place for Performance?" in *Theatron: Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Grünbart (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 277-86; P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglosia: A Poetic of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*, 284.

and a wide public had immense significance. Imperial encomia were a currency of public discourse and a fundamental element of the rhetoric that lubricated the wheels of government.⁵⁵⁰ Panegyrics/imperial encomia were performed during important ceremonies and on Christian holidays.⁵⁵¹ For instance, on Epiphany, master of rhetoric and his students would eulogize the emperor in his presence and summarize the achievements he had made during the year. The centrality of rhetoric for the emperor's public image is conveyed by the example of Manuel I Komnenos whose court became the focus of rhetorical performances. He is one of the most eulogized Byzantine emperors and the subject of 70 direct encomia.⁵⁵² Although in the Byzantine world rhetoric was honored as an art of persuasive use of language, certain circles in the empire had a very negative attitude towards the double-tonguedness of the rhetoric. One of the most influential and revered Byzantine theologians, Symeon the New Theologian, perceived rhetoric as trickery and a deceptive tool in the hands of literati.⁵⁵³

Four Rhetorical *Prooimia*: Introducing Tamar to the Audience

In order to understand better the nature of Georgian court rhetoric and discourse on ideal female rulership, it is vital to analyze the rhetorical strategy of each encomiastic text. Each of the four narratives has its method of persuasion and they highlight different features of Tamar's life. These texts, however, have many things in common. First and foremost, all four authors dedicate their works to Tamar and they make her the main protagonist of their compositions. Furthermore, they all construct a highly idealized image of Tamar and aim to persuade the audience that despite her gender, she is an exceptional and powerful ruler. In addition, the eulogistic praise of Tamar in these texts resembles the conventional rhetorical strategy which Byzantine narratives utilized to portray a positive image of the emperor and empress. The contemporary and near-contemporary discourse on Tamar's queenship bears a striking resemblance to Byzantine imperial rhetoric.

Even though the Georgian kingdom during Tamar's reign was the dominant player in the Caucasus and out of the Byzantine orbit, connections between Constantinople and the Bagratid court were still maintained. The Bagratids had kinship ties with the Komnenian imperial family,

⁵⁵⁰ Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 414.

⁵⁵¹ G. T. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington: Harvard University Press, 1997), 131-40.

⁵⁵² P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 414.

⁵⁵³ F. Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry*, 157.

which enhanced communication between the imperial and royal courts to a certain degree. For instance, Andronikos I Komnenos (r.1183–85) spent some time at Giorgi III’s court before he became emperor. The *Histories and Eulogies* tell the following story about Andronikos’ visit to Georgia:

Once Andronikos Komnenos, the son of his [i.e. Giorgi] father’s sister, as well as the son of the brother of the great Caesar Manuel Komnenos, the king of the entire west and Greece, came to visit him with his beautiful fair wife and children. Offering thanks to God he [i.e. Giorgi] received him as necessary, and rendered honors proper for his relative: he granted him towns and fortresses, and placed a throne for him next to his own...⁵⁵⁴

After the fall of the Komnenoi, family members of the executed Andronikos I Komnenos found shelter at the court of Tamar. Georgian monastic communities in the Byzantine empire enhanced the communication and movements of ideas and knowledge between the two worlds. The monastic schools of Gelati and Iq‘alto – inspired by and following the Byzantine tradition – kept ties with the Georgian literary centers in the empire. Most likely for medieval Georgians, Constantinople had still the status of a center of learning. Some of Tamar’s contemporary literati could have been educated in different learning centers of the imperial capital. Thus, the exploitation of Byzantine rhetorical traditions and imperial paradigms in Georgian encomiastic narratives that were composed at Tamar’s court comes as no surprise.

Among the four texts that I will examine here, the anonymous’ *Histories and Eulogies* has the longest and rhetorically most sophisticated prooimion. The author starts the introduction of his text in the very same way as Menander Rhetor advised his peer rhetoricians in his *basilikos logos*. Menander relates: “It clearly follows that you should derive the prooemia from the amplification, investing the subject with grandeur on the ground that ‘it is hard to match’ and you ‘have entered into a contest in which it is difficult to succeed in word.’”⁵⁵⁵ Following this formula, the anonymous opens his *Histories and Eulogies* with an allusion to an Old Testament story, using the episode in

⁵⁵⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 392-3; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 234: მოვიდა ოდესმე ანდრონიკე კომნენოსი ცოლითა სახებრწყინვალითა და შუენიერითა, თანა შვილებითურთ და დისწულითა, მამის მმისწული დიდისა მანოველ კეისრისა და ყოვლისა დასავლეთისა და საბერძნეთისა მეფისა. და ვითარ მართებდა, ეგრეთ მმადლობელმან ღმრთისამან შეიწყნარა და მისცა პატივი შესატყვისი სახლისშვილობისა მისისა. და მიმცემელმან ქალაქთა და ციხეთამან კმასაყოფელთმან დაუდგნა სახდომნი სიახლესა საყდრისა თვისისა...

⁵⁵⁵ D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, eds., *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 77.

which Moses, referring to his poor eloquence, refuses to obey God’s commandment to preach divine words to the Jews:

When the prophet Moses, who saw God, was unwilling to obey him – when He wanted to send Moses to the Israelites – Moses referred to his poor oratorical skills ... So how can a person, who is unable to speak appropriately of exalted things, be so bold as to embark upon this task.⁵⁵⁶

After humbling himself as an unworthy rhetor, the anonymus introduces Tamar to the audience as the worthy offspring of her biblical “ancestors,” King-Prophet David and Biblical Solomon.

Like Solomon ... I will blow the trumpet and render ‘the praise of praises’ to the one, who came from the seed of Solomon, the one, for whom praise of her glory and Olympian grandeur, and even (the gift of) Solomon, would never be adequate. *I mean Tamar, famous among the monarchs, and the glory of the first David, a prophet [my emphasis].*⁵⁵⁷

By this statement, the author pointed out to the audience that the Bagratid dynasty was a sacred family, related by blood to the Biblical David and Solomon. As pointed out elsewhere, the Bagratids formulated their alleged Biblical ancestry in the ninth century and claiming Biblical descent became one of the cornerstones of their dynastic propaganda. More interesting information is provided by the anonymus in his *Histories and Eulogies* when he describes the coronation of Tamar as sole ruler in 1184. He states that during the coronation ceremony, Tamar was sitting on the Prophet-King David’s throne and she received the Biblical Solomon’s seal. Prominent aristocrats gave her a sword, and the army knelt before her and acclaimed her.⁵⁵⁸

This is the first time that a Georgian historiographical narrative provides an account of a coronation ceremony and describes the Old Testament royal insignia allegedly possessed by the Bagratid kings. It is well known that the Byzantine emperors claimed to possess the Old Testament royal insignia, the Rod of Moses and Solomon’s throne, which were supposedly kept in the

⁵⁵⁶ *The Life of Kartli*, 377; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 227: ვინათგან მოსე მხილველი ღმრთისა და წინასწარმეცნი ყოფადთა, ეურჩა განმგზავნსა ისრაელთადმი, მათდა მომღები ენამძიმობისა, მიერიდა უძღურსა; ვითარცა ყოფადთა დამსახი ვითარ ესევითარისა შემკადრე ვიქმნა ვერმეტყვ თქმათა აღმატებულებისათა?

⁵⁵⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 377-8; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 227: ვითარ დავსცე სულამიტისა სახედ აღსაყვრისა ‘ქებასა-ქებათასა’ რომელსა-იგი გალობს სიბრძნითა მეიგავე სოლომონი, რომლისგან შთამოთესლოვნებისა ვერსაკმო არს შემსხმელად ულუმპიანობათა მათ გარდაცემისა, თამარისსასა ვიტყვი, ხელმწიფესა სახელისა და დიდებისა დავით მის პირველისა.

⁵⁵⁸ *The Life of Kartli*, 402-3; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 239;

imperial palace of Constantinople and displayed to the audience during important ceremonies.⁵⁵⁹ It is difficult to define whether the Old Testament insignia mentioned in the narrative was just an invention of the anonymous author or whether the Bagratids truly claimed to be in the possession of these relics at the end of the twelfth century. The Old Testament royal insignia had a significant ideological meaning. According to the rabbinic tradition, Solomon's throne embodied divine favor and possessing it guaranteed a kingdom/empire's universal domination. Solomon's throne was first captured by the Babylonians and later by the Persians. From Persia, the throne arrived in Greece and later in Rome.⁵⁶⁰ It is unclear whether this tradition was known in medieval Georgia, but we should not rule out the possibility that the Georgian historian/encomiast knew about this tradition and accentuated the transfer of divine favor and universal imperialism (claimed by Byzantine emperors) from Byzantium to the Georgian kingdom by ascribing the possession of the Old Testament royal insignia to the Bagratid family.

After introducing Tamar as the main protagonist of the narrative and highlighting the Bagratid family's sacred descent, the *Histories and Eulogies* diverts the audience's attention to the praise of Tamar's family (*genos*). Namely, the first several pages of the *Histories and Eulogies* are dedicated to the "father of the shining daughter," i.e., Giorgi III. The rhetorical representation of Giorgi's military campaigns served to refresh one's memory about his achievements and reanimate his name, which suffered after the events of 1177. Through this literary strategy, the anonymous further reinforced Tamar's authority as the heir of her glorious father. This is why I assume that the first part of the *Histories and Eulogies* was written in the early stage of Tamar's rule, when she needed to legitimize herself. Apart from dedicating significant space to Tamar's father, who the anonymous refers to as "the father of a shining daughter," a few lines are also assigned to Tamar's mother. She is shown as a pious and exemplary wife who resembles Saint Catherine and the Mother of God. The anonymous exploits elevated epithets and conventional rhetorical tropes to denote the greatness of Tamar's *genos*. Byzantine panegyrics and imperial biographies following the tradition coined by Menander Rhetor often praised the emperor's family or individual members of the family. Menander, in his handbook, suggested that his peer rhetoricians extoll the emperor's ancestors and talk about his noble lineage. "If neither his [the emperor's] city nor his nation is

⁵⁵⁹ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 84, 90 and 98; Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity*, 26. On the importance of Solomon's throne in Byzantine court culture see G. Brett, "The Automata in the Byzantine Throne of Solomon," *Speculum* 29 (1954): 477-87.

⁵⁶⁰ Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity*, 24.

conspicuously famous, you should omit this topic and consider whether his family has prestige or not. If it has, work it up. If it is humble or without prestige, omit it likewise...⁵⁶¹ It seems that the Georgian narrator closely followed the instructions of Menander Rhetor, who had set a benchmark for Byzantine authors.

The long introduction and the first part of the *Histories and Eulogies* end with the death of Giorgi. After this, the anonymus switches to Tamar's rule, and his language becomes more sophisticated and rhetorical. To divert his listeners' attention from Giorgi to his main protagonist Tamar, and emphasize her exceptionality, the anonymus utilizes theological vocabulary and extolls Tamar as a fourth member of the Holy Trinity: "Once, amongst three youths Nebuchadnezzar, met three young men and beheld one of the Trinity as the fourth; here and now, together with incomparable and honored Tamar, the Trinity appears to consist of four."⁵⁶²

Prooimion of the Life of Tamar

Pseudo-Basil in his *Life of Tamar* chooses a different strategy to introduce his protagonist to the audience and dedicates very little space to Giorgi III when praising Tamar's ancestors. Giorgi's reign is summarized in several lines and in this instance the *Life of Tamar* makes a sharp contrast with the *Histories and Eulogies*. Instead, Pseudo-Basil brings to the fore the positive image of Tamar's aunt, Rusudan, a female member of the Bagratid family who earned the name of a powerful woman before Tamar. By the time the narrative was composed, Tamar's authority was well established and certain aspects of the image-making strategy had disappeared; Giorgi III no longer played a legitimizing role for Tamar. After summarizing the information about Tamar's ancestors in a few sentences, Pseudo-Basil extolls her as the vicar of God: "what must be said of Tamar in her role as the Lord's deputy."⁵⁶³ This statement summarizes well the central message of *Life of Tamar* – she was an ideal Christian monarch.

Like the anonymus, Pseudo-Basil at the very beginning of his writing establishes a correlation between the Old Testament and Bagratid kingship. The narrative rhetorically describes Tamar's coronation and states that during the ceremony she was invested with the Old Testament

⁵⁶¹ *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 81.

⁵⁶² *The Life of Kartli*, 401; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 239: თუ მაშინ ნაბუქოდონოსორ სამთა ყრმათა თანა ოთხებად იხილა ერთი სამეფისაგანი, აქა კულა სამეფის თანა იხილვების ოთხებად თამარ, მისწორებული და აღმატებული.

⁵⁶³ *The Life of Kartli*, 483; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 288.

kings' royal insignia; Tamar received the crown and standard of the Biblical David. Moreover, the author of *the Life of Tamar* goes so far as to state that by Tamar's elevation to the throne the Biblical David's prophecy came into being: "For her countenance had been glorified in the beginning in the fulfillment of David's words, who has said that the kings and princes would pay homage with prayers and supplications, and the tribes would bring her presents."⁵⁶⁴ *The Life of Tamar* dedicates less space to the narration of military events than the *Histories and Eulogies*. Lengthy descriptions of battles against the neighboring Muslim polities and the heroic and Homeric performances of military men on the battlefield are absent. Pseudo-Basil focuses on the campaigns that had essential military and political repercussions and secured the kingdom's leading position in the Caucasus. Tamar is lauded as a defender of Christianity, and the decline of Muslim power as a consequence of a Georgian offensive is seen in a positive light. The credit for the successful expansion of the kingdom is given to Tamar.

The moralizing story of the *Life of Tamar* is the following: Tamar, through her wise and energetic rule, established her kingdom's domination in the region. She maintained an intimate relationship with God and secured divine favor through her righteous deeds and pious lifestyle and thus brought prosperity and happiness to her subjects. Thanks to her, the kingdom witnessed a strengthening of the Christian faith and a moral/ethical purification of its population. Therefore, this virtuous and faithful leader is the key to the realm's success.

The Prooimia of the Abdulmesiani and In Praise of King Tamar

The authors of the panegyric poems, like the authors of the encomiastic historiographical narratives, enunciate that the main protagonist of their work is Tamar. Šavteli and Čaxruxaze employ a similar literary strategy in the prefaces to their poems. They both state that they have a difficult task and consider their rhetorical skills insufficient to articulate properly Tamar's greatness.⁵⁶⁵

The author of *In Praise of King Tamar* summons the ancient philosophers and asks them to join him to extoll "prudent and powerful Tamar."⁵⁶⁶ Čaxruxaze relates that even if he and his

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. ვითარმედ პირი მისი პირველვე იყო დავითის მიერ თქმითა: რათა ლიტანიობით თაყუანის-სცემდნენ მეფენი და მთავარნი, და მეძღუნებოდნენ ნათესავნი.

⁵⁶⁵ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 117.

⁵⁶⁶ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: In Praise of King Tamar*, 183.

fellow rhetors possessed the wisdom of Socrates, they would still not be able to praise Tamar duly. Neither Plato nor Homer could render honor to her. In the poet-rhetor’s viewpoint, even Aristotle, the most celebrated among the philosophers, would fail to eulogize her properly. Despite the difficulties, the Georgian rhetor still dares to start praising “the one, who like a luminary radiates the light [i.e. Tamar].”⁵⁶⁷

Ioane Šavteli in his *Abdulmesiani* asks the “wise men, sons of Athens” [i.e., the ancient philosophers] to join him in praising the “anointed king, Tamar;” a “famous ruler who had been glorified all over the world, in the east as well as in the west.”⁵⁶⁸ Šavteli states:

You, Romans and Helens who consider yourself the students of Socrates, and you, astrologers who criticize other philosophers, will demonstrate your weakness/incapability and harm yourself if you decide to extoll Tamar.⁵⁶⁹

These (rhetorical) introductions tell much about the function of these panegyric poems and the context in which they were performed. The Georgian literati aimed at impressing the audience by demonstrating their knowledge of the classical past and “close” acquaintance with the ancient philosophers.⁵⁷⁰ Through this strategy, Šavteli and Čaxruxaze enforced their authority as good rhetoricians and learned men. It is also likely that these rhetoricians further sought to improve their position at the royal court and use their literary works as a means for social advancement. In eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium, learned men instrumentalized their literary products to achieve promotion at the imperial court. Symeon the New Theologian saw an obvious co-relation between rhetoric and social advancement.⁵⁷¹

4.4 Juxtaposing the Literary Portrayal of Tamar and Davit Soslan

Tamar’s preeminence in panegyric poems and encomiastic historiography and the fact that she receives more exalted treatment from the narrators than her father, Giorgi, and other prominent military man – including her second husband, Davit Soslan, and generals Zakaria and Ivane

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 117.

⁵⁶⁹ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 117: რომელნი ელნით, რომელნი ელნით თავს სოგრატისებრ სწავლით გებულსა, ვარსკვლავთ მრიცხველნო, სხვათა ბრძენთ მკიცხველინო, ვერ ძალგიცთ ქებად, თავს ჰყოფთ ვნებულსა,

⁵⁷⁰ One can only speculate on the extent to which these two Georgian panegyrists were acquainted with the works of the classical authors they mention in the introductions of their poems.

⁵⁷¹ Bernard, *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry*, 155.

Mxargrjeli – stands out as a rare exception for the medieval world. One cannot say much, however, about medieval Georgian stereotypes concerning powerful and ambitious women who tried to participate in governing the kingdom simply because royal women/queens are hardly visibly in Georgian narratives. Prior to Tamar, few Georgian queens are mentioned in the historiographical texts; they are represented either as regents during the minority of their children or as kings' exemplary mothers and wives. These women are neither portrayed as powerful and ambitious nor as playing a central role in the management of the state. Nonetheless, the Georgian point of view regarding women who wished to exercise power was probably not different from the Byzantine perspective. The Byzantine writers who wrote about women implicitly and explicitly demonstrate that their society was misogynistic.⁵⁷² Their viewpoints were shaped by the Old Testament tradition and the writings of the Church Fathers, which stressed a woman's inferiority to man and her central role in man's fall as the offspring of Eve.⁵⁷³ According to the Byzantine conventional belief, a woman was not supposed to rule because she was incapable of holding power and using it in a correct, positive, fashion.⁵⁷⁴ Imperial women were expected to have a secluded lifestyle with limited access to public life.⁵⁷⁵ Although in theory the empress had a restricted right to exercise power, she was recognized as the deputy of the emperor. The empress had power in a different sphere than the emperor.⁵⁷⁶

The exalted image of Tamar and her domination in the rhetorical sources becomes more apparent when one juxtaposes her portrayal with that of her second husband, Davit Soslan. After Tamar assumed power as sole ruler in 1184, she had to comply with the demands of the powerful aristocrats and ecclesiastics and married, contrary to her wish. The military aristocracy put forward the following argument: since Tamar could not lead the army in battle because of her gender, the royal army needed a male commander. Furthermore, for the kingdom's stability, Tamar was expected to give birth to a male heir to the throne.

Sometime in 1185, Tamar married Iurii Bogolubsky, a prince in exile from the Russian principality of Vladimir-Suzdal. The marriage was short-lived, however, and after two years

⁵⁷² James, *Empress and Power in Early Byzantium*, 2; A. Laiou, "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society," *JOB* 31(1) (1981): 233-60.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2; E. Neville, "The Authorial Voice of Anna Komnēnē," in *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes Function and Identity*, ed. A. Pizzone (De Gruyter, 2014), 266.

⁵⁷⁴ James, *Empress and Power in Early Byzantium*, 3.

⁵⁷⁵ A. McClanan, *Representation of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 113.

⁵⁷⁶ James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 74.

Tamar divorced her Rus husband. The reason for the conflict between the royal couple is provided by only a single source, the *Histories and Eulogies*, which contends that soon after the marriage Iurii revealed his “Scythian” nature. Of course, as an exemplary wife and a pious person, Tamar tried to cope with her husband’s “odd” behavior and lifestyle, but in the end, at the queen’s demand, the marriage was dissolved and Iurii exiled to Constantinople.

In the episode that describes the conflict between the royal couple, the anonymous uses eulogistic epithets to denote Tamar’s greatness. While Iurii is called “Scythian,” Tamar is acclaimed as humble, kind, reasonable, charming and generous like the sun.⁵⁷⁷ Scholars tend to take at face value the vague account of the anonymous historian and interpret Iurii’s “Scythian” nature as excessive love for alcohol or homosexuality. In contrast to the commonly asserted views, it is possible that the reason for the disagreement between Tamar and Iurii was something other than domestic conflict. I hypothesize that a contest for power and influence developed the hostility between the Rus prince and Tamar. Iurii may have tried to marginalize Tamar and exclude her from governing the kingdom. Had he succeeded in this endeavor, Tamar would have become a source for Iurii’s legitimacy and queen-consort, a transmitter of regnal power to her husband. In eleventh-century Byzantium, empress Zoe, a member of Macedonian dynasty, legitimized four emperors, three through marriage and one by adoption. Although these emperors had access to the imperial power because of Zoe, they all tried to marginalize and exclude her from governmental affairs as well as to restrict her access to the imperial finances.⁵⁷⁸

Even though the Bagratid royal propaganda tried to denigrate Iurii and erase his memory, his charisma and military skills arguably earned him a good reputation among certain groups of the Georgian aristocracy. After Tamar secured the divorce from Iurii, he was remunerated lavishly and sent or exiled to Constantinople. But Iurii managed to return to Georgia and cause one of the biggest political crises Tamar ever faced. Backed by powerful western and southern-western aristocrats, Iurii was crowned king in western Georgia. The coronation of Tamar’s banished ex-husband in western Georgia with the support of the military aristocracy was a great challenge not only for Tamar but for the entire Bagratid family, whose legitimacy as the royal house was seriously questioned. The *Histories and Eulogies* evaluates Iurii’s coronation as: “What a horrible thing and a wonder, exceeding human understanding, and who was it who wanted to sit on the

⁵⁷⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 415; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 245.

⁵⁷⁸ On empress Zoe see L. Garland, *Byzantine Empress: Women and Power in Byzantium*, 136-57.

throne of the descendants of Davit, the prophet? Tamar was amazed at such an absurd, nonsensical undertaking...⁵⁷⁹ According to this source, the main reason for Tamar's frustration was not the rebellion itself or the fact that her subjects shifted their alliance and supported the exiled Iurii, but rather that a non-member of the Bagratid dynasty was crowned as king and placed on the "Davidic" throne. This episode enunciates well the general line of the Georgian royal propaganda, according to which the individual who aspired to the kingship had to be a member of the "sacred" Bagratid dynasty. The challenge Iurii posed to the Bagratid dynasty in the 1190s explains why the sacred origin and splendor of the Bagratid family was continually emphasized in Tamar's contemporary rhetorical narratives.

The fragmentary body of evidence does not support a discussion of the scale of the discontent caused by Iurii's return from Constantinople or the way Tamar handled the crisis. Yet the fact that she and her supporters prevailed against her ex-husband strengthened Tamar's position. Although Iurii suffered a severe blow and was sent into exile a second time, he returned to Georgia again, but this time failed to secure the support of powerful players and lost his case. Tamar's and Iurii's joint rule was never reflected on the coinage. The coins that were minted in 1187 bear only Tamar's name. On the obverse, these coins show Tamar's signature in Georgian; the reverse contains a long legend in Arabic that hails her as a great queen, the glory of the world and faith and champion of the Messiah.⁵⁸⁰ Tamar either minted this type of coin to highlight her sole rulership after the divorce from Iurii or she issued the coin while she was still married to the Rus prince to affirm her position as a ruler in her own right.

In 1089 Tamar married an Alan/Ossetian prince Davit Soslan, a distant relative of the Bagratid clan.⁵⁸¹ Davit Soslan was brought up at the Bagratid royal court and Tamar's aunt, Rusudan, was his foster mother.⁵⁸² Perhaps by 1089/90 Tamar could be independent in her choice and married the person whom she considered the least threat to her power and authority. She probably learned a lesson from her first marriage. The royal couple ruled the kingdom together from 1189, but which of them was the senior king is not easy to define. If one scrutinizes

⁵⁷⁹ *The Life of Kartli*, 423; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 249.

⁵⁸⁰ T. Dundua and G. Dundua, *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three*, 246.

⁵⁸¹ David Soslan was descendent of Bagrat IV's brother Demetre C. Toumanoff, "Armenia and Georgia" in *The Cambridge Medieval History vol. IV: The Byzantine Empire: Byzantium and its Neighbours*, 623; D. Rayfield, *Edge of the Empires*, 110.

⁵⁸² D. Rayfield, *Edge of the Empires*, 110.

contemporary literary narratives and compares them with information attested in numismatic material and epigraphic inscriptions, one gets the impression that Tamar was the senior ruler and dominant figure from whom Davit derived his power.

One of the markers of Tamar's prominence and seniority in the *Histories and Eulogies* is the language which the author exploits when talking about her. While he employs elevated epithets and metaphors as well as Biblical and Classical *exempla*, he limits his word choice when referring to Davit. Only Tamar is recognized as "the brightest of all crown bearers, successful in everything and bathed in glory."⁵⁸³ Epithets like "divine mountain,"⁵⁸⁴ "resplendent light," "sun of the monarchs," and "great by nature and the most celebrated among the scepter-bearers" are applied only to Tamar.⁵⁸⁵ She is praised as a worthy offspring of her great-grandfather, Davit IV and Biblical King-Prophet, David.⁵⁸⁶ In the episodes where Tamar and Davit are mentioned side by side, the former is treated in a more elevated manner than the latter. For instance, when Davit conducted a military campaign against the "Persians" he returned to the "most perfect and brilliant Tamar, who was like an eye, not clouded by the dark night; she was like a day without shadow."⁵⁸⁷ The royal army, after achieving a glorious victory against the Muslims with many spoils returns to the "happiest Davit and the God-crowned Tamar."⁵⁸⁸ In the aftermath of the battle of Basiani in 1205, "glorious Davit returns to his sun, Tamar."⁵⁸⁹ According to the anonymous rhetor, it is Tamar's rather than Davit's name and persona that causes fear and trembling among the enemies of Christianity and in the Georgian kingdom. Tamar is the one who subdued the dissenters inside and outside the kingdom, and it is her name "as the name of the angel that is spread all over the world, from East to West and North to South."⁵⁹⁰ Tamar's seniority is allegedly recognized by foreign rulers as well. In a letter sent by the ruler of Sharvan to the royal couple, Davit is addressed as brave, while Tamar is hailed as prudent and fortunate like Alexander the Great.⁵⁹¹ To reinforce further the image of Tamar as a ruler in her own right, the anonymous puts the words into the mouth of commander-in-chief of the Georgian royal army, Zakaria Mxargrzelis (the Long-armed), who

⁵⁸³ *The Life of Kartli*, 467; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 270.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 396; 236.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 448; 261.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 440; 257.

⁵⁸⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 413; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 244.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 432; 253.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 467; 270.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 416; 254.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 434-35; 255.

addresses Tamar as “powerful sovereign” and the “brightest among the crowned monarchs.”⁵⁹² This literary ploy aimed to make an audience believe that even one of the most influential military commanders of the kingdom recognized the female ruler’s power and authority. Zakaria Mxargrzeni is portrayed as an obedient and loyal servant of Tamar. Further careful reading of the sources shows that only Tamar maintains a close and intimate relationship with God, and divine grace is secured through her agency. She builds and patronizes churches and monasteries inside and outside of the kingdom.⁵⁹³ Tamar is represented as the only source of justice and she acts in her kingdom as a supreme judge, listening to the complaints of her subjects.⁵⁹⁴ Davit, on the other hand, lacks all these royal qualities and his persona is devoid of an aura of sacredness and sanctity. Instead, he is portrayed as a good army commander and a brave soldier who fights like an Achilles on the battlefield.⁵⁹⁵

The historiographical texts also apply different royal titles to Tamar and Davit, in this way enunciating the hierarchy between wife and husband. Tamar receives more elevated royal titles than her husband and is addressed as “king of kings,” “queen and king,” and the “ruler of the west and east, north and south.”⁵⁹⁶ The “king of kings and queen of queens, the sun over all the suns” is the most elaborate royal epithet with which Tamar is addressed by the anonymous author.⁵⁹⁷ Davit in comparison is usually called merely as “king Davit.” Tamar’s royal titulature varies in all the literary narratives; most frequently she is addressed as “king” and “king of kings,” but in certain instances as “king and queen.”⁵⁹⁸ While a great deal of attention is paid to Davit in the *Histories and Eulogies*, a rare reference to the queen’s husband appears in Pseudo-Basil’s *Life of Tamar*.

Even though the hierarchy between Tamar and Davit is not that evident in the panegyric poems at first glance, close inspection of Šavteli’s and Čaxruxaze’s rhetorical discourse unmasks Tamar’s supremacy over her husband. First and foremost, Tamar is declared as the main protagonist and subject of praise in the rhetorical *prooimia* of *Abdulmesiani* and *In Praise of King Tamar*. Furthermore, some verses in these poems explicitly assert Tamar’s seniority. For instance,

⁵⁹² Ibid., 471; 272.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 467; 270.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 442; 258.

⁵⁹⁶ *The Life of Kartli*, 414, 470-71; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 245, 272.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 414; 272.

⁵⁹⁸ The English version of *the Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs* translates Tamar’s royal title *mepe* (king) as queen. This discrepancy creates the wrong impression of Tamar’s royal titulature.

one of the strophes of the poem *Abdulmesiani* states that Davit received power and strength as well as sun like brightness from Tamar.

The Lion [i.e., Davit] received the power and the sun brightness from you [i.e., Tamar]
You are a member of the Angelic group, you stand in one line with the saints
and share their grace and the lifestyle.⁵⁹⁹

Only Tamar is eulogized in *Abdulmesiani* as a true Caesar and she is compared to the Byzantine emperor Herakleios. Tamar's glorious victories against "her enemies" are declared as impressive as emperor Herakleios' triumph over the Persians.⁶⁰⁰

After juxtaposing the representation of Tamar and Davit in the encomiastic narratives and scrutinizing the rhetorical strategies utilized by the narrators in relation the royal couple, it is appropriate to say that Tamar is presented as the senior ruler while Davit has the status of co-ruler. Although each text demonstrates a great reverence for Davit and lauds his virtues of bravery and good generalship, the literary image of Tamar dominates Davit's. It is furthermore striking that while Tamar's twofold coronation (as a co-ruler with her father in 1178 and as sole ruler in 1184) is described with precision in the historiographical texts, Davit's coronation as king after his marriage to Tamar is absent. Thus, the Georgian authors persuade their readers and listeners of Tamar's supremacy and domination over her husband, Davit. In the Byzantine empire, in contrast, imperial women who tried to exercise power and had influence over their male consorts frequently received harsh critiques. It is remarkable the way Georgian encomiastic narratives portray the female ruler in full power.

Although one can question the extent to which these rhetorical texts present an accurate picture of Tamar's authority, the numismatic material does corroborate the accounts of Georgian literati. The bi-lingual coin issued during the joint rule of Tamar and Davit is a good example of the royal court's official statement about the hierarchy between the wife and husband (Fig. 12).

⁵⁹⁹ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 136.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.



Figure 12. Copper Coin of Tamar and Davit, issues in ca. 1200.

Obverse: In the middle, unidentified monogram, sometimes referred to as the “Bagratid badge.”

Tamar’s abbreviated name to the left of the monogram: ႠႢ. Davit’s abbreviated name to the right side of the monogram: ႠႠ.

Reverse: The legend in Arabic: ملكة الملكات جلال الدنيا والدين تامار ابنة كيوري ظهير المسيح – “Queen of Queens, glory of the world and the faith, Tamar daughter of Giorgi, champion of the Messiah.”

Two features underline Tamar’s prominent position on the coin. First, her abbreviated name is placed on the left side – a place of honor and traditionally reserved for the senior ruler. Second, the legend in Arabic on the reverse hails only Tamar as “Queen of the Queens, Glory of the World and Faith, Tamar, daughter of Giorgi, Champion of the Messiah.” The omission of Davit’s name from the main communicative message of the copper coin indicates that the Georgian royal court set a clear-cut boundary between Tamar as the senior ruler and Davit as the subordinate one. The use of the epithet “champion of the Messiah” to delineate the authority of a female ruler is striking. By means of this laudatory phrase Tamar informed the Muslim audience that she was a guardian and defender of the Christians. The phrase “the sword of the Messiah/champion of the Messiah” was coined by the Georgian kings in the second quarter of the twelfth century, when Georgian kingdom was on the offensive against the Seljuk Turks. The “champion of the Messiah” or “the sword of the Messiah” was predominantly inscribed in Arabic on Georgian kings’ bilingual coins.

It is difficult to find a Byzantine coin minted between the eleventh and twelfth century that implicitly emphasizes the dominant position of a female ruler over her male consort. Although coinage and seals allowed the Byzantine empresses to promote their image, in most cases these

media highlighted their subordination to their male partners. In the Byzantine visual culture, when the empress and emperor were represented together on coins and seals, the emperor's seniority was traditionally emphasized. Eudokia Makrembolitissa is perhaps the only Byzantine empress who is often represented on coins and seals as not subservient to her husbands, but as a partner who shares imperial power with them on an equal basis. For instance, on the copper follis of Emperor Konstantinos X Doukas, the image of Eudokia takes the traditional place of honor, to the viewer's left, while Konstantinos appears to the viewer's right, the place usually given to the co-emperor and heir to the imperial throne; each ruler holds a *labarum*.⁶⁰¹ On the *miliarēsiōn*, the image of Konstantinos appears on the left side and Eudokia's to the viewer's right. The Greek inscriptions hail the imperial couple as faithful emperors of the Romans (*pistoi basileis Romaiōn*). It is noteworthy that the designation of the Byzantine empress with the male title while she was not the sole ruler is an exceptional case. The position of Eudokia as an equal partner of her second husband, Emperor Romanos IV, is reflected on the so-called Romanos Ivory. On this ivory panel the empress's full-size image stands next to that of her second husband, Romanos IV, equal in size, and Christ blesses both rulers. The inscription in Greek hails the imperial couple as "Romanos, emperor of the Romans" and "Eudokia, empress of the Romans;"⁶⁰² Romanos IV Diogenes and Eudokia Makrembolitissa are the only Byzantine couple to rule as "Romanos and Eudokia."⁶⁰³ The *histameron* coin struck during their joint rule repeats the iconographic repertoire of the Romanos Ivory. The reverse of the *histameron* portrays images of equal size of Eudokia and Romanos, both blessed by Christ. It is noteworthy that in Byzantine visual culture Christ was traditionally blessing the emperor and rarely the empress. There is only a single type of visual evidence, a pattern of *tetarteron* from Bibliotheque Nationale, which could be interpreted as an expression of Eudokia's dominant position over her husband. The obverse of this coin depicts a frontal bust of Eudokia holding a globus cruciger and *labarum*. She is referred to as *basilis*. Romanos IV's bust holding a globus cruciger and *akakia* appears on the obverse. He is called *despotes*. Eudokia's title of *basilis* and the *labarum* outrank Romanos's imperial title and regalia.⁶⁰⁴ Although the symbols and language of power on the *tetarteron* pattern suggest that Eudokia held the upper hand over her husband, it is believed that no coin was struck from this

⁶⁰¹ L. Kalavrezou, "Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 31 (1997), 311.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 307-318.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

pattern.⁶⁰⁵ Thus, Eudokia’s visual domination over her second husband was never propagated widely. In contrast to the Byzantine tradition, the language of authority on the Georgian bi-lingual coin implies that the female Tamar, was the source of power and senior ruler.

The royal imagery is another case that sheds light on Tamar’s and Davit’s positions in the kingdom’s power hierarchy.⁶⁰⁶ Among the six surviving royal images, Tamar appears with Davit Soslan only in a single fresco from the monastery of Natlismcemeli (John the Baptist). Natlismcemeli – one of the sixteen monasteries of the Davit Gareji monastic complex – is an isolated monastery which was located far from the core areas of the kingdom in the twelfth century. Although the monastery could have been the foci of pilgrimages during Tamar’s reign, it was still isolated, not accessible to the wider public.⁶⁰⁷ The royal panel is placed on the northern wall of the Natlismcemeli; Tamar and Davit stand together, with their small son, Giorgi-Laša, between them. All three rulers hold *labara* in their hands. Tamar and Davit wear similar Byzantine imperial robes and crowns. The image of Davit is on the left side and Tamar is on the right side. Although Davit’s figure is slightly larger than Tamar’s and he is depicted on the left side of the composition, both rulers receive similar royal entitulations. Tamar is addressed as “king of kings, daughter of the great king of kings,” and Davit is also called “king of kings.”⁶⁰⁸ The royal panel was made in the 1190s, probably not very long after the Georgian army under the command of Davit achieved a stunning victory against a Muslim coalition army at the battle of Šamkori in 1195. This victory secured the position of the Georgian kingdom as a great power in the Caucasus and prevented the Muslim world from subverting Tamar’s authority. Perhaps Davit’s military achievements earned him a position as Tamar’s equal in the visual media from Natlismcemeli. This fresco is so far the only surviving evidence that puts Davit on the same level as Tamar. For instance, on a single surviving royal charter which was issued in Tamar’s name to Gelati Monastery in 1193, she models herself as “By the will of God, Tamar Bagratuniani, king and queen of the Apxazians, Kartvelians, Ranians, and K’axetians, and Armenians; Sharvan šāh and šāhān šāh, and ruler of the East and West.”⁶⁰⁹ Davit’s signature on this charter after Tamar’s names him only as “king.” Although the

⁶⁰⁵ L. Kalavrezou, “Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory,” 315.

⁶⁰⁶ For detailed description of the royal imagery, see: Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 124-41; [Z. Sxirtladze] სამეფო კტიტორული პორტრეტი გარეჯის ნათლისმცემლის მონასტორს მთავარ ტაძარში [Royal donor portraits in the main church of Natlismcemeli Monastery in Gareji], *SabXel* 1983, 95-110.

⁶⁰⁷ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 139.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

⁶⁰⁹ *Corpus of the Eleventh- and the Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents*, 77.

representation of Davit and Tamar as equals at Natlismcemeli is the exception and contrasts with the numismatic evidence and a royal charter, one also needs to question to what extent the royal court had full control over the royal images in the various monastic centers of Georgia. Unlike the monastery of Varzia, which was a royal foundation and where the court could have had more leverage to impose the uniformity of the royal representation, the Gareji monastic complex was not a royal foundation and was one of the oldest monastic centers in Georgia. It may be that the representation of Tamar and Davit as equals was a local monastic perspective on the nature of royal power rather than the Bagratid court's view. Furthermore, perhaps the Gareji monastic community was expressing gratitude to Davit, who had defeated the Muslim coalition army. Šamkori, the place where the battle took place in 1195, was not far from Gareji, and if the Muslim army had prevailed over the Georgian army, one of the largest and oldest monastic centers of Georgia could have become a target of the enemy. It has been rightly argued that the Natlismcemeli imagery reflects the highpoint in the representation of Davit Soslan.⁶¹⁰

4.5 The sun-like and Christ-like Tamar: Cultivating the sacrality of a Female Ruler

Tamar's rule witnessed an unprecedented scale of sacralization of the Georgian kingship. One of the indicators of this phenomenon was the high frequency with which solar and astral symbolism was employed in relation to Tamar. If, in anonymus's *Life of Davit*, solar and light metaphors were invoked in a few instances, Tamar's contemporary rhetorical media frequently portray her as a sun, an earthly sun, and a sun which brings warmth and light to her subjects. The association and assimilation of Tamar with the sun and life-giving light is a conventional hermeneutical strategy in all four rhetorical texts. The presence of solar and light imagery in the discourse on ideal kingship indicates that Georgian rhetoric could have been inspired by the Byzantine tradition. The sun and light were symbols of divinity in the ancient world and often used in relation to the emperor in order to emphasize his sacrality and divine nature. Christian apologists and theologians, however, appropriated the metaphor of the sun to express the divinity of Christ and later it was applied to the Christian Roman emperor.⁶¹¹ Therefore, Byzantine imperial rhetoric allegorized the emperor with the light-giving sun, who shines for the benefit of his subjects and as

⁶¹⁰ Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 137.

⁶¹¹ P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 417.

an earthly representative of Christ-Light of the World.⁶¹² From the tenth century, solar symbolism in Byzantine imperial ceremonies was no longer of a religious-cosmic nature associated with ancient Roman festivals but was exploited for the glorification of the Christian sun-like ruler.⁶¹³ During the celebration of the imperial *Broumalion*, the enthroned emperor would sit on a raised platform looking towards the east. The emperor's lower body was hidden behind a curtain, and his shining bejeweled insignia would look like a metaphor of the sun rising on the eastern horizon.⁶¹⁴ The emperor received the following acclamation during the ceremony: "rise like a sun! God-inspired kingship, rise!"⁶¹⁵ From the eleventh century onwards, the association of the emperor with the sun became more frequent in imperial panegyrics.⁶¹⁶ It was only in the twelfth century, however, during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, that the likeness of the emperor to the sun and light acquired paramount importance. Probably during Manuel I Komnenos's rule, the *prokypsis* ceremony – a quasi-theatrical appearance of the emperor – was introduced at the imperial court of Byzantium.⁶¹⁷ The *prokypsis* ceremony would take place during the late afternoon on Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Epiphany, when the emperor, standing on a raised platform, appeared before the audience as an imitation of Christ.⁶¹⁸ The purpose of the *prokypsis* ceremony was to articulate and emphasize the idea of sun-rulership.⁶¹⁹ Therefore it is no surprise that the association of the emperor with the sun and the light-giving sun were so prominent in the Komnenian imperial rhetoric. The court poet, "Manganeios" Prodromos, used the sun and light extensively as rhetorical metaphors in his panegyric poetry to highlight the emperor Manuel I's sacred and Christ-like nature.⁶²⁰

⁶¹² M. Parani, "'Rise Like Sun, the God-inspired Kingship': Light-symbolism and the Uses of Light in the Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonies," in *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World*. Ed. A. Lidov (Moscow: Theoria, 2013), 159; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 413-34; D. Angelov, *Imperial ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium*, 80;

⁶¹³ M. Parani, "'Rise Like Sun, the God-inspired Kingship': Light-symbolism and the Uses of Light in the Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonies," 169.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ G. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," 134.

⁶¹⁷ S. H. Rapp, jr., "Imagining History at the Crossroads," 658-59.

⁶¹⁸ M. Parani, "'Rise Like Sun, the God-inspired Kingship': Light-symbolism and the Uses of Light in the Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonies," 174; D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium*, 41; On *prokypsis* see further M. Jeffreys, "The Comnenian *prokypsis*," *Parergon* 5 (1983): 38-53; On the use of solar metaphors during the imperial ceremonies and in imperial rhetoric see G. Dennis, "Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality," 131-40.

⁶¹⁹ M. Parani, "'Rise Like Sun, the God-inspired Kingship': Light-symbolism and the Uses of Light in the Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonies," 174.

⁶²⁰ Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 470.

Among the Georgian historiographical narratives, the *Histories and Eulogies* most frequently exploits the solar and light metaphors in relation to Tamar. By associating Tamar continually with the sun and light, the anonymus delineates her sacred and Christ-like nature. The first likeness of Tamar with a sun occurs when the author narrates her coronation as a co-ruler with her father, Giorgi, in 1178. Tamar is eulogized as a sun in the cloudless sky who sends the rays.⁶²¹ Tamar's coronation as sole ruler in 1184 is another instance when her persona was wrapped in solar symbolism. "Tamar, like lightning or the sun that illuminates others, was elevated to her father's throne."⁶²² She is further exalted as the sun of suns and the light that is brighter than ordinary day.⁶²³ Enthroned Tamar is beautiful like Aphrodite and generous like sunny Apollo.⁶²⁴ She is the superior sun, perfect and brilliant, and a day without a shade.⁶²⁵

The rhetorical juxtaposition of Tamar with Apollo is the first case when the ruler is allegorized with the solar deity in medieval Georgian encomiastic narratives. Assimilation of the emperor with Apollo had pre-Christian roots. Constantine the Great's contemporaries, and the emperor himself, saw an intimate relationship between him and Apollo Sol.⁶²⁶ Fourth-century rhetorical texts articulated the idea of a close connection between the emperor Constantine and Apollo. An anonymus orator, in speech delivered ca. 310, defined Apollo not only as Constantine's partner but called Constantine a double of Apollo. The oration relates that Constantine in a vision saw and recognized himself in the likeness of Apollo.⁶²⁷ In the same period, Constantine's coinage started to communicate the emperor's special relationship to Apollo the Sun. In addition to this, Constantine's statue in the guise of Apollo Sol was erected in Constantinople in a solar-shaped forum.⁶²⁸

Tamar's sun-like imagery also occurs in the panegyric poems *In Praise of King Tamar* and *Abdulmesiani*. The density of solar and astral epithets utilized in relation to Tamar in these two rhetorical poems is far more excessive than in the historiographic texts. Particularly lavish in this regard is *In Praise of King Tamar*. Tamar is hailed as the smiling sun, shining brightly like

⁶²¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 396; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 236.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 402; 239.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 407; 241.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 411-12; 243-44.

⁶²⁶ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 120-21.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

“celestial Cronus.”⁶²⁹ She illuminates like an eternal and light-giving sun.⁶³⁰ Moreover, Tamar is the brightest luminary of the universe, supreme sun who lights the sky.⁶³¹ Tamar’s sun-like image is constructed and communicated by Šavteli in his *Abdulmesiani*. The Bagratid queen is claimed to rule like a sun surrounded by the seven luminaires;⁶³² she shines like a light and radiates lightening-like rays.⁶³³

Another interesting feature of Georgian royal rhetoric was the frequent comparison of Tamar to Christ and the Theotokos as well as an emphasis on her special relationship with the Divine. The rhetorical texts claimed Tamar to be a Christ-like figure and deputy of Christ on the earth who constantly imitated Christ through her behavior. For the author of the *Histories and Eulogies*, Tamar is an innocent lamb who resembles the son of God, Christ.⁶³⁴ She is hailed as “Christ-like in strength” and claimed to stand “in place of God to her kingdom and people.” When the anonymus describes the birth of Tamar’s son, Giorgi-Laša, he makes direct literary parallels between the contemporary event and the New Testament story. The *Histories and Eulogies* relate that Tamar turned the royal palace into Bethlehem by giving birth to a son equal to Christ. The members of the royal court, including Davit and Tamar’s sister, behaved like the Magi and brought presents to the new born baby.⁶³⁵ The author of *In Praise of King Tamar* was particularly bold concerning Tamar’s Christ-like nature. He goes as far as to claim that Tamar, like Christ, assumed flesh and came from heaven to earth for the salvation of humankind.⁶³⁶ On a later occasion, Čaxruxaze hails Tamar as equal to God the Father and Christ.⁶³⁷

Apart from eulogizing Tamar as a second Christ, a Christ-like ruler, and equal to the Trinity, each rhetorical text portrays Tamar as a unique human being and God’s perfect creation. Šavteli in his *Abdulmesiani* not infrequently asks the rhetorical question whether someone knows a better and more perfect human being than Tamar. From Adam until now the world has not witnessed a person like Tamar:

Innocent God, supreme essence of nature, who sees everything,
unreachable and eternal, the light of the Trinity, graceful God the Father,

⁶²⁹ *In Praise of King Tamar*, 183.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶³² *Abdulmesiani*, 122.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶³⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 424; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 249.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 428-9; 252.

⁶³⁶ *In Praise of King Tamar*, 201.

⁶³⁷ *In Praise of King Tamar*, 204.

miracle of the Holy Spirit and son, consubstantial with the father,
created you as daily light, rays of the sun, and a star in the sky.⁶³⁸

The author of *Abdulmesiani* elaborates a similar idea about Tamar's uniqueness as well as her intimate relationship with the divine in other part of the poem:

God the father and son-divine logos created her as superior of all souls,
Light of the life, who still retains ties with heavenly beings.⁶³⁹

After this scrutiny of medieval Georgian encomiastic narratives and the rhetorical strategies these texts applied to glorify a female ruler, it becomes apparent how bold Tamar's image-makers were. The scale of Tamar's laudation and increased emphasis on the sacrality of her kingship stands as an exception in the medieval world. What is important to emphasize and bear in mind is that medieval literary narratives, notably the Byzantine, as a rule maintained a clear-cut distinction between the epithets and modes of behavior applicable to the emperor and empress. These boundaries in the Byzantine discourse were strictly maintained. The empress/imperial women in imperial rhetoric were never praised in the same way as the emperor. Hence, it is hard to find any Byzantine empress/imperial woman who was celebrated as extensively as Tamar. The use of sun/light imagery and metaphors in relation to the Byzantine empress/imperial woman is difficult to trace as extensively as in Tamar's case. The Byzantine empress/imperial woman could hardly position herself as a deputy of Christ on earth even if she had assumed power.⁶⁴⁰ Even comparisons of the Byzantine empress/imperial woman with the Mother of God are rare in rhetorical narratives.⁶⁴¹ Besides, the Byzantine literary or visual rhetoric rarely allegorized the Byzantine empress with Christ or maintained her image as a Christ-like figure or earthly representative of Christ. In Byzantine thought, it was only the Byzantine emperor – the Christian basileus – who represented Christ on earth and whose authority came directly from Christ. According to Byzantine imperial ideology, only emperor was charged with mystical power and acted in his capacity as vice-regent and representative of Christ on earth. In imperial orations and other rhetorical texts, the emperor was advised to imitate Christ and follow in Christ's footsteps. Furthermore, Byzantine imperial discourse maintained the idea that the emperor was responsible for peace and prosperity in Christendom and it was his duty to defend and spread Christianity and

⁶³⁸ *Abdulmesiani*, 138.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 3.

⁶⁴¹ B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 75.

convert pagans and heretics to the true faith. Although Byzantine authors emphasized the emperor's unique position as a deputy of Christ on earth and admitted that he was a sacred figure as holder of the imperial office, they were still careful in their statements. Even when sacralization of the emperor's persona reached an apex in the twelfth-century Byzantine empire, the Byzantine intellectuals never became as bold in their statements as the Georgian literati. Even though the Georgian sources do not try to masculinize Tamar and present her as a manly woman, she bore all the characteristics that would apply to a male ruler according to medieval standards.

4.6 A New Constantine: Tamar's virtues of Piety, Philanthropy, and Justice

In the twelfth-and thirteenth-century Georgian rhetorical discourse on ideal kingship, the practice of the Christian virtues was the path that lead the ruler to ethical/moral perfection and divinization. Therefore, the most significant attention in portraying Tamar's idealized image is dedicated to her piety and philanthropy – the essential Christian virtues in Christian thought. Public display of these virtues enhances the literary image of Tamar as a sacred ruler. All four Georgian rhetorical texts accentuate Tamar's piety, care for the well-being of the Church, and her central role in the defense of Christianity. Pseudo-Basil dedicates the greatest space to Tamar's exemplary piety and philanthropy and hails her as a second Constantine. Like Constantine, Tamar convened an ecclesiastical council in order to secure the purity of the faith and the well-being of the Church.

In terms of faith, *she was a second Constantine; like him, she intended to do godly things* [my emphasis]. She began to sharpen her double-edged sword to eliminate the source of evil and called the council in order to define and establish the order of all the great and Ecumenical Councils.⁶⁴²

The double-edged sword metaphorically implied Tamar's ability to apply coercive power if necessary. The sword in medieval Georgia was an important royal attribute. During coronation, the king, along with other royal regalia, received a sword that symbolized his role as the head of the army.

The main agenda of the council convened in the name of Tamar is not entirely clear. The text states that Tamar recalled Nikoloz Gulaberize – an influential high-ranking ecclesiastic during

⁶⁴² *The Life of Kartli*, 485; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 288: ხოლო სჯულთათვის სულითთა მეორე კონსტანტინე იქმნებოდა და მისებრ ჰგუაროვნებდა დაწყებასა საღმრთოთა საქმეთა, რამეთუ იყო ალესვად ორპირისა მახვილსა მოსასვრელად თესლთა ზოროტთა და ინება რათა იქმნას შეყრა და გარჩევა დიდთა მათ და მსოფლიო კრებათა.

Giorgi III's reign – from Jerusalem and entrusted the chairmanship of the council to him. After gathering ecclesiastics from all over the kingdom, Tamar opened the council and addressed the participants:

‘O, holy fathers, you are appointed by God as our teachers and the rulers of the Holy Church, you have to preach for the sake of our souls, investigate everything thoroughly, sanction the just, and banish the unjust, begin with me, because the halo that surrounds me is a halo of royal greatness and not of theomachy.... Do with your words and I will do by my deeds, you with your teaching and I by suggestions, you with instruction and I by resolution; let all of us lend each other a helping hand ..., you as priest and me as a king, you as rulers and myself as a guardian.’ *Hearing these words, they thanked God and the divinely illuminated king* [my emphasis].⁶⁴³

Although in this fictionalized speech the queen demonstrates great humility and respect towards the ecclesiastics, she emphasizes her monarchical responsibilities pertaining to Church affairs. Tamar offers a division of the responsibilities between her and the ecclesiastical hierarchs. She, as the king and guardian of the faith, and the participants of the council should work hand in hand to maintain order and preserve divine law in the Church. While the “men of God” will benefit the well-being of the faith through their words and teaching, Tamar will do the same by her actions and suggestions.⁶⁴⁴ Tamar's speech is claimed to have made an impression on the council participants and they hailed her as a divinely illuminated king.⁶⁴⁵ There are several noteworthy elements in the language of the *Life of Tamar* that convey Tamar's royal authority. First and foremost, Tamar is acclaimed as a second Constantine and parallels are drawn between her and Constantine's accomplishments. In the previous chapter I discussed the authority Constantine the Great enjoyed in Byzantium and how important it was for Byzantine emperors to emulate Constantine. I have also demonstrated that Constantine the Great became a paradigm of ideal kingship in Georgia during Davit IV's rule and the first Christian emperor's name was present in twelfth century Georgian royal rhetoric. The rhetorical comparison of a female ruler with

⁶⁴³ *The Life of Kartli*, 485-6; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 289: ‘ჰოი წმიდანო მამანო, თქუნ ღმრთისა მიერ განჩინებულ ხართ მოძღვრუად ჩუენდა და მმართველად წმიდასა ეკლესიასა და თანა-გაც სიტყვის მიცმე სულთათვის ჩუენთა. გამოიძიეთ ყოველი კეთილად და დაამტკიცეთ მართალი, ხოლო განხადეთ გულარძნილი. იწყეთ ჩემ ზედა, რამეთუ შარავენდი ესე მეფობისა არს და არა ღმრთისმბრძოლობისა...თქუნ სიტყვით, ხოლო მე სქმით; თქუნ სწავლით, ხოლო მე განსწავლით; თქუნ წურთით, ხოლო მე განწურთით ზოგად ხელი მივსცეთ დაცვად სჯულთა საღმრთოთა შეუგინებელად, რათა არა ზოგად ვიზღვნეთ: თქუნ ვითარცა მღვდელნი, ხოლო მე, ვითარცა მეფე; თქუნ, ვითარცა მნენი, ხოლო მე, ვითარცა ებგური.’

⁶⁴⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 485-6; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 289.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Constantine, however, is astonishing. In Byzantium, as a tradition, an emperor was hailed as a new Constantine while an empress was acclaimed as second/new Helena. This tradition originated in the fifth century, when, during the council of Chalcedon (c. 451), emperor Maurice and empress Pulcheria were acclaimed for the first time as a “New Constantine” and “New Helena.”⁶⁴⁶ Following the established tradition, the author of a seventh-century poem – related to the gift of a cross relic – likens emperor Justin II to Constantine and his wife, Sofia, to Helena.⁶⁴⁷ The role of Helena was key for the Byzantine empresses,⁶⁴⁸ but comparing Byzantine empresses/imperial women with Helena was uncommon in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine literary texts.⁶⁴⁹

Even though one may question the historicity of this episode in Pseudo-Basil’s rhetorical text, it is not entirely implausible that Tamar was hailed as a second/new Constantine or Constantine and Helena by her supporters during the ceremonial opening of the council. The council failed to achieve the primary goal and depose the *katholikos* of the Georgian Church, but it succeeded in removing some high-ranking ecclesiastics from their dioceses.⁶⁵⁰ It was most important for Tamar, in her struggle to attain legitimacy, to exercise the right to convene the council. Tamar’s participation in the opening of the council and her speech were a step forward in strengthening her position and bolstering her authority. What is of considerable importance in Pseudo-Basil’s discourse on ideal rulership is the portrayal of a female ruler as a guardian/defender of faith besides presenting her as a new Constantine. In her alleged speech to the members of the council, Tamar used language that conveyed her royal authority and emphasized her right to intervene in Church affairs; as a bearer of the sacred halo (*sharavendedi*) of kingship, she is the guardian of the faith and retains the right to make suggestions to the ecclesiastics if necessary.

The convocation of the council is not the only marker of Tamar’s piety and guardianship of the faith. The Georgian queen is portrayed as the most zealous follower and guardian of the “law of God” in the entire kingdom: “Church services and vigils performed at her palace excelled the prayers of Theodosius the Great, and I am sure, those of the Anchorites.”⁶⁵¹ Not only were “Tamar’s fasts the most impressive,” but she observed and made sure that the monks, as well as

⁶⁴⁶ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 3.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ L. James, “Goddess, Whore, and Wife of Slave? Will the Real Byzantine Empress Stand Up?”, 124.

⁶⁴⁹ B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 75.

⁶⁵⁰ D. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 108-9.

⁶⁵¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 519; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 304.

members of the court would follow suit. Tamar's piety is further illustrated by her claimed positive relationship and friendship with monks and churchmen.

It is impossible to describe her adoration for priests and monks. There were always people with her who followed the rules of pious life. She always arranged the accommodations for them close to her chambers and provided them with food and all the necessary things. And if someone was sick among them, she herself visited him and comforted him, and with her own hands prepared the bed for him.⁶⁵²

A good relationship of a ruler with a monk or holy man was a literary *topos* commonly utilized by Byzantine authors to portray an idealized image of an emperor. But Byzantine emperors and empresses did cultivate closeness with monks/holy men in order to establish their credentials as a “good” ruler and demonstrate that they practiced the imperial virtue of piety. The practice of spirituality and the performance of personal piety were methods that helped the empress to improve her status and become more visible.⁶⁵³ Anna Dalassene, an influential and powerful Komnenian woman, is portrayed as a deeply pious lady, a patron of monks and holy men. She even made sure that her son, Alexios Komnenos, was accompanied on his military campaigns by a monk, who acted as his spiritual adviser and confessor.⁶⁵⁴

Apart from patronizing the monks and holy men and thus advertising her piety, Tamar is portrayed working hard to establish obedience and the fear of God in the kingdom. We are told that the teachers of scripture became fearful, priests obeyed canon law, and monks started to follow an exemplary lifestyle. This, however, was not confined to the ecclesiastical body of the kingdom. The secular aristocracy began a pious life and the population of the kingdom acquired a sense of the duty to serve God.⁶⁵⁵ Ioane Šavteli portrays a similar image of Tamar in his poem by asserting her central role in strengthening the faith and guarding the purity of Orthodoxy. The panegyrist refers to Tamar several times as a “pillar of faith.” Tamar guards the canons of the seven ecumenical councils and teachings of the Church Fathers and rejects the false teachings of Arius,

⁶⁵² Ibid: ეგრეთვე სიყვარულისათვის ხუცესთა და მონაზონთასა ნამეტნავ არს თქუმად, რამეთუ წესიერად ცხორებულნი კაცნი მარადღე იყვნინან წინაშე მისსა, და მახლობელად სასუენებელისა მისცის მათ საყოფელი, და თვით ზრდიდის საზრდელითა და ყოვლითა სახმრითა, რაცა უნებნ. და უკეთუ მათგანი ვინმე იყვის უძლურ, თვით მივალნ მოხილვად და ნუგეშინის ცემად, და თვით განუმზადებნ ცხედარსა და სარეცელსა.

⁶⁵³ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 65-7.

⁶⁵⁴ M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 45.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 521; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 305.

Sabellius, and Eutychus.⁶⁵⁶ According to Šavteli, Tamar would have silenced and won out over Theodore of Mopsuestia and Sabellius and their followers had she had the chance to do so.⁶⁵⁷

Piety seems to have been an essential component of Tamar's royal image and it is likely that public display of this central Christian virtue greatly enhanced her reputation. What is important to bear in mind is that imperial/royal piety, reflected either in personal piety or translated into ecclesiastical patronage, was not only a matter of personal faith but a source of power, and thus piety did not exist separately from the notion of power.⁶⁵⁸ In the Byzantine empire the empresses/imperial women frequently practiced this social behavior to bolster their prestige.⁶⁵⁹

Monastic patronage was another source of Tamar's authority. Pseudo-Basil as well as the anonymus in his *Histories and Eulogies* portrays Tamar as a most generous benefactor and patron of the churches and monasteries in Georgia and other parts of Christendom.

She sent her agents around to instruct them: 'Travel from Alexandria and through the entire territory to Libya and Mount Sinai.' She learned of the needs of the churches, monasteries and the Christian peoples of these countries. And do we need to mention Jerusalem? To the churches of all these lands she sent chalices and patents, and shrouds for sacred objects, much gold for monks and beggars,...she did the same in the regions of Hellas and the Holy Mount, and also in Macedonia and Petritsoni, in the lands of Thrace, and in the monasteries of Constantinople and Romana, and everywhere, as well as in Isavria and K'uruseti and all the surrounding areas of the Black Mountain and Cyprus. All these lands she filled with good works, and God protected her labors.⁶⁶⁰

The anonymus' *Histories and Eulogies* does not contradict Pseudo-Basil's account:

Tamar favored her beloved God with gifts and honors, she was not too lazy to do things agreeable to him. She replaced Upper Vardzia by Lower Vardzia, and began to build an abode for the blessed Vardzia mother of God, who helped her in her

⁶⁵⁶ *Abdulmesiani*, 145.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 216.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁶⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, 506-7; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 300: წარავლენდის სარწმუნოთა თვისთა და დავედრის ესრეთ: 'იწყეთ ალექსანდრიით ყოვლისა თანა ლუბიისა, სინისა მთისა,' და მათ კერძოთა ეკლესიათა, მონასტერთა და ერთი ქრისტიანეთა მოიკითხვიდის. ხოლო იერუსალიმისათვის რადღა სახმარ არს თქმად? რამეთუ წარგზავნიდის ამათ ყოველთა შინა ეკლესიათა ბარძიმ-ფეშხუმებსა და სიწმიდეთა საბურავებსა და მონაზონთა და გლახაკათვის ოქროთა აურაცხელთა. ტყუენი განათავისუფლნის და ხარკი ერისა თვით უკუნსცის, და ყოველი ჭირი და დაჭირებული აღილის მათგან. კუალად კერძოთა ელადისათა და მთაწმიდას, ეგრეთვე მაკედონიისათა პეტრიწონს, კერძოდ თრაკისათა და კონსტანტინეპოლის მონასტრებთა, რომანას და ყოველგან, კუალად ისავრიას, კურუსეთს და ყოველთა მათ სანახებთა შავისა მთისათა კუპრისათა,-ესე ყოველნი ადავსნა ქველისსაქმითა, რომლისათვის ისმინეთ, თუ ვითარ მოხედვიდა ღმერთი საქმეთა მისთა.

campaigns. A church and cells for the monks were carved in the rocks and were inaccessible to the enemies...

What about her other undertakings: there was her building activity and donations to the monasteries! She built monasteries not only in Georgia, but also in Palestine and Jerusalem, in Cyprus and Galia. She brought property for these monasteries and adorned them with everything proper for a respectable monastery, and she helped Constantinople as well. My narration will be too long if I try to tell you of how lavishly she presented monasteries in Georgia and Hellas...⁶⁶¹

These historiographical texts claim that Tamar exhibited other important characteristics of an ideal ruler. Apart from monastic patronage, she distributed alms on a permanent basis and secured the well-being of the poor.⁶⁶² In this way Tamar exercised *philantrophia* – a Christian virtue par-excellence. Pseudo-Basil relates that by Tamar’s order one-tenth of the entire income of the kingdom was directed to the needs of the poor. She appointed trustworthy people to administer the distribution of the alms and made sure that the poor would receive everything that was allocated for them. “Doing all these things, she did not think she was performing godly act of charity.”⁶⁶³ The narrative gives another example that demonstrates Tamar’s love for humankind. Whenever the queen had leisure time, she would take a spindle or needle in hand and either spin or sew; whatever she made with her hands she would distribute to the poor and clergy.⁶⁶⁴ It was common for Byzantine authors to associate the empress and imperial women with the traditional virtue of philanthropy. For instance, empress Zoe Macedonian is portrayed by her contemporaries as an active philanthropist who spent much money on charity and distributed alms in the imperial

⁶⁶¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 461-2; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 267: ესევეითარი ნიჭი და პატივი მიმადლა მის მიერ შეყარებულმან ღმერთან თამარსა, გარნა არცა ის უდებ იქმნა მოქმედებად საქმეთა სათნოთა ღმრთისათა. ამისთვის ხელ-ყო აღმენებად საყოფელსა, გამმარჯუებელსა მისსა ზეშთაკურთხეულსა ვარძიისა ღმრთისმშობელსა, ზემო ვარძიისა ქუემო ვარძიითა მიცვალებითა, რომელი კლდისაგან გამოეკვეთა, თვით პატიოსანი ეკლესია და მონაზონთ საყოფი სენაკები, რომელი მტერთაგანცა შეუვად და უბრძოლველ ყო.

ხოლო სხუანი საქმენი, აღმენებანი და შეწირვანი მონასტერთანი ისმინენი. არაოდენ საქართველოსა მონასტერნი ააშენნა, არამედ პალესტინეს, იერუსალემს, ააშენა პირველად მონასტერი; და კუალად კუპრეს დალია შეამკო და უყიდნა შესავალნი და ადაშენა მონასტერი და შეამკო ყოვლითა წესითა პატიოსნისა მონასტრისათა. და კუალად კონსტანტინოპოლის ადაშენა მეტოქი მათი. და გრძელ სადმე არს ყოვლისა თხრობელობა, რომელ საბერძნეთსა და ყოველსა ელადასა შინანი მონასტრისანი უხუად წყალობამიფენილ ყვნა.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 519; 304.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

capital.⁶⁶⁵ Afraid of her growing popularity, her husbands tried to limit her access to the treasury, thus disabling her philanthropic activities. Nevertheless, the empress Zoe still succeeded in earning popularity in the city and secured the loyalty of the population. When emperor Michael V exiled Zoe from Constantinople in 1042, the population rose in her defense and stormed the imperial palace. The emperor and his entourage were probably caught by surprise to discover that the marginalized empress had such support. No doubt the scope of her philanthropic activities contributed to the formation of Zoe's well-crafted public image, which saved her from exile.⁶⁶⁶ The event of 1042 indicates that an empress, denied the right to participate in governing the empire and restricted access to the imperial treasury, could yet establish unchallenged authority.

The Georgian encomiastic texts put forward Tamar's other virtue, justice, to further build her royal authority as well as forge a metaphorical link between her and Christ. The anonymous, in his *Histories and Eulogies*, extolls Tamar as a "father of orphans and the judge of widows," and the fairest ruler, who judges wisely.⁶⁶⁷ Similar rhetoric is maintained in *Abdulmesiani*, which represents Tamar not only as a lover of the poor and a fair judge, but more importantly, as a source of justice. She is the supreme judge, judge of judges, the firm seal whose judgment is always fair. Tamar has a divine-like aim to be a perfect law-giver and the ultimate arbiter.⁶⁶⁸ It is important to emphasize that in Byzantine thought justice was one of the four cardinal imperial virtues the possession/practice of which made the emperor ideal.⁶⁶⁹ In Hellenistic political philosophy, which was adopted and received in the Byzantine empire, justice was considered king/ruler's most precious possession.⁶⁷⁰ The dispensation of justice associated the Byzantine emperor with Christ as it set parallels between the basileus's and the Savior's mercifulness. The pursuit of justice was one of the prerogatives of an emperor and he was considered the source of justice and law.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁵ B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 44, 54.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁷ *The Life of Kartli*, 451; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 262.

⁶⁶⁸ *Abdulmesiani*, 132.

⁶⁶⁹ The concept of four cardinal virtues – wisdom, courage moderation and justice – was articulated/developed by Plato in his *Republic* and later appropriated by Ancient, Late Antique and the Byzantine authors. See D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

⁶⁷⁰ P. Heather and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and the Empire in Fourth Century*, 83.

⁶⁷¹ M. Anastor, "Byzantine Political Theory: its Classical Precedents and Legal Embodiment," in *Aspects of the Mind of Byzantium: Political theory, theology and Ecclesiastical Relations with the See of Rome*, eds., S. Vryonis and N. Goodhue (Ashgate: Variorum, 2001), 13-52; M. Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 269.

Empresses and imperial women, however, were not considered a source of justice and the virtue of justice was rarely applied to them.

Since justice was a divine attribute and the practice of justice implied the imitation of God,⁶⁷² Georgian rhetorical media associated Tamar with Christ by bringing to the fore her exemplary justice. In the context of Tamar's fairness arises her decision to ban the death penalty and corporal punishment in the kingdom.

Tamar possessed such wisdom and lofty mind that during all thirty-one years of her reign, not one man was punished by lashing. She shunned the spilling of blood and such forms of punishment like blinding and maiming. She, who could bring fear and terror to her enemies, and who was humble with humble, reigned peacefully and joyfully in her state and domain [my emphasis].⁶⁷³

Tamar is extolled not only for bringing justice to her kingdom but for securing justice and harmony in the entire region. The expansion of the Georgian kingdom during her reign is portrayed as a manifestation of universal justice. Tamar's intention was not subjugation of other people and territories but the restoration of justice. As a righteous ruler, she exerted influence over her neighbors, not through fear, but by protecting them from those who threatened and terrorized them. She made herself supreme judge among the neighboring kingdoms and allowed them neither to go to war against each other nor to lay the yoke of coercion on one another. In this way, Tamar maintained peace and tranquility and became the "second Solomon" among the kings.⁶⁷⁴

4.7 "Famous among the Monarchs:" Tamar Exercise of Royal Power

Tamar's literary persona is not passive and limited in her actions. On the contrary, the queen is fully engaged in public affairs and governs the realm. Only Tamar decides questions of war and peace and convokes and chairs state councils. She receives ambassadors and foreign rulers address letters to her. The army and its leaders are portrayed as unquestionably loyal to her, with great trust in her wisdom. Neither court officials nor aristocrats can conduct a single act before

⁶⁷² D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, 179.

⁶⁷³ *The Life of Kartli*, 409-410; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 242: რომელმან ესევითარი იხმია ფრიადება ცნობიერებისა და სიმშვიდე გონებისა, ვიდრემდის ამისსა განგებასა ათორმეტსა წელიწადსა შინა არცათუ ტაჯგანაგი უბრძანა ვის სადამე კრვად. კიდემქონებელი ყოვლისა მესისხლეობისა და მზნელობლობისა და ასოთამოლებისა, ნება აღსრულებული, შიშისა და ზარისა დამდებელი, მშვიდი და მშვიდობისმყოფელი იშუებს და სუფევს სამეუფოთა და სამფლებოლოთა შინა მისთა...

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 520; 305.

consulting and receiving confirmation from Tamar. Even small-scale military actions, such as pillaging enemy territory across the frontier, had to be permitted and legalized by the queen. All the Georgian narratives that portray Tamar's reign claim that she had a major role in the public governance of the kingdom and maintained control over the military body of the realm. According to Pseudo-Basil, Tamar "elevated in mind," was perfectly aware of the enormous burden the governing of the realm required, but as an exemplary monarch she tirelessly performed all her royal duties.

We should also say that many other women showed their power, but not one did it like Tamar. *Guided by wisdom, truthfulness and the purity of David, she arranged the lives of her people not by force but by the spiritual calm that distinguishes Jacob, by the generosity of Abraham by kindness which resembles the mercifulness of Jesus, and by imitating His justice* [my emphasis].⁶⁷⁵

"Inspired by the Holy Spirit," she managed not only to deal with her royal obligations excellently but to become invincible and the most famous monarch of all times. As *the Life of Tamar* puts it: "If someone among you goes again and again through the chronicles that narrate the life of old and new kings, he will see that not one of them exceeds by his deed those performed by Tamar."⁶⁷⁶ As a good manager of the state, Tamar moves constantly with her retinue and travels to different parts of her kingdom in order to settle matters at the spot. "king Tamar...wintered in Dvin, and spent the summer in Kola and Tselis T'ba, moving sometimes to Apxazeti – Geguti and Tskhumi."⁶⁷⁷ When the defeated supporters of Iurii Bogolubsky, encircled and besieged in a fortress by the royal army, decided to surrender, they agreed to submit only to Tamar. They asked king Davit to mediate and arrange a meeting with the queen. After Tamar arrived, the rebels surrendered themselves to her and handed over the key to the fortress.⁶⁷⁸

The exceptional literary image of Tamar by medieval standards becomes increasingly clear if one places a Georgian case in the Byzantine context and adds more examples of the literary representation of powerful Byzantine women. The eleventh century was a period of powerful

⁶⁷⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 506; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 300: ჯერ არს ამისთვისცა თქმად, ვითარმედ ქმნენ მრავალთა დედათა ძლიერება, არამედ არა ესრეთ, ვითარ ამან: არა ვერაგობისა ღომითა აცხოვნებდა ერსა თვისსა, არამედ სიბრძნითა წინამძღოლობითა და სამართლითა და უმანკოებითა დავითიანითა, სიმშვიდითა იაკობის მსგავსითა, სიუხვითა აბრამისებრითა, მოწყალებითა იესოს ღმრთისა მსგავსად, და სამართალისა მისისა მობაძვითა.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 520-21; 305: განიგემნე ყოველი მატთანენი, ძუელთა გინა ახალთა მეფეთა მაქებელნი, რამეთუ გარდაემატა თამარის საქმეთა ჭემმარტებით საქებლობა სიტყვისაგერ პირველთასა;

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 478; 276.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 255; 426.

women in Byzantium, nevertheless, no Byzantine source ascribes such authority and scale of involvement in public affairs to any empress or imperial woman as the Georgian authors do when portraying their female protagonist. But at the same time, it should be noted that the Byzantine sources that describe the life of empresses and imperial women did not always reflect social reality but rather stereotypes and norms of correct behavior.⁶⁷⁹ Byzantine conventional ideology considered seclusion a suitable lifestyle for a woman and some Byzantine sources constructed literary images of modest empresses who preferred to stay behind the veil and refrained from appearing in public. But eleventh-century Byzantine empresses engaged in public activities and enjoyed political and social influence. In Michael Psellos' *Chronographia* there is an ambivalence about the representation of empresses who exercise power. For instance, Psellos recognizes Zoe's and Theodora's right to the imperial throne as they were the members of Macedonian dynasty and considers their joint rule and method of governing much better than the regimes of Michael IV and Michael V, although he claims that the sisters were not intelligent enough to rule the empire.⁶⁸⁰ It is not entirely clear if Psellos disapproved of Zoe's and Theodora's joint rule only because he considered them unsuitable for rulership or whether his criticism came from his firm belief that women were generally unable to understand politics and lacked the skills to govern. When Psellos describes the sole rulership of Theodora (1055–56), he claims that his contemporaries were convinced that “the Roman empire to be governed by a woman, instead of man, was improper, and even if the people did not think so, it certainly seemed that they did.”⁶⁸¹ Empress Maria Alania enjoyed profound authority and was a powerful player at the imperial court, responsible for bringing Alexios I Komnenos to power.⁶⁸² Michael Psellos, however, represents Maria as stereotypical ideal Byzantine woman, displaying the quality of modesty instead of flaunting her influence.

It would be superfluous to praise the empress because of her family...her own preeminence, not only in virtue but also in beauty, is commendation enough. If, as a tragic poet says, ‘silence is a woman’s glory’ then she above all other woman is worthy of honor, for she speaks to no one but her husband, and her natural loveliness is far more effective than any artificial adornment dedicated by convention.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ L. Garland, “Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women,” 364-5.

⁶⁸⁰ Michael Psellos, *The Chronographia*, VI (Sewter, 157); D. Smythe, “Behind the Mask: The Empress and Empire in Middle Byzantium,” 151.

⁶⁸¹ Michael Psellos, *the Chronographia*, VI (Sewter, 262).

⁶⁸² Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 80-5; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 180.

⁶⁸³ Michael Psellos, *the Chronographia*, VII (Sewter, 372).

Another Byzantine intellectual and court orator, Theophylact of Ohrid, lauds Maria Alania in his *basilikos logos* as an ideal mother rather than an authoritative and powerful empress.⁶⁸⁴ While Psellos questions the competence of the Macedonian sisters and downplays the political weight of Maria Alania, he is outspoken about Eudokia Makrembolitissa's ability to control the administration of the empire.⁶⁸⁵ Psellos relates that Eudokia assumed personal control of the entire imperial administration after her husband's death and handled governmental affairs well because she was an exceedingly clever woman.⁶⁸⁶ One can argue, however, that Psellos' approval of Eudokia's style of rulership was much determined by the empress's modesty: "At first she behaved modestly enough: neither in the imperial procession nor in her own clothing was there any mark of extravagance."⁶⁸⁷ Anna Komnene in her *Alexiad*, also demonstrates certain ambiguity when talking about powerful imperial women. She praises her grandmother Anna Dalassene as intelligent person who showed great ability to govern the empire in the absence of emperor Alexios.

For my grandmother had an exceptional grasp of public affairs, with a genius for organization and government; she was capable, in fact, of managing not only the Roman Empire, but every other empire under the sun as well. She had vast experience and knew the nature of things...she was intuitive about what needed doing and clever at getting it done.⁶⁸⁸

In marked contrast to her grandmother Anna Dalassene, Anna Komnene lauds her own mother, Eirene Doukaina as an exemplary modest woman, and ideal mother and wife, who prefers to stay in seclusion and feels uncomfortable and shy when she appears in the public.

Whenever she had to appear in public as empress at some important ceremony, she was overcome with modesty and blush at once suffused her cheeks... well, the empress, my mother, the image of majesty, the dwelling-place of saintliness, so far from being please to travel to the common gaze an elbow or her eyes, was unwilling that even her voice should be heard by stranger. Her modesty was really extraordinary [my emphasis].⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁴ M. Mullett, "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal," 262.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 345.

⁶⁸⁶ Michael Psellos, *the Chronographia*, VII (Sewter, 345).

⁶⁸⁷ Michael Psellos, *the Chronographia*, VII (Sewter, 345).

⁶⁸⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, III. 7 (Frankopan, 94).

⁶⁸⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XII. 3 (Frankopan, 337-38).

Anna describes in this episode a paradigm of ideal female behavior rather than a social reality.⁶⁹⁰ Eirene was a strong-minded woman whose power and influence grew especially in the last years of Alexios's reign. She had a strong opinion on the question of imperial succession and openly favored her daughter, Anna, and her husband, Nikephoros Bryenios,' candidacy for the imperial throne. If one reads other parts of the *Alexiad*, it becomes clear that empress Eirene was anything but secluded and retiring.⁶⁹¹ Despite the dichotomy of the Byzantine narratives and frequent claims that the imperial women lead an isolated life and practiced domesticity, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries women of high standing had total social and political independence and it does not seem that they were secluded. Although Byzantine sources extoll certain women's roles in governing the empire, none of them are portrayed as in full control of governmental affairs and enjoying the position of senior ruler as is claimed in the Georgian encomiastic narratives. Despite her willingness and zeal to assume power, Eudokia Makrembolitissa failed to establish herself as the sole ruler of the empire in her own right. She became a victim of a conspiracy which brought her down after her second husband, Romanos IV, failed to achieve a military victory against the Seljuk Turks in 1071. The influence of Anna Dalassene was short-lived, and by the beginning of the twelfth century, she fell out of favor with her son. She was forced to distance herself from public affairs and ended her life in seclusion. As it has rightly been pointed out, the elevation of Alexios and establishment of the Komnenoi regime resulted in the gradual decline of imperial women's power, and consequently, they are far less visible in the twelfth-century historical sources.⁶⁹² In sharp contrast stand the Georgian narratives, which are far less ambiguous and more straightforward when speaking of the powerful female ruler. In the Georgian discourse on ideal queenship, female seclusion is not considered a paradigm of ideal behavior and thus Tamar is never praised as a shy woman seeking to stay away from public affairs. On the contrary, Tamar demonstrates a willingness to assume power and leads an increasingly active political life. As shall be demonstrated further, Tamar is always in the center of public events; she takes part in ceremonials, royal processions, and even celebrates military triumphs in person.

⁶⁹⁰ L. Garland, "Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," 373.

⁶⁹¹ L. Garland, "Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," 391.

⁶⁹² B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 212-14.

Relation with the Army and Celebration of Military Victories

Another novel feature of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Georgian rhetoric of kingship is a female ruler's association with conquests and military victories as well as an assertion that she maintained control over the army. Georgian encomiastic texts would have us believe that Tamar was the main architect of the Georgian kingdom's successful expansion and that her name caused fear among their enemies: "Let him learn of the tribute she laid upon the lands which stretched from Georgia to Iraq and from Bagdad to Maragha ... It is enough to say that the Caliph in person prays to the creator for mercy."⁶⁹³ Although this is an exaggerated statement, nonetheless it does reflect a certain reality. The Georgian kingdom during Tamar's rule annexed Muslim polities which had been under the protection of the caliph of Baghdad. The *Life of Tamar* argues that the queen became the defender of the Christian people and that "her army" was always ready to put the Muslims in check: "The hopes of the Muslims were running out, and totally powerless they appealed to the mercy of Tamar..."⁶⁹⁴ Similar rhetoric is maintained in two panegyric court poems that bring to the fore the triumph of Christianity over Islam and present Georgians as a God-chosen people and scourge in the annihilation of enemies of the "true faith." The Georgian rhetor Ioane Šavteli accentuates Tamar's role in strengthening the military might of the Georgian kingdom and compares her to Caesar: "You forced Isavri to pay tribute, and you are a Caesar."⁶⁹⁵ The geographical toponym Isavri creates confusion in this verse as it is not entirely clear what the author means by this name. I am inclined to think that Isavri is a Georgianized version of the Classical toponym Isauria, which Šavteli uses to refer either to the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum or the Turkomans of Anatolia. By the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, the kingdom of Georgia and the sultanate of Rum both struggled to establish hegemony in the western part of the Caucasus and certain areas of the Asia Minor.⁶⁹⁶ The rivalry for hegemony resulted in military confrontation and around 1204/5 the Georgian and Seljuk armies met on the field of Basean. Even though the Georgian army defeated the Seljuks, it did not result in a major shift in

⁶⁹³ *The Life of Kartli*, 489; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 291.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 490; 296.

⁶⁹⁵ *Abdulmesiani*, 128.

⁶⁹⁶ On Seljuk-Georgian confrontation see A. Peacock, "Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th Centuries," *Anatolian Studies* vol.56 (2006): 127-146

the balance of power between the two states and, consequently, the Seljuks did not pay tribute to the Bagratid crown.⁶⁹⁷

The other verses of Šavteli's *Abdulmesiani* presents Tamar as the leading actor in the victorious wars against the Muslims. She is claimed to have defeated and destroyed Muslims like the Byzantine emperor Herakleios.

I recall the name of Khosrow, the one who was enslaved by Herakleios
Also, who carried the True Cross from Jerusalem to Persia
And you should admit and say loud that like Herakleios
Tamar puts the heathens to flight.⁶⁹⁸

With these words, the panegyrist equates Tamar's contemporary military success with the scale of Herakleios' victory against the Persians.⁶⁹⁹

The army was one of the foundations of royal and imperial power in Georgia as well as in Byzantium.⁷⁰⁰ The emperor's hold on the army and the loyalty of the military forces were important for his survival. Besides, military victory was one of the essential markers of a good and successful emperor.⁷⁰¹ While the emperor was the head of the imperial army in Byzantium, the empress was officially denied this role. The command of the army was considered unsuitable for the empress.⁷⁰² Like in Byzantium, the army was one of the foundations of the Georgian kings' power and position. If in Byzantium some non-military emperors could afford to avoid participation in battles and remain in Constantinople during their reign, this was not the case in Bagratid Georgia. The Bagratid kings were expected to command the army in battle and secure victories to demonstrate their fitness to rule.

When discussing Tamar's style of kingship and her image, a legitimate question arises to what extent she exerted authority over the military body of the kingdom. Tamar could not lead the army in battle because of her gender, and the lack of this crucial skill in medieval Georgia, whose secular elite was more militarized than in Byzantium, was a great disadvantage. As the offspring of her father, Giorgi, and great-grandfather, Davit – both of whom earned fame through their campaigns – Tamar had to find a way to control the army and direct military affairs. Even though

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., 134-5.

⁶⁹⁸ *Abdulmesiani*, 129.

⁶⁹⁹ *Abdulmesiani*, 129.

⁷⁰⁰ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 88.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

one may doubt the historicity of medieval Georgian literary texts, it is important to emphasize that Tamar's contemporary/near-contemporary rhetorical media unanimously affirm that she enjoyed great authority in the eyes of the military forces and the troops and generals obeyed her orders. Moreover, it is asserted that Tamar maintained control over the army like Alexander the Great and she never allowed her soldiers to remain inactive. After each military campaign, Tamar dismissed her troops, however "she guarded vigilantly what she had captured and conquered."⁷⁰³ Encomiastic historiography frequently refers to the royal army with the epithets like: "Tamar's soldiers," "Tamar's troops," and "the knights of happy Tamar."⁷⁰⁴ After each battle, the victorious troops return to "their queen" and stand before her. When the royal army won a victory against the Turkomans, "Tamar's soldiers" appeared before the "king and queen of the entire East and West [i.e. Tamar]."⁷⁰⁵ The same happened after "Tamar's army" prevailed against her ex-husband, Iurii, and "her men" destroyed the rebelled forces. The victorious army returned to the "God crowned king and king of kings," and she, with a "calm heart and eye full of love, arranged a review of her troops."⁷⁰⁶ Another example further persuades the reader that Tamar directed the military affairs in the kingdom. The *Histories and Eulogies* claims that when Tamar learned that her ex-husband Iurii had arrived from Constantinople and provoked unrest in the kingdom, she gathered her supporters and court officials in order to obtain detailed information about the rebellion.

She ordered all the governors who remained faithful to her to gather the *didebulis* and *spasalars* from Hereti, Kakheti, Kartli, Somkhiti and Samtskhe. Upset by what was going on, they assured her that all that happened, had happened without their consent and knowledge, and swore allegiance to her, pledging their lives. With a quiet and sweet voice, Tamar herself questioned influential people as to what had taken place, and she sent Patriarch Theodore and Anton Kutateli...to other bishops to inquire into the reason for the rebellions.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰³ *The Life of Kartli*, 446; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 260;

⁷⁰⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 414, 419, 425; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 245, 247, 249.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 414; 245.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 425; 250.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 423; 249: მაშინ თამარ...მბრძანებელ ექმნა ყოველთა ერთგულთა მისთა, ვინაცა შემოკრბეს სპასალარნი და დიდებულნი ჰერეთით, კახეთით, ქართლით, სომხითითურთ, და სამცხით. მკვრნეთა საქმითა ჰკადრეს ფიცითა არა მათგან ნებადართულობა საქმისა, და ვითა შეაჯერეს უმათოდ ქმნილობა, მხეცებრ განხდა გული მათი ერთგულობისათვის და თავისა საწამებლად დადებისათვის. და თვით თამარ ხელითა საუფლოთა სიტყვთა ოქრონექტართა მართალი მართლად იკითხვიდა მიზეზსა მკვდრთა მისთაგან. ოდესმე თევდორე პატრიარქსა და ანტონი ქუთათელსა,...და სხუათა ებისკოპოზთა გზავნიდის, ოდესმე - შინაურ ეჯიბსა და მესტუმრესა, და მათგან ვერას პირის მპოვნელი.

When Iurii's supporters marched from western Georgian to the east and crossed Lixi Mountain to attack queen and her retinue, Tamar not only ordered to the head of the army to march against the enemy, but she also defined the location where the royal army was supposed to engage the rebelled forces.

Then Tamar ordered *amirspasalar* Gamrekeli, and four Mkhargrdzeli, as well as the Torelis from the upper and lower regions, to go and meet the enemy in the country of Javakheti, in order to assess their forces and what is more important, to witness the power of God's justice.⁷⁰⁸

In the aftermath of Iurii's defeat, the army asked permission from Tamar to advance in the southern regions of the realm to give a final blow to the rebel subjects and when she granted them the right they marched on a punitive campaign.⁷⁰⁹

Although Tamar could not participate in battles, she may have accompanied the army on campaigns. A single reference in a historiographical narrative suggests this. We are told that Tamar was “conquering her enemies” when she learned that her exiled ex-husband had left Constantinople and arrived in the Caucasus. Does this account depict an accurate picture? And if yes, what was her role and function in the military campaign? For sure Tamar would not act as a military commander and fight on the battlefield, but she would be able to attend meetings organized by the generals to discuss the action plan. The presence of a female ruler in military camp is attested in the twelfth-century Byzantine empire. Anna Komnene in her *Alexiad* tells that her mother, Eirene Doukaina accompanied Alexios on military expeditions: “But since not even gods, as the poet says, fight against necessity, *she was forced to accompany the emperor on his frequent expeditions* [my emphasis].”⁷¹⁰ Anna never claims, however, that her mother had any role during these campaigns; Eirene was with Alexios only in her capacity as the emperor's wife and she does not seem to have tried to interfere in military affairs or to claim a share in military successes.

Tamar's close relationship with the army is brought to the fore not only in the *Histories and Eulogies* but in the *Life of Tamar*. This text devotes a great deal of space to the portrayal of

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 424; 249: მაშინ უბრძანა ამირსპასალარს გამრეკელსა და ოთხთა მხარგრძელთა და სხუთა თორელთა, ზემოთა და ქუემოთა, წასვლა და მიგებება წინა ქვეყანასა ჯავახეთისასა და მუნვე ცნობაი ძალისა მათისა, და უფროსლა ცნობა ძლიერებისა მართლმსაჯულობისა ღმრთისასა.

⁷⁰⁹ *The Life of Kartli*, 424; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 250.

⁷¹⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XII. 3 (Frankopan 337-38): τοσοῦτον ἦν ἐκείνη χρῆμα θαυμασιον εἰς αἰδῶς. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀναγκη σὺνδε θεοί, φησί, μαχοναι ἀναγκαζεσθαι προς τας συχνάς τοῦ αὐτοκρατορος ἐκστρατευσεις αὐτῶ παρακολουθεῖω.

the queen's communication with the army as well as her participation in victory celebrations and *adventus*. For the first time these historiographical texts discuss the royal ceremony of victory and triumphal processions in medieval Georgia; before Tamar's reign textual evidence is lacking that would provide insight into the sophisticated spectacle the Bagratid rulers used to celebrate their victories or make themselves visible to the general public. Surprisingly, Tamar's contemporary ceremonials described in these two narratives have gone unremarked by scholars.

In 1195 by the Caliph's order, a Muslim army was gathered against the kingdom of Georgia. The *Life of Tamar* relates that in this critical situation, when the kingdom was seriously threatened to be overrun by the enemy, Tamar acted as a true leader of the realm. The queen convened a council of high officials and aristocrats; after hearing different opinions, she ordered her chief minister to send letters around the kingdom and assemble the army.⁷¹¹ When the army had gathered in southern Georgia, Tamar left the royal capital, T'bilisi, and traveled to the army camp, where she observed the condition of the troops for several days and remained on the spot to participate in the liturgy and public prayers.⁷¹² Just before the army departed, the queen gave a speech and addressed the soldiers with the aim of raising their morale.

You have heard of Gideon and the three hundred men he commanded, and the countless Midianites he defeated, and of the camp of the Assyrians which was destroyed at the moment by an Angel in answer to Ezekias prayer. Trust only the One God, strengthen your hearts and set your hopes without reservation on the cross of Christ. Now with the help of the Holy Mother of God, storm their country and assault the enemy with the power of the invincible Cross.⁷¹³

After her eloquent speech, Tamar placed the life-giving cross in front of the army as their guide; then she took off her shoes and walked barefoot to the church of the Mother of God to pray. Her supplication for divine intercession through prayers guaranteed the triumph of the royal army against the Muslims.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 490; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 292.

⁷¹² *The Life of Kartli*, 490; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 292.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, 491; 292: ძმანო ჩემნო, ყოვლად ნუ შეძრწუნდებიან გულნი თქუენნი სიმრავლისა მათისათვის და სიმცირისა თქუენისა, რამეთუ ღმერთი ჩუენთან არს. გასმია გედეონისთვის სამასნი და სიმრავლე ურიცხვი მადიამელთა, მათ მიერ მოწყუედილი, კუალად ასურასტანელთა ბანაკი ლოცვითა ეზეკიასითა წამსა შინა ანგელოზისა მიერ დაცემული? მხოლოდ ღმერთსა ოდენ მიენდვენით და გულნი თქუენნი სიმართლით იპყრენით წინაშე მისსა და სასოება ყოველი ჯუარისა მიმართ ქრისტესისა იყავნ. შეისწრაფეთ ქუეყანად მათად შეწვენითა ყოვლად წმიდისა ღმრთისმშობელისათა, და ძალითა უძლეველითა ჯუარისათა წარემართენით.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Encouraging soldiers before battle is as old as the *Iliad*, and both Alexander the Great and Caesar used the power of oratory to inspire the soldiers in antiquity.⁷¹⁵ In the Byzantine empire, the ability to increase soldiers' morale through rhetorical speech was one of the most desirable attributes of Byzantine generals.⁷¹⁶ The technique of composing and delivering military orations was a well-developed sub-branch of rhetoric in Byzantium.⁷¹⁷ By the beginning of the seventh century, the Byzantines had a deep understanding of the importance of a rousing speech before battle. The *Strategikon* of Maurice (ca. 600) contains concise instructions on the role of cantatores and heralds, who had to say some words before battle and remind the soldiers of past victories.⁷¹⁸ The tenth-century military manual, *De velitatione* (c. 970) instructs the army commander to give a speech sweet like honey to increase the morale of his soldiers.⁷¹⁹ Emperor Konstantinos VII in his military oration also stresses the importance of a speech before battles and praises the army commander for doing so. The orations/rhetorical speeches read in front of the army along with the acclamations and official salutations formed the part of imperial propaganda.⁷²⁰ In light of these observations, it is surprising that in medieval Georgia a female ruler gave a speech before battle; it shows that Tamar tried to build her authority in the eyes of the soldiers and army commanders.

The Georgian victory against the coalition army in 1195 had significant military and political repercussions – it re-affirmed the kingdom's unsought role as the dominant military and political player in the Caucasus and the northern part of the Near East. As the *Life of Tamar* puts it, the Georgian army gained an “Olympian victory,” more praiseworthy than the victory of Alexander the Great over Darius.⁷²¹ When the victorious army returned to the kingdom and reached the outskirts of the capital, Tamar came out of the city to meet the troops: “She rejoiced and thanked God and asked each of the returning man about his health, considering them as her children. And army rejoiced to see her.”⁷²² What is especially significant in this passage is that conversation takes place between Tamar and the soldiers and the fact that the queen inquires about

⁷¹⁵ E. McGeer, “Two Military Orations of Constantine VII,” in *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations*, ed. J. Nesbitt (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 113.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ *The Life of Kartli*, 492; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 293.

⁷²² *Ibid.* იხარებდა და მადლობდა ღმერთსა, მოიკითხვიდა თვითეულსა, ვითარცა შვილთა, და იშუებდეს იგინი ხილვითა მისითა.

each soldier's health and condition because she is said to have considered them as her children. Although fictional, this passage may mirror reality and Tamar could have interacted with the soldiers after they returned from battle and addressed them as her children. In this way, Tamar reinforced her maternal authority and underlined her position as a ruler in her own right. The idea that soldiers are the children of the ruler was also present in the Byzantine imperial rhetoric. For instance, emperor Konstantinos VII in his second oration – a rhetorical text that communicated the emperor's message to the army before battle – addressed the soldiers as his “beloved children.” The wording that Konstantinos VII used echoes words of the Apostle Paul, who addressed the Corinthians similarly. Paul implied that the soldiers were the emperor's flesh and blood .⁷²³

Other examples from the *Life of Tamar* also show Tamar's role in celebrating the triumph. Even though the account of the narrative describing the events that took place after the army returned from the battle of 1195 is vague, close scrutiny of the text reveals that the royal court staged an impressive ceremonial in which Tamar took the leading role. The celebration of the triumph was organized in two parts. The first part of the ceremony took place on the outskirts of Tp'ilisi when the spoils of war, loaded on horses and mules, and prisoners of war were paraded in front of Tamar.

In fact, the distinguished men Zakharia and Ivane ... lined up the camels, all with packs, and the horses, all with decorations in the valley of Didube; and these lines stretched down to Avch'ala. *They lined up also the captured leaders, each with his banner. And the first among the banners was the banner of Caliph, then of the Atabek and so on, one after the other. They lined up all the prisoners from the city gates down to the ravine of Gldani. They were brought in steady manner to Tamar...*[my emphasis].⁷²⁴

At the end of the ceremony, the “leaders of Persia” – high-ranking prisoners of war – ceremonially submitted themselves to Tamar and spoils of war were offered to her as gift. The Georgian aristocracy followed suit; they approached the queen, made obeisance to her, and congratulated her on a happy and God-granted reign.⁷²⁵ The second part of the ceremony took place inside the city, probably in the royal palace, where the leaders of the army bent their knees in front of Tamar

⁷²³ E. McGeer, “Two Military Orations of Constantine VII,” 124, 129.

⁷²⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 492-93; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 294: უსახელოვანესთა მათ კაცთა, ზაქარია და ივანე, აიღეს ფანჯიაქი სამეფოდ და განაწყვეს ველსა დიდუბისა ავჭალამდე აქლემი ყველა ტვირთითა, ცხენი ყველა შეკაზმული, ეგრეთვე ყოველნი იგი ამირანი თეს-თვისითა დრშითა: პირველად ხალიფას დროშა, მერე ათაბაგისა, შემდგომი - შემდგომად; გააწყვეს კარითგან ქალაქისათა ხევამდე გლდანისა ტყუე ყოველი. განიყვანეს თამარ და შესწირეს...

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

again and presented her with valuable spoils of war: “gold and adornments and utensils of gold, precious stones and priceless pearls, chainmail, helmets, well-used swords, colored and gold-brocaded cloth and rich dresses...”⁷²⁶ It is noteworthy that even though Davit Soslan was the commander of the royal army and his role was not insignificant in securing the victory against the Muslim coalition in 1195, his name is not mentioned when Pseudo-Basil narrates the celebration of military triumph. The paraded prisoners of war offer the booty to Tamar, and the Georgian aristocracy congratulates her on the victory. Neither does the author refer to Davit when he describes the battle scene; instead, he extols the bravery and heroic performance of the soldiers. Davit makes an appearance only after the battle, when the Muslim army leaders are “brought to king Davit by their beards.”⁷²⁷

Tamar’s representation as an independent ruler who wields immense authority reaches a high point when Pseudo-Basil describes the conflict between the Georgian kingdom and the Seljuks of Rum. In this part of the text we see Tamar’s participation and her central role in the elaborate system of rituals. In the first years of the thirteenth century, the relationship between the Georgian kingdom and the Seljuk sultanate of Rum deteriorated sharply.⁷²⁸ According to the Georgian historical narratives, Sultan Rukn al Adin decided to challenge Georgian domination in the region and punish the country for its aggressive treatment of the Muslim population. The sultan sent a misogynistic letter, insulting Tamar and demanding submission of the kingdom to his power. The narrative states that after receiving the threatening letter and realizing that her realm was in great danger, Tamar did not lose control over herself but remained humble and modest like Ezekias in the Bible. Guided by the wisdom, she convened the state council, and after taking council with her subjects she ordered the assembly of the army.

Her decrees and orders were spread around the kingdom with the speed of the wind by her messengers. And in a few days, warriors gathered, resembling tigers in their agility and lions in their courage. Setting their hopes on Christ and on God, and without losing a moment they went to the church of Holy Mother in Vardzia. There, praying before the Vardzia Mother of God with tears in her eyes, the queen entrusted Her with Davit Soslan and the army...⁷²⁹

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., 491; 293.

⁷²⁸ A. Peacock, “Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th Centuries,” 133-35; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 113-4.

⁷²⁹ *The Life of Kartli*, 500; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 298: მაშინ მოუწოდეს სპათა იმერთა და ამერთა ნიკოფსიით ვიდრე დარუბანდამდე და ბრძანება და წიგნები ქროდა მალემსრბოლთა. და ცოტათა შინა დღეთა შემოკრბეს ვითარცა ვეფხვნი სიკისკასიით და ვითარცა ლონი გულითა. ქრისტესა

This episode describing the preparation of the Georgian royal court for war with the sultanate of Rum is concise and slightly ambiguous. But, as Tamar ordered, the Georgian army was gathered in southern Georgia, in the close proximity to the massive rock-cut monastic complex of Varzia. Just like before the battle of 1195, Tamar went to the army camp, where she participated in a public liturgy and prayers. Afterwards, Tamar, barefoot, escorted the army as far as the frontier of the kingdom.⁷³⁰ Near the city of Karin/ Theodosiopolis, Tamar ordered all her men to mount their horses:

And she herself ascended to a high place from where she could observe all of them; and she fell on her knees and cried for a long time, praying to God. When she rose people could see that the place where she had been kneeling was wet from tears. *Then she summoned all the nobles and ordered them to approach one by one the Holy Cross, to bow before it and kiss it. And they came and begged, crying, for victory and bowed before the Holy Cross and kissed it, and kissed Tamar's hand as well [my emphasis].*⁷³¹

Later, Tamar took the Holy Cross in her hands and made the sign of the cross three times at each side, in this way she blessed the army.⁷³² The *Life of Tamar* attributes the successful outcome of the battle of 1205 to Tamar's blessing, prayer, and firm faith in God.⁷³³ This episode in the *Life of Tamar* portrays an unconventional image of a charismatic female ruler who is endowed with an aura of sacredness. The marginalization of ecclesiastics in the ceremony of blessing stressed Tamar's role as the leader of the country. Her presence at the military camps before crucial battles raised her popularity in the eyes of the military commanders as well as ordinary soldiers. The *Life of Tamar* provides scanty information about the triumph which the Bagratid court celebrated after the Georgian army won a victory against the Seljuks of Rum at the battle of Basean in 1204/5. The narrative summarizes the arrival of the victorious army in the royal capital in few sentences.

ღმერთსა ესევიდეს და შეკრებს ჯავახეთს და არღარა ყოვნეს, არამედ მსწრაფლ მიმართეს ტაძარსა ყოვლადწმიდისა ღმრთისმშობლისასა ვარძიას. და ვარძიისა ღმრთისმშობელსა წინაშე ცრემლით შევედრნა სოსლან დავით და სპაი მისი...

⁷³⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, 501; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 298.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.* ხოლო თვითონ უბრძანა თვისთა სპათა ყოველთა შესხდომა, და თვით განვიდა უმაღლესა ადგილა, სადათ ყოველთა ხედვითა, და დავარდა მუხლთა ზედა დიდხან და ტიროდა წინაშე ღმრთისა. მერე აღდგა რაი, იხილვებოდა ადგილი იგი ყოვლად დალტობილად ცრემლთაგან მისთაგან. მერე მოიყვანა წინაშე მისსა ყოველი წარჩინებულნი და უბრძანა ერისთავთა, რათა თვითეული მათი მოვიდოდის წმიდასა ჯუარსა და თაყუანისცემდნენ და შეემთხუეოდინ. და იწყეს მოსვლად ყოველთა და ტირილით ვედრებად, და თაყუანისცემა პატიოსნისა ჯვარისა, და ამბორის ყოფად, და ეგრეთვე შემთხუევად ხელსა თამარისასა.

⁷³² *Ibid.*

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 504; 299.

According to the text, Tamar and Davit triumphantly entered Tp‘ilisi, bringing with them the banner of Ruknadin and the captured ruler of Ezinka.⁷³⁴

The third episode that highlights Tamar’s specific style of interaction with the army is given at the very end of the *Histories and Eulogies*, when the anonymus describes the preparation of the Georgian army for a military expedition into northern Iran. Around 1206/7, by Tamar’s order, the Georgian army invaded northern Iran and marched across the littoral of the Caspian Sea, capturing and looting the cities of Tabriz and Qazvin. It is not certain why the Bagratid court initiated a military expedition of this scale and what strategic goals the political leadership of the kingdom were pursuing.

The brothers of Mkhargrdzeli, *amirspasalar Zachariah, msakhurtukhutsesi Ivane* and Varam Gageli came to her and said: ‘*Our most powerful sovereign and the brightest among all crown bearers. Look at your kingdom and see the courage and virtue of your army... let your highness give us order and we will arm ourselves against Iraq, Rom-Gur, that is Khorasan; Let all the armies of the East taste our force and our power [my emphasis].*⁷³⁵

Even though this military campaign was initiated by Zakaria Mxargrзeli, it was launched only after Tamar gave her consent and ordered assembly of the troops. As the army gathered at the meeting point, it moved towards Tbilisi, where a ritual encounter between Tamar and the royal army took place. Tamar reportedly made a careful inspection of the troops in order to assure that they were well prepared.⁷³⁶ When she completed the inspection – she was satisfied with the good quality of the armor and horses, as well as by the number and spirit of the troops – Tamar took a royal banner in her hands, asked the Mother of God of Varzia to bless it and presented it to Zaharias Mxargrзeli – the commander in chief of the royal army.⁷³⁷

After the end of the difficult expedition, the triumphant army “appeared before the king in Tbilisi.” The “king of kings” [i.e., Tamar] met the troops with a great triumph and pomp

⁷³⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 504; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 299.

⁷³⁵ *The Life of Kartli*, 471-2; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 272: მოვიდეს მხარგრძელნი – ამირსპასალარი ზაქარია და მსახურთუხუცესი ივანე და ვარამ გაგელი მეფის წინაშე და მოახსენეს: ‘ძლიერო ხელმწიფეო, შარავანდედს შორის უმეტეს აღმობრწყინებულო, იხილი და განიცადე სამეფო თქუენი და ცან სიმხნე და სიქველე სპათა შენთა... აწ ბრძანოს მეფობამან თქუენმან, რათა არა ცუდად დავიწყებასა მიეცეს სადმე სიმხნე სპათა შენთა, არამედ აღვამხედროთ ერას, რომგურს ზედა, რომელ არს ხუარასანი, და ცნან ყოველთა სპათა აღმოსავლეთით ძალი და სიმხნე ჩუენი.

⁷³⁶ *The Life of Kartli*, 471-2; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 272.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 472; 272-3.

accompanied by the sounds of horns and flutes.⁷³⁸ Probably the meeting took place at the entrance to Tp‘ilisi, after which Tamar and the army proceeded through the city to the royal palace of Isani. The royal *adventus* into the city, however, was only the first part of the ceremony. The other part continued inside the royal palace where the valuable spoils of war were placed in front of the enthroned “king of kings” [i.e., Tamar].⁷³⁹ This organized triumph and procession during which war spoils were placed before Tamar reasserted her position as the ruler in her own right. Although panegyric poems are not as informative as historiographical texts concerning Tamar’s relationship with the army and her participation in the celebration of the military triumphs, they portray Tamar as a defender of Christianity and the main architect of the Georgian kingdom’s successful expansion.

Tamar’s participation in the ceremonies of *adventus* and triumph, her ritualized encounter with the army, and her inclusion in the celebration of victory stand as a compelling example for the eastern Mediterranean and Byzantine world. In the Late Antique Roman empire, an emperor and empress were shareholders in the imperial victory.⁷⁴⁰ Textual as well as numismatic sources suggest that in the fourth and fifth century empresses could claim the imperial prerogatives of the *adventus*, monetary largesse, and *proskynesis*. For instance, the empresses usually followed the protocol of the *adventus* when entering the city or returning to the capital.⁷⁴¹ Although *proskynesis* was reserved for the emperor and after Christianization of the Roman empire performed before Christ, Mary, and the saints, some empresses are claimed to have enjoyed this scale of veneration. Even more interesting is the ancient Roman and Late Antique practice of forging a connection between the empress and imperial victory. The Roman empress, frequently syncretized with mother goddesses, was perceived as contributing to the victory.⁷⁴² This translated not only in her epithet “mother of the military camp” (*mater castrorum*) with which she was honored from the second century, but in visual culture as well. Some surviving images show the enthroned empress as a goddess with a scepter, globe, and military standards. Also, reliefs represent the empress crowning the emperor with a victory wreath. The empress in her allegorical capacity as a mother of the troops and the goddess Victoria was represented as a source of imperial victory.⁷⁴³ Since

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 476; 275.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 200-201.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

⁷⁴² Ibid., 197-8.

⁷⁴³ D. Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 199.

Christianity recognized only God as the source of victory, after the Christianization of the Roman empire the empress turned from the symbolic mother of victory to a victorious sovereign and imperial colleague in the victory.⁷⁴⁴ This symbolic role of the empress was reflected on imperial coinage which hailed both the emperor and empress as victorious. Not only this, but imperial acclamation also highlighted an empress's role as a source of and shareholder in the victory. When emperor Anastasius I was crowned, his spouse, Ariadne, received the acclamation: "Ariadne Augusta may you conquer."⁷⁴⁵ Besides, inscriptions on the walls of cities in Asia Minor also attested that the population considered that their protection depended equally on both the emperor Justinian and empress Theodora.⁷⁴⁶ It seems that the tradition of the empress's participation in public processions and the *adventus* had faded away as early as the end of the sixth century. A single piece of evidence from the eighth century suggests that the empress exploited ceremonials to display her power. The case in point is the empress Irene (r.797–802), who took a part in an imperial public procession on Christmas Day in Hagia Sophia very soon after she became empress-regent in 780. In 784, Irene, accompanied by the army and musicians, left Constantinople for Thrace with her son; after the journey, she triumphantly entered the imperial capital.⁷⁴⁷ Irene even adapted the ceremony designed for Easter Monday in order to exploit further the advantages of the public procession. She crossed the city in a chariot pulled by four white horses, throwing golden coins into the streets like an emperor. She also celebrated a military triumph, although not in person but through her appointed general eunuch, Staurakios.⁷⁴⁸ It is important to keep in mind that Irene was the only female ruler from the early and middle Byzantine period who enjoyed the privilege of a triumphal entrance into the imperial capital and participated in public processions. Even in the eleventh century, which is viewed as Byzantium's "century of the empresses,"⁷⁴⁹ the empresses and imperial women did not participate in the elaborate ceremonies associated with military victories nor did they enjoy the privilege of an imperial *adventus* into Constantinople. While middle Byzantine empresses could not accrue ideological points by celebrating imperial triumph or initiating wars inside and outside their realm, Tamar seems to have enjoyed all these privileges. She not only participated in royal triumphs and celebrated victories personally, but played a central

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁷ L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, 54-55.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁴⁹ D. Smythe, "Behind the Mask: The Empress and Empire in Middle Byzantium," 145.

role in them. During the triumphal ceremonies, the army and its leaders submitted the spoils of war to the enthroned Tamar and high-ranking prisoners of war were brought before her and performed the ritual of submission to her. Tamar's participation in the essential public processions and military triumphs allowed her to display power publicly and override her gender as well as to present herself as the source of the victories.

By far the most intriguing aspect of Tamar's practice of queenship was her participation in hunting. Both historiographical texts, the *Histories and Eulogies* and the *Life of Tamar*, on several occasions represent Tamar as a hunter. The *Histories and Eulogies* mentions two hunting episodes; we are told that after the victory of 1195 Tamar and Davit hunted and relaxed.⁷⁵⁰ The other time, the queen went to western Georgia, settled matters there, and hunted in splendid places.⁷⁵¹ The *Life of Tamar* reports that Tamar was always informed about the military threats posed to the kingdom and its vassals, no matter whether she was at hunt, in the royal palace or in the field.⁷⁵² Participation of a woman in hunting was at odds with the medieval lifestyle, but it seems that Tamar managed to negotiate her gender and power and practice certain types of masculine behavior. The hunt was a dominant royal pastime in the medieval world and served the ruler to demonstrate his royal qualities and martial skills.⁷⁵³

4.8 She-Philosopher: The Image of an Erudite Queen

Tamar's wisdom and intelligence played a central roles in the contemporary/near contemporary discourse on ideal rulership. All the rhetorical texts reinforce her authority by accentuating her wisdom. The historiographical narratives, the *Histories and Eulogies* and the *Life of Tamar*, state that Tamar possessed wisdom and was a divinely illuminated ruler. This rhetoric served to persuade the audience that despite her gender, Tamar was endowed with divine grace, which made her a great and successful ruler. As pseudo-Basil points out "Tamar kept no other

⁷⁵⁰ *The Life of Kartli*, 446; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 260.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 468; 270.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 494; 295.

⁷⁵³ About the hunt as a popular royal leisure and part of royal upbringing see: M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship Between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 180-81; D. Angelov, "Emperors and Patriarchs as Ideal Children and Adolescents: Literary Conventions and Cultural Expectations", in *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, eds. A. Papaconstantinou and A. M. Talbot (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2009), 109.

thing in her heart besides ‘the origin of wisdom is fear of God.’”⁷⁵⁴ Authors frequently utilized epithets such as “wise and intelligent,” “wise and reasonable,” and “divinely illuminated ruler” to denote Tamar’s greatness. Tamar is further eulogized as wiser than Solomon and a depository of wisdom. When the kingdom is in dire straits, Tamar invokes her intelligent mind and gives orders to her subjects; She makes decisions only after she judges wisely.⁷⁵⁵ To better articulate the wisdom of Tamar and draw parallels between her and the Old Testament and Classical paradigms of kingship, the *Histories and Eulogies* says: “With the serenity and moderation of David, and the wisdom of Solomon, and courage and care of Alexander, she held the kingdom firmly in her hands, which stretched from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea...”⁷⁵⁶ The anonymous author of this text also buttresses Tamar’s intelligence and learnedness by citing her poem in his work. We are told that Tamar composed a short iambic poem in six strophes and dedicated it to the Theotokos to celebrate the victory of the Georgian army against the Muslim coalition in 1195. In this endeavor, Tamar could have followed the example of her grandfather, Demetre I, or great-grandfather, Davit IV, to whom she is likened in the *Histories and Eulogies*. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Davit IV composed a religious poem, *Hymns of Repentance*, and dedicated it to the Mother of God. Unfortunately, Tamar’s poem survives only as a quotation within the *Histories and Eulogies*.⁷⁵⁷ It seems that the anonymous had access to the queen’s writing and integrated this critical piece into his narrative. Without a doubt, the ability to compose religious poetry enhanced her reputation as a wise ruler. Apart from discussing theological themes – the Theotokos’ role in salvation and incarnation – Tamar conveys political messages. She expresses her gratitude to the Mother of God because she has favored and anointed her and blessed her queenship. Tamar furthermore stresses that she shares a kinship tie with the Theotokos: “you have anointed me, and I am related to you.”⁷⁵⁸ The wording “I am related to you” likely implied that the Theotokos and Tamar shared a common descent as they both were offspring of the King-Prophet David. According to the scriptural tradition, Mary was a descendent of the Biblical David. Tamar communicated a powerful message to the audience by bringing to the fore kinship ties between her and the Theotokos.

⁷⁵⁴ *The Life of Kartli*, 501; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 299.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 409; 241.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 444-45; 259-60.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The *Histories and Eulogies* and the *Life of Tamar* position Tamar as a wise and intelligent ruler, but neither text mentions her education nor clarifies the source of her intelligence and knowledge. In these historiographical texts, we do not encounter a rhetorical depiction of Tamar's zeal for learning as in the *Life of Davit*. Neither is she obsessed with reading nor claimed to be a lover of books like her great-grandfather, Davit IV. The *Life of Tamar*, in the concluding part of the narrative, tells only that Tamar was humble when she was teaching someone.⁷⁵⁹

While the historiographical narratives do not elaborate on this matter, the panegyric poems are more informative. Ioane Šavteli is particularly colorful when he represents Tamar's erudition. On the one hand he considers the fear of God as a source of her wisdom: "And she made the following saying as a rule to herself 'the fear of God is a source of wisdom.'" ⁷⁶⁰ On the other hand, he hails Tamar as a philosopher and a good polemicist, a true pillar of the faith, equally learned in ancient philosophy and patristic theology. Šavteli further lauds Tamar as a "teacher of knowledge,"⁷⁶¹ a "gulf of wisdom," a "guardian of knowledge,"⁷⁶² "far-sighted and intelligent,"⁷⁶³ and "clothed in divine illumination." Šavteli not only presents Tamar as the most erudite among her contemporaries and exemplary polemicist who could win polemics and shed light on the most complex philosophical concepts "like sun that illuminates the darkness,"⁷⁶⁴ but also eulogizes her as gifted exegetist. According to Šavteli, Tamar like a true teacher, taught and interpreted complex theological texts for others. The poet expresses his gratitude to the queen because she illuminated and educated him and his peer literati.⁷⁶⁵ As Šavteli contends, the philosophers were utterly unable to compete with Tamar: "Proclus and Iamblichus said about you 'we cannot compete with first-born Tamar; whose wisdom is like a sea. While Zeno of Elias, celestial beings, and leaders of Magi extoll you as 'sovereign of the Peripatetic school.'" ⁷⁶⁶ Tamar even wears the gown (*trivon*) over her clothes, customarily worn by philosophers, to style herself as wise and humble ruler.⁷⁶⁷

Mention of Proclus in this Georgian panegyric poem and claims that Tamar had superior knowledge of philosophy should not pass without comment. As already noted, the popularization

⁷⁵⁹ *The Life of Kartli*, 520; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 305.

⁷⁶⁰ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 121.

⁷⁶¹ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 135.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁶⁵ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani*, 138.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

of Proclus in medieval Georgia is associated with Ioane P'etric'i. P'etric'i translated Proclus' the *Elements of Theology* and wrote long commentaries on it.⁷⁶⁸ In eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium, Proclus was the most influential Neoplatonist and his works and teachings had considerable impact on Byzantine intellectuals. Michael Psellos considered Proclus one of the greatest Greek philosophers.⁷⁶⁹

Apart from elaborating the philosophical basis of Tamar's prudence, Šavteli praises her rhetorical skills: "You are a font of wisdom and your rhetorical speech resembles Mount Etna."⁷⁷⁰ The poet wishes that Tamar never closes her mouth, "the source of sweet speech and grace."⁷⁷¹ In another part of the poem, Šavteli again returns to his protagonist's learnedness and persuasive abilities. Tamar's eloquent speech is claimed to be a "house of wisdom and source of knowledge" for those who want to learn.⁷⁷² According to the poet-rhetor, Tamar's rhetorical speech had such an overwhelming impact on listeners that even pagans would come under its sway and convert to Christianity.⁷⁷³ Interestingly, a twelfth-century Byzantine intellectual, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, in one of his orations to Manuel Komnenos, accentuates that the emperor was an exemplary orator. Eustathios, in a way similar to Šavteli, extolls Manuel's clarity of voice and the sweetness of his enunciation and states that the emperor's speech had the effect of the divine voice on an audience.⁷⁷⁴ As already pointed out, the idea of a learned ruler with good rhetorical skills was revived in eleventh century Byzantium, and this ideal was transmitted and received in medieval Georgia during the reign of Davit IV. It seems, however, that the concept of a learned-philosopher ruler and a skillful rhetorician was put on a different level during Tamar's rule. Tamar probably received a thorough education, especially if one take into account that her father, Giorgi, in all likelihood wanted her to become a ruler in her own right. Learnedness and good intellectual capabilities also empowered Tamar to further consolidate her reputation. In Byzantium, it was a firmly established tradition that rhetoric was a powerful medium. If a person could handle rhetoric and learn its practical skills, he had a chance to acquire ethics, become powerful and capable of

⁷⁶⁸ L. Gigineishvili, *The Platonic Theology of Ioane Petritsi*, 20-21.

⁷⁶⁹ P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglosia: A Poetic of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*, 176.

⁷⁷⁰ *Old Georgian Panegyrists: Abdulmesiani* 136.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁷⁴ A. Stone, tr., *Eustathios of Thessaloniki. Secular Orations 1167/8 to 1179*. Byzantina Australiensia (Brill, 2013), 127.

ruling the community.⁷⁷⁵ This understanding of rhetoric in Byzantium echoed an ancient belief that knowledge and education empowered the individual.⁷⁷⁶

Tamar's image as an artful speechmaker is upheld not only in *Abdulmesiani* but in one of the episodes of *Life of Tamar*, already discussed above. Tamar displayed her personal mastery of rhetoric when she addressed the Georgian army and delivered a speech before the battle of Šamkori. Although the historical accuracy of the speech content is questionable, the fact that Tamar addressed the army and attempted to boost their morale by alluding to Biblical and Classical examples should not be questioned. This kind of behavior would be expected from Tamar, who constantly needed to negotiate her authority and remain as visible as possible to her subjects.

The appearance of the notion of self-control – commonly used in Byzantine orations – in Georgian rhetorical discourse on kingship can be interpreted as a direct impact of the Byzantine rhetorical traditions as well. All four encomiastic narratives that eulogize Tamar assert that she had admirable control of her emotions. In the most critical circumstances, Tamar never allowed the passions to seize her, she retained a stoic calmness and handled governmental matters wisely. The Byzantines greatly admired the quality of self-control (*sophrosyne*) and the emperors were frequently praised in narratives for possessing and displaying this quality. An accusation of intemperance and rashness was one of the greatest insults a Byzantine could make.⁷⁷⁷ As already noted, Byzantine women were rarely credited with *sophrosyne*.⁷⁷⁸ According to the conventional medieval belief, a woman's nature was weak and unstable, which significantly affected her judgment. Byzantine authors often represented women succumbing to panic, bursting into tears, and losing control of their behavior in critical situations. For instance, empress Anna Komnene portrays her grandmother, Anna Dalassene, and mother, Eirene Doukaina, as powerful women who had exceptional self-control, never being moved by anger. But Anna also says that emotional weakness is a characteristic of the female sex, and women lack courage and are prone to shrieking and wailings.⁷⁷⁹ From Anna's point of view, her grandmother and mother were exceptional women because they possessed the quality of *sophrosyne*. According to Byzantine political thought, stoic behavior and self-control were qualities that made the emperor an ideal ruler and true image of

⁷⁷⁵ F. Leonte, "Rhetoric in Purple: the Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos," Ph.D dissertation (Budapest: Central European University, 2012), 390.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁷ Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 182.

⁷⁷⁸ Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium 1025-1204*, 183.

⁷⁷⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, XV. 2 (Frankopan, 434).

God. Menander Rhetor puts great emphasis on the emperor's self-control in his *basilikos logos*.⁷⁸⁰ One of the foci of sixth-century political treatises (so-called advice to the emperor literature), was the emperor's self-control.⁷⁸¹ In twelfth-century Byzantium, however, the quality of *sophrosyne* was also ascribed to influential Komnenian women. Apart from the *Alexiad*, Michael Italikos in his oration to Eirene Doukaina, and George Tornikes in his funeral oration to Anna Komnene, praised the Komnenian women's virtue of self-control.⁷⁸² But Italikos and Tornikes never ascribed *sophrosyne* to the women who were in charge of the empire or had access to power. When Michael Italikos wrote and performed his oration, Eirene Doukaina was in monastic confinement with no chance of exercising political power, while Tornikes's rhetorical piece was a funeral oration addressing Anna Komnene after her death.

The emphasis on Tamar's learnedness and rhetorical skills, as well as the claim that she had marvelous self-control, applied to the art of ruling arguably served to present her in the guise of a philosopher-king. It needs to be emphasized that Tamar's husband, David Soslan, is not represented as wise and intelligent as his wife and no rhetorical narrative attempts at crafting his image as a philosopher-king. The *Histories and Eulogies* says once that Davit excelled his teachers and contemporary students in the knowledge of books.⁷⁸³ It is important to keep in mind that the Byzantine narrative sources rarely credited imperial women with the qualities of wisdom and intelligence, let alone presenting a powerful woman as a philosopher-ruler.

Very few middle Byzantine texts talk about literary interest of the imperial women or extoll their intelligence. For example, Michael Psellos in his *Chronographia* characterizes Eudokia Makrembolitissa as an "exceedingly clever women,"⁷⁸⁴ but no further references are made in the text to Eudokia's education or the scale of her learnedness. Neither is she portrayed as an exemplary rhetorician or well versed in theology and philosophy. However, more information on the origin of empress's wisdom and learnedness is attested in the *Alexiad*. Anna Komnene dwelt on her grandmother's, Anna Dalassene's, exceptional intellectual ability and rhetorical skills. "Her intellectual ability, moreover, was paralleled by her command of language. She was indeed the

⁷⁸⁰ D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, eds., *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, 109.

⁷⁸¹ S. Dmitriev, "John Lydus' Political Message and the Byzantine Idea of Imperial Rule", *BMGS* 39:1 (2015), 11.

⁷⁸² *Georges et Démétrios Tornikes. Lettres et Discours*, ed. J. Darrouzès (Paris, 1970), 231-3; *Michael Italikos. Lettres et Discours*, ed. P. Gautier (Paris, 1972), 150-51.

⁷⁸³ *The Life of Kartli*, 421; *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, 248.

⁷⁸⁴ Michael Psellos, *The Chronographia*, Book VII (Sewter, 345).

most persuasive orator, without being verbose or long-winded.”⁷⁸⁵ Anna also portrays her mother, Eirene Doukaina, as a shrewd woman and lauds her zeal to attain the wisdom through reading the Holy Scripture, saint’s lives, and writings of the Church Fathers. “Many a time...I remember seeing my mother with a book in her hands, diligently reading dogmatic pronouncements of the Holy Fathers, especially of the philosopher and martyr Maximos.”⁷⁸⁶ While Eirene’s literary interest is in the Scripture and Church Fathers, Anna Komnene’s intellectual horizon is much broader. As Anna states in the preface of her *Alexiad*, she studied the Greek language and literature, rhetoric and “read thoroughly the works of Aristotle and the dialogues of Plato and... fortified my mind with *tetrakus* of science.”⁷⁸⁷ The most informative about imperial women’s literary interests and education is George Tornikes’s funeral oration to Anna Komnene. According to Tornikes, Anna’s education was much more impressive and broader than articulated by Anna herself in the *Alexiad*. Tornikes also talks about Eirene Doukaina’s reading habits; it turns out that the empress only read the New Testament,⁷⁸⁸ in marked contrast to Anna’s claim that her mother was interested in the Church Fathers, theological treatises, and saints’ lives. Although admitting and elaborating in depth on the Komnenoi empress’s impressive knowledge, Tornike maintains a certain ambivalence in his rhetorical piece and assures the reader that Anna acquired knowledge against her parents’ will in secret and exchanged traditional female occupations for learning. Thus, like many Byzantine literati, Tornike himself may have had an ambiguous attitude towards educated women and presented Anna’s erudition as a deviation from the social norm rather than as a behavior to be emulated.⁷⁸⁹ Despite the fact that the sources often represented model views of female behavior rather than reality, in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries aristocratic and imperial women were literate and some of them highly educated.⁷⁹⁰ The presence of learned women in the Komnenoi period was a consequence of the changed attitude towards female education that happened in eleventh century Byzantium.⁷⁹¹ *Sebastokratorissa* Eirene, a Komnenian imperial woman and great literary patron during the reign of Manuel Komnenos, was

⁷⁸⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, III. 7 (Frankopan, 94).

⁷⁸⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, V. 9 (Frankopan, 150).

⁷⁸⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, prologue. 1 (Frankopan, 3).

⁷⁸⁸ R. Browning, ed., “An Unpublished Funeral Oration on Anna Comnena” in *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature and Education* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1997), 11-12.

⁷⁸⁹ B. Hill, “The Ideal Imperial Komnenian Woman,” *BF* (1996), 15-16.

⁷⁹⁰ Laiou, “The Role of Women in Byzantine Society,” 253 and 256.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

praised by her contemporaries for her learning, skillful use of language and interest in Classical literature and philosophy.⁷⁹²

Therefore, in light of the changes that took place in Byzantium that enhanced women's interest in literacy and knowledge, it is possible that Tamar received an excellent education, studied rhetoric, literature, and theology. Maybe Tamar was also acquainted with ancient philosophers, including Proclus who was a known and revered author in medieval Georgia thanks to Ioane P'etric'i. The references to Plato and Aristotle in Georgian sources indicate that educated circles in the Georgian kingdom were familiar with these philosophers. For example, Šota Rustaveli in his *Knight in the Panther's Skin* makes a direct reference to Plato. In one of the verses of the poem, Avtandil – one of the main protagonists – cites Plato in his letter to king Rostevan: "Permit me, O king, to recall to your mind the teaching of Plato: 'Falseness and double-dealing are destroyers of body and soul.'" ⁷⁹³

Conclusion

Was Tamar as powerful and independent a ruler as suggested by the rhetorical narratives that emanated from the Bagratid royal court? Did she truly exercise this scale of power and have firm control over the kingdom? We will never know the truth behind the thick layer of rhetoric, but by many standards Tamar was an exceptional ruler. First and foremost, an encomiastic narratives portray increasingly unconventional image of a confident female ruler, who wields power and enjoys immense authority. Tamar's contemporary writings testify that she was the sole source of power and delegator of the authority in the kingdom. Unlike the Byzantine historiographical and hagiographical narratives, which tend to accentuate female weakness and not infrequently employ a misogynistic and gender-biased tone to portray powerful women, encomiastic texts dedicated to Tamar demonstrate the contrary. They all admit her power and laud her as a sacred ruler by virtue of the divinely bestowed rank of kingship. Tamar is proclaimed as the Lord's anointed, a Christ-like ruler, the enforcer of divine order, and a true *soter* leading her

⁷⁹² E. Jeffreys, "The *sebastokratorissa* Eirene as a Literary Patroness: The Monk Iakovos," *JÖB* 32, no. 3 (1982), 64. On *sebastokratorissa* Irene also see E. Jeffreys, "The *sebastokratorissa* Irene as Patron," in *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds., L. Theis, M. Mullett, and M. Grünbart (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), 177-194; B. Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 172-74;

⁷⁹³ Šota Rustaveli, *the Knight in the Panther's Skin*, Engl. trans. V. Urushadze (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1971) 117. It is important to bear in mind that Rustaveli's *Knight in the Panther's Skin* was very much inspired by the Persian/Near Eastern poetic and literary traditions and it is hard to detect any Byzantine influence in the poem.

people to salvation. In order to harmonize her status of a king with her gender, her contemporary/near-contemporary rhetoric pushed the limits and constructed an increasingly sacralized image and authority for Tamar. The narrative sources further convey that Tamar secured God's benevolence and brought peace and prosperity to her subjects through practicing all the noblest virtues. All the texts use elevated phrases, metaphors, and various rhetorical tropes to denote her unique position. She is hailed as a wise ruler whose source of wisdom was not only the fear of God but a deep knowledge of theology and philosophy. The Georgian queen, who in literary sources is often referred as king (*mepē*) and king of kings (*mepet mepē*), receives all the honors that in Byzantium would only apply to the emperor. According to Byzantine thought, the emperor could be wise, philanthropic, pious, just, brave and moderate, but an empress/imperial woman was denied the majority of imperial virtues; she could receive two cardinal virtues out of four (philanthropy and piety). In contrast, Tamar's literary persona possesses and displays a broad spectrum of Christian virtues. Byzantine ideology considered the empress subservient to the emperor (not matter how powerful and influential she was), whereas scrutiny of the Georgian texts demonstrates that king Davit was subservient to his wife, Tamar. In the Byzantine empire, only the emperor was considered God's vice-regent on earth, guardian of Christianity, and responsible for the well-being of the Church and his subjects. In Georgia, in contrast, a female ruler was called God's vicar on earth and responsible for preserving the purity of the faith and guaranteeing harmony in the Church. Imperial panegyrics – frequently performed during court ceremonials – highlighted the emperor's metaphorical likeness with Biblical figures and Classical heroes. The emperor was hailed as a second Moses, a second Biblical David and Solomon, and an embodiment of Alexander the Great. The empress was denied this level of laudation. Tamar's encomiasts, in marked contrast to Byzantine texts, make explicit parallels between Tamar, on the one hand, and the Biblical David and Solomon, Alexander the Great, Apollo, Aphrodite, Caesar, and emperor Herakleios on the other. Furthermore, Tamar is eulogized as a second Constantine and portrayed as a guardian and a pillar of the faith. While in theory piety and philanthropy were qualities that made an empress ideal, care for the well-being of the Church and the preservation and protection of the purity of Christianity was usually beyond her prerogative. Only an emperor was considered the guardian of doctrinal purity and consequently visualized as a new Constantine. The twelfth-century Byzantine canonist, Theodore Balsamon, asserted that the Byzantine empress did not share her husband's, i.e., the emperor's, semi-sacerdotal character and the care for the souls of their

subjects was not her concern.⁷⁹⁴ Georgian literati, on the contrary, emphasized that it was Tamar's duty to care about her subjects' souls.

Ceremonial kingship and the ritualization of power seem to have reached a new level in this period, which enabled Tamar to emphasize her status as ruling queen and make a statement of her authority. Since the ceremonial procession was a powerful transmitter of royalty, Tamar secured her participation in celebrating military triumphs and the royal adventus. In this way she claimed a share of the military victories and underpinned her unique position in the kingdom. More importantly, Tamar is claimed to have succeeded in establishing a special relationship with the army during her rule. This is probably why her encomiast juxtaposed her to Alexander the Great even though she could not participate in military campaigns. Likening the female ruler with Alexander is unusual and it is difficult to recall any Byzantine narrative that would make such a comparison. What is probably the most remarkable is that Tamar succeeded in reinforcing her image to a great extent and became a dominant person with her contemporary/near contemporary royal rhetoric, overshadowing her second husband, Davit, and other prominent military men. All the narratives discussed in this chapter follow a similar pattern when it comes to illustrating Tamar's image, which indicates that they reflect the ideology of the Bagratid royal court rather than authorial perspectives on the nature of Tamar's authority and power. To be able to promote herself to such an extent, Tamar needed not only resources but freedom of action, which she seems to have had.

The fact that the Georgian royal rhetoric succeeded in crafting Tamar's unshattered authority as an ideal monarch is supported by the numismatic evidence, namely, by coinage of Giorgi-Laša IV (r. 1210–1222). During his sole rulership Giorgi-Laša minted three different types of coins and on all of them he is labeled as Tamar's son. The following legend was inscribed in Georgian on the reverse of all Giorgi-Laša's coins: "Giorgi, son of Tamar."⁷⁹⁵ Had Tamar failed to attain great fame and reputation soon after her death, Giorgi would not have affiliated himself with his mother. Instead, the young king would have referred to his father, Davit, or grandfather, Giorgi. Undoubtedly, association with Tamar was a source of prestige and legitimacy for king Giorgi. Tamar's daughter, Rusudan (r. 1222–1235), who assumed power after Giorgi's death and

⁷⁹⁴ E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford, 1957), 106.

⁷⁹⁵ *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three*, 250-51.

ruled in her own right, also modeled herself on her coinage as “Rusudan, daughter of Tamar.”⁷⁹⁶ Therefore, the royal rhetoric in post-1210 Georgia shows in what high esteem Tamar was held after her death.

⁷⁹⁶ *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three*, 252.

Epilogue

The Christianization of Kartli and Armenia in the fourth century was a watershed in the history of the Caucasus, a diverse and multicultural region. In the long run, the adoption of Christianity by the Kartvelian royal house determined the reorientation of the Georgian world towards the Christian Roman Empire. After Sassanian Persia abolished the kingship in Kartli, ca.523 or perhaps 580, the Kartvelian aristocracy appealed to the Byzantine emperor and asked the basileus to nominate a new ruler in Kartli. According to the Georgian historiographical tradition, emperor Maurice nominated Guaram as the new ruler of Kartli. Guaram ruled as a presiding prince in Kartli rather than as a king, but he was elevated to the dignity of *kouropalatēs*, by that time a high-ranking and very prestigious court title, which increased his political weight at home. Guaram's elevation to this rank indicates how important it was for the Byzantine empire to maintain its influence in the eastern Caucasus and secure the benevolence and good disposition of the Kartvelian secular elite. The Byzantine influence in Kartli was thwarted after the Arabs advanced and challenged the empire's domination in the Caucasus and the East. From this time onwards, the imperial court and the emperors never ceased their attempts to forge and strengthen alliances with the Kartvelian elite. By the end of the seventh century, when a civil war erupted in the caliphate, the imperial court managed to regain influence temporarily in Kartli. In the eighth century, however, the Arab caliphs launched more aggressive military campaigns to solidify their domination in the Caucasus and placed an Arab official, an emir, in the capital of Kartli, T'pilisi.

As a consequence of this change, conflicts developed between the Kartvelian secular and ecclesiastical elite and the Arab emir. Frequent invasions followed by political instability and economic decay forced the population of Kartli to migrate to the regions far from Arab-dominated areas, which were close to the frontier of the Byzantine empire. The southwestern Caucasian lands of Tao/Tayk and Klarjeti became a new Kartli, where the Kartvelian elite established a new political entity. The emergence of a new Kartli in Tao and Klarjeti was also determined by the support and consent of the Byzantine imperial court. Ašot I Bagratid, the first ruler of Tao Klarjeti, consolidated his power in the region with the blessing and support of the Byzantine emperor. In the eleventh century, after the Georgian lands were united into the single kingdom, the court historian Sumbat Davitis-ze in his short chronicle emphasized the decisive role the Byzantine emperor played in founding the principality of Tao-Klarjeti. Sumbat says that

Ašot *kouropalatēs* rose in prominence by the grace of God and the will of the Byzantine emperor. Although in the eleventh century, when this narrative was composed, the Bagratid royal court and the Byzantine empire had a poor relationship, Byzantium's role in the foundation of Tao-Klarjeti was so significant that Sumbat felt obliged to stress it. The consolidation of the Bagratid power coincided with the flourishing of Georgian monasticism in Tao-Klarjeti. The mass migration of the Kartvelians to Tao-Klarjeti not only changed the demography of the region and transformed the Caucasian political map, but it also brought Byzantium into the cultural and political life of the region. From this period, Byzantine influence proliferated in the Georgian-speaking world.

The Kartvelian ecclesiastical and secular elite started to look towards Byzantium from the ninth century, which resulted in an acceleration of movements of groups of people, valuable objects, manuscripts, and ideas; this enhanced the formation of tight connections between Byzantine and the Georgian world. After the Arabs took control of the Holy Land and Jerusalem, the Christians of the Caucasus became more attracted by the sacred places of Byzantium. If, in the first half of the ninth century, Jerusalem and the Holy Land were the holiest places in the Georgian imagination, from the end of the ninth century, Constantinople became a sacred and holy city equally important as Jerusalem. Georgian hagiographical vitae attest that Georgian monks traveled to Constantinople to visit the sacred places of the imperial capital and venerate the relics. From this time onwards, Kartvelian/Georgian monastic communities and monasteries started to emerge in various parts of the Byzantine empire, which further contributed to the transmission of Byzantine thought to the Georgian world. The foundation of the Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos in the tenth century was particularly important in this respect. Soon after its establishment, Iviron monastery became a center of learning and manuscript production and a significant number of translated manuscripts created there were disseminated to the Georgian-speaking lands. The Kartvelian monks were also translating manuscripts in the monasteries of Romana and Chora. The core of the Byzantine empire, however, was not the only place where Kartvelian monastic communities emerged. The Black Mountain and the Monastery of Kalipos became a place of attraction equal to Athos from the second quarter of the eleventh century. Eptvime the Athonite and Giorgi the Hagiorite from Iviron and Giorgi the Recluse and Ephrem Mc'ire from Black Mountain were the most prominent learned churchmen who translated a large number of texts from Greek into Georgian. They took care that their works would be disseminated to the Georgian-speaking lands.

After Byzantium regained its position as a supra-regional power in the Caucasus, the basileus' authority as a pre-eminent Christian monarch was solidified among the Kartvelian lay and ecclesiastical elite. As manuscript colophons, hagiographical vitae, and the inscriptions carved on church walls attest, the basileus was held in high esteem. Some contemporary Georgian authors did not even hide their admiration for the basileus and rendered him a greater respect than the Georgian kings.

The political influence of the Byzantine empire in the Caucasus translated into the popularization of Byzantine political culture among the local kings and princes. From the ninth century, the Byzantine emperors bestowed the honorary court dignity of *kouropalatēs* on the Bagratid rulers, which became a marker of Bagratid power and authority. This highly prestigious court dignity/title elevated the Bagratids to the status of “the emperor’s men” in the Caucasus and distinguished them from their peers. The Bagratids embraced the political culture of Byzantium and instrumentalized the imperial court dignities to establish their prestige. The affiliation with the Byzantine emperors and imperial court, in the long run, helped the Bagratids consolidate their power and spread their influence throughout the Georgian-speaking lands. After the Bagratids succeeded in unifying all the Georgian-speaking lands under their leadership, they not only did not discard imperial court dignities but promoted their images through these titles. All three kings of the united Georgia, Bagrat III, Bagrat IV, and Giorgi II, propagated their images by bringing their court titles to the fore. While the Georgian kings at the beginning of the eleventh century modeled themselves as “king and *kouropalatēs*” after they started receiving higher court dignities from the emperor, they revised their titulature and brought their new titles to the fore. In the second half of the eleventh-century, the Byzantine court dignities of *sebastos*, *nōbelissimos*, and *kaisar* became so crucial for the Bagratids that they minted silver coins with their titles on them and thus communicated their elevated position to their subjects.

Apart from promoting their image as high-ranking dignitaries of the imperial court, the Bagratids adopted other means to increase their authority. They embellished the provenance of their house with sacred imagery, claiming to be the direct offspring of the Biblical King-Prophet David. The Bagratids propagated their claimed sacred genealogy successfully and this story reached the imperial court in Constantinople. Emperor Konstantinos VII in his *De Administrando Imperio* dedicated space to the claimed Biblical genealogy of the Bagratid family.

Although the Bagratid rulers felt free to borrow the imperial symbols and language of power to construct their images, it was only during the reign of Davit IV that the Georgians started to exploit the Byzantine imperial language to the fullest extent. After 1100, Georgian royal rhetoric and discourse on the ideal kingship underwent a profound sophistication, and a new ideology of kingship developed as a consequence of a gradual adaptation of the Byzantine literary and visual notions of how to represent an ideal emperor. The main reason behind this changed attitude towards royal authority was Davit's successful wars against the Seljuks, which resulted in the establishment of the Georgian kingdom as the dominant power in the Caucasus. While Davit's contemporary emperors, Alexios and Ioannes Komnenos, struggled without success to reconquer all of Asia Minor, the Georgian king was victorious in his wars against the Turks and succeeded in founding a powerful kingdom in the Caucasus. Davit is the first Georgian ruler whose literary and visual image looks very similar to that of the Byzantine emperor. Davit adopted the imperial insignia and the language of authority used by the Byzantine emperors, who had been claiming the status of pre-eminent ruler in the Caucasus for centuries. By instrumentalizing the Byzantine imperial imagery, Davit delegitimized the emperor and modeled himself as his successor in the Caucasus and Christian East.

As I have argued in this dissertation, Davit IV's and Alexios Komnenos's styles of kingship, reforms, and contemporary and near-contemporary rhetoric show similarities. Alexios and Davit succeeded in re-establishing the moral and spiritual foundation of royal/imperial authority and pursued similar Church policies. They both positioned themselves as guardians of Orthodoxy and new Constantines and publicly displayed their piety and philanthropy. Davit and Alexios also presented themselves as learned rulers and exemplary polemicists with expertise in theology.

After the elevation of king Demetre to power in 1125, certain innovations were introduced to the Georgian ruler's representation. The Byzantine-oriented kingship gave way to a more diverse, cosmopolitan kingship that amalgamated not only the Byzantine symbols and language of rulership but also Near Eastern/oriental traditions. These changes in the Bagratid rulership were caused by the rapid expansion of the Georgian kingdom's borders, as a result of which vast lands inhabited by Muslims were integrated into the Bagratid realm. Demetre and his son, Giorgi III, had to adopt a new language to communicate their image and authority to their Muslim subjects. Consequently, Demetre and Giorgi issued bilingual (Georgian-Arabic) coins and fashioned

themselves in Arabic as “king of kings” and “sword of the Messiah.” They adopted the laudatory epithet of “the sword of the Messiah” after Byzantine power declined in the Caucasus to position themselves as guardians and defenders of Christians in the East.

When a female, Tamar, was elevated to power and became sole ruler in 1184, the Georgian court initiated an unprecedented scale of rhetoric to legitimize a woman as a ruler in her own right for the first time in the kingdom’s history. While Tamar’s bilingual coins used Near Eastern patterns, her contemporary and near-contemporary rhetorical narratives, celebrating her as an ideal ruler, utilized encomiastic motifs (imagery and language) similar to those used in Byzantine texts for portraying idealized images of the emperors and imperial women. Tamar and her entourage turned rhetoric into a political discourse to change the traditional ways of viewing the weakness of the female gender. She was portrayed as an exceptional and successful female ruler, more prominent than the kings who had ruled before her. Her encomiasts went even further in crafting and disseminating her image as a Christ-like ruler, the Lord’s anointed and deputy on earth, a true philosopher, an exemplary theologian, and a rhetorician. She was cast in the mold of Constantine the Great and invested with the right to guard the Church and preserve the doctrinal purity of Orthodoxy. Most likely, Tamar adopted specific modes of behavior to become more visible and exercise authority. The practice and public performance of *philanthropia* and piety, two essential Christian virtues, would have empowered Tamar and allowed her to establish her credentials of an ideal ruler and secure the good favor of influential social groups. Although the narratives may exaggerate the scale of her learnedness, Tamar likely received a good education; by presenting herself as an exceedingly clever and philosophically minded woman, Tamar would have tried to compensate for her inability to lead the army in battle and override her gender. Bolstering her image and masterminding excellent royal propaganda were markers of Tamar’s power and authority.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

A. Georgian Sources

[David the Builder] დავით აღმაშენებელი, გალობანი სინანულისანი [Hymns of Repentance] ed. G. Tevzadze. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1989.

[The Conversion of Kartli] მოქცევაი ქართლისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, I. 5th–10th c.] ed. I. Abuladze, 81-163. Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963.

[The Life and Martyrdom of K‘onstanti] ცხოვრება და წამებაი კოსტანტისი ქართველისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, I. 5th–10th c.] ed. I. Abuladze, 164-172. Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963.

[The Life of Ilarion Kartveli] ცხოვრება და მოქალაქეობა ილარიონ ქართველისი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, II. 11th–15th c.] ed. I. Abuladze, (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1967), 9-37.

[The Life of Grigol Xanzteli] შრომაი და მოლუაწეობაი გრიგოლისი არქიმანდრიტისაი ხანცთისა და შატბერდისა აღმაშენებელისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, I. 5th–10th c.] ed. I. Abuladze Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1963 , 248-319.

[The Life of Ioane and Eptvime] ცხოვრებაი იოვანესი და ეფთვიმესი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, II. 11th–15th c.] ed. I. Abuladze (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1967), 38–207. English trans. T. Grdzeldze, *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos: Two Eleventh-century Lives of the Hegoumenoi of Iviron*. London: Bennett & Bloom, 2009, 53-96.

[The Life of Giorgi the Hagiorite] ცხოვრებაი გიორგი მთაწმიდელისაი. ძველი ქართული ჰაგიოგრაფიული ლიტერატურის ძეგლები [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature, II. 11th–15th c.], English trans. T. Grdzeldze, *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, 97-162.

[The Life and Tales of the Bagratids] ცხოვრება და უწყება ბაგრატიონთა. ქართლის ცხოვრება [the Life of Kartli 1] ed. S. Khaukchishvili, 372-386. Tbilisi: Saxelgami, 1955.

- [The Life of Davit, King of Kings] ცხოვრებაი მეფეთ-მეფისა დავითისი, ed. M. Shanidze, 157-224. Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1992. English trans. R. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, Original Georgian Text and the Armenian Adaptation* by Robert W. Thomson, 309-353. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- [The Histories and Eulogies of the Monarchs] ისტორიანი და აზმანნი შარავანდედთანი. ქართლის ცხოვრება [The Life of Kartli] ed., R. Metreveli, 377-482. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2012. English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones, 227-286. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2014.
- [The Life of Tamar, King of Kings] ცხოვრებაი მეფეთ-მეფისა თამარისი. ქართლის ცხოვრება (The Life of Kartli) ed., R. Metreveli, 377-482. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2012. English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones, 227-286. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2014.
- [Abdulmesiani] ძველი ქართველი მეხოტბენი: აბდულმესიანი [Old Georgian Panegyrist II] Ed. I. Lolashvili. Tbilisi: Georgian Academy of Sciences Press, 1958.
- [Corpus of Eleventh- and Thirteenth-Century Georgian Historical Documents] ნ. შოშიაშვილი, ვ. სილოგავა, ქართული ისტორიული საბუთების კორპუსი, eds., N. Shoshiashvili, and V. Silogava. Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1984.
- [In Praise of King Tamar] ქება მეფისა თამარისი. ძველი ქართველი მეხოტბენი [Old Georgian Panegyrist, I] ed., I. Lolashvili, 181-216. Tbilisi: Georgian Academy of Science Press, 1957.
- [The Life of Tamar, King of Kings] ცხოვრებაი მეფეთ-მეფისა თამარისი. ქართლის ცხოვრება [The Life of Kartli] ed., R. Metreveli, 377-482. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2012. English trans. *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. S. Jones, 227-286. Tbilisi: Artanuji publishing, 2014.
- [Great Nomokanon] დიდი სჯულისკანონი, ed Gabidzashvili. Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1975.
- [Chronicles, 1] ქრონიკები, I, ed T. Zhordania. Tbilisi: Sharadze Printing House, 1892.
- [Qauxchishvili, S] ს. ყაუხჩიშვილი, გეორგიკა: ბიზანტიელი მწერლები საქართველოს შესახებ [*Georgika: The Byzantine Authors on Georgia*, vol. VI] Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1966.

B. Byzantine Sources

- Anna Komnene. *Alexias*. eds., D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, 2 vols., CFHB 40. Berlin, 2001. English trans., E. R. A. Sewter and P. Frankopan. *Anna Komnene: The Alexiad*. London: Penguin Classics, 2009.
- Ioannes Skylitzes. *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*. Ed. I. Thurn. CFHB 5. Berlin, 1973. English trans., J. Wortley. *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Ioannes Zonaras, *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome Historiarum*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, vol. 3. Bonn: Weber, 1897.
- Konstantinos Porphyrogenitos. *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De Administrando Imperio*, ed G. Moravcsick, and R. Jenkins, trans. Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967.
- Konstantinos Porphyrogenitos. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti de Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 2 vols, ed J. J. Reiske .Bonn 1830. English trans. A. Moffatt and M. Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, 2 vols. Canberra: The Australian National University, 2012.
- Menander Rhetor. *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*. Ed. with tr. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. D. R. Reinsch Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. English trans., E. R. A. Sewter, *The Chronographia of Michael Psellos*. London: Penguin Classics, 1966.
- Michael Psellos. *Michaelis Pselli Historia Syntomos*, ed. and trans. M. Aerts. CFHB 30. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990.
- Stone, A. trans. *Eustathios of Thessaloniki. Secular Orations 1167/8 to 1179*. Byzantina Australiensia. Brill, 2013
- Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB. Bonn, 1838.

C. Armenian Sources

- Greenwood, T. trans. *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. R.W. Thomson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Step'anos Orbelean, *History of the State of Sisakan*, trans. R. Bedrosian. Long Branch, NJ, 2015.

[The History of Aristakes Lastiverc'i] *Повесть о варданета Аристакеса Ластиверци*, trans. I. Yuzbashyan. Moscow, 1968.

The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa trans. A. E. Dostourian Lanham: University Press of America, 1993.

[Vardan Arevelc'i] ვარდან არაველცი. მსოფლიო ისტორია [World History] trans. N. Shoshiashvili and E. Kvachantiradze. Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishers, 2002.

Yovhannēs Draxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*. trans. K. Maksoudian. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987.

Secondary Literature

Alexidze, A. "Martha-Maria: A Striking Figure in the Cultural History of Georgia and Byzantium", in *The Greeks in the Black Sea from the Bronze Age to the Early Twentieth Century*. Ed. M. Koromila, 204-212. Athens: Panorama, 1991.

Alexidze, L. "Ioane Petritsi." In *Interpreting Proclus from Antiquity to Renaissance*, ed. S. Gersh, 229-244. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Anastor, M. "Byzantine Political Theory: its Classical Precedents and Legal Embodiment", in *Aspects of the Mind of Byzantium: Political Theory, Theology and Ecclesiastical Relations with the See of Rome*, eds., S. Vryonis and N. Goodhue, 13-52. Ashgate: Variorum, 2001.

Angelov, D. *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

_____. "Emperors and Patriarchs as Ideal Children and Adolescents: Literary Conventions and Cultural Expectations." In *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, eds. A. Papaconstantinou and A. M. Talbot, 85-126. Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2009.

Angelova, D. *Sacred Founders: Women, Men and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium*. California: University of California Press, 2015.

Angold, M. *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

_____. *The Byzantine Empire 1025–1204: A Political History*. London and New York: Longman, 1997.

_____. “Belle Epoque of Crisis?” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c.500-1492*. ed. J. Shepard, 731-758. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Antonopoulou, T. *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

[Badridze, Š.] შ. ბადრიძე. საქართველოს ურთიერთობები ბიზანტიასთან და დასავლეთ ევროპასთან [Relationship of Georgia with the Byzantine Empire and the Western Europe, X-XIII Centuries] Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1984.

Barber, C. “Leo of Chalcedon, Euthymios Zigabenos and the Return of the Past.” *Contesting the Logic of Painting. Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*. Leiden (2007): 131-157.

Barker, E. *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium*. Oxford, 1957.

[Bakradze, A] ა. ბაქრაძე, “თრიალეთისა და ატენის ეპიგრაფიკული ძეგლები როგორც როგორც ისტორიული წყარო” [Epigraphic Inscriptions from Trialeti and Ateni as a Historical Source], *Bulletin of the Georgian National Museum XX-B* (1959)

Bentley, J. H. *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchange in pre-Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Brett, G. “The Automata in the Byzantine Throne of Solomon.” *Speculum* 29 (1954): 477-87.

Beihammer, A. *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Bernard, F. *Writing and Reading Byzantine Secular Poetry, 1025–1081*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Bell, N. *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

Bezarashvili, K. “Hellenophilism in Georgian Literature as Cultural Orientation towards Byzantine Thought: Ephrem Mtsire’s Culture Orientation. Part I.” *Scripta & e-Scripta* 14-15 (2015): 335-364.

Bossina, L. “Niketas Choniates as a Theologian”, In *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, eds., A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis, 165-184. Geneva: La Pomme d’Or, 2009.

Browning, R. “Enlightenment and Repression in Byzantium in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.” *Past & Present*, N. 69 (Nov. 1975):

Brubaker, L and H. Tobler. “The Gender of Money: Byzantine Empresses on Coins (324 –802)”. *Gender &History*, Vol. 12. No. 3 November (2000): 572-594.

- Brubaker, L. “Memories of Helena: Patterns of Imperial Matronage in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries,” in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. L. James, 52–75. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Buckley, P. *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene: Artistic Strategy in Making Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Cameron, A. *Arguing it Out: Discussion in the Twelfth Century Byzantium*. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2016.
- Carr, A. W. “Leo of Chalcedon and the Icons.” In *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. D. Mouriki, 579-584. Princeton, 1995.
- Ciggaar, K. *Western Travelers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium, 962 –1204: Cultural and Political Relations*. Leiden&New York: Brill, 1996.
- Cloke, G. *‘This Female Man of God:’ Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350–450*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Clucas, L. *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century*. Munich: Institut für Byzantinistik, 1981.
- Connolly, J. “The New world order: Greek Rhetoric in Rome”, in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. I. Worthington, 139-165. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Dagron, G. *Emperor and Priest, the Imperial Office in Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Dennis, G. T. “Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality.” In *Byzantine Courte Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire, 131-140. Washington: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Dundua, G and T. Dundua. *Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics: Part Three. “Golden Age” and Decline. Coin Issues and Monetary Circulation in the 11th-16th Centuries*. Tbilisi: Meridian Publishers, 2015.
- _____. ქართული ნუმისმატიკა, ნაწილი I [Georgian Numismatics: Part One] Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishers, 2006.
- Dmitriev, S. “John Lydus’ Political Massage and the Byzantine Idea of Imperial Rule”, *BMGS* 39:1 (2015): 1-24.
- Dvornik, F. *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*. vol 2. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966.

[Gagoshidze, G] გ. გაგოშიძე, “ბაგრატ IV ნოველისიმოსი: 1050 წლის უცნობი წარწერა თრიალეთიდან” [Bagrat IV *nōbelissimos*: an unknown inscription from Trialeti from 1050], *Essays of the Georgian National Museum IX* (2004): 48-53.

Eastmond, A. *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

_____. “‘it began with picture’: Imperial art, texts and subversion between East and West in the twelfth century” in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed., D. Angelov and M. Saxby, 121-146. Burlington: Ashgate, 2013.

_____. “Gender and Orientalism in Georgia in the Age of Queen Tamar”. In *Women, Man and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*. Ed. L. James, 100-118. London: Routledge, 1997.

_____. “Royal Renewal in Georgia: the case of Queen Tamar.” In *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, 283-293. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994.

Efthymiadis, S. “Greek and Biblical Exempla in the Service of an Artful Writer.” In *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, eds., A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis, 35-58. Geneva: La Pomme d’Or, 2009.

Evans, N. “Kastron, Rabad, and Ardūn: The Case of Artanuji.” *From Constantinople to the Frontier*, eds., N. Matheou, T. Kampianaki and L. Bondioli, 343-364. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Frankopan, P. ‘Re-Interpreting the Role of Family in Komnenian Byzantium: Where Blood is not thicker than water’, in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. M. Lauxtermann and M. Whittow, 181-196. London: Routledge, 2017.

Galatariotou, C. “Holy Women and Witches: Aspects of the Byzantine Conception of Gender”. *BMGS* 9 (1984/5): 55-94.

[Gabidzashvili, E.] ე. გაბიძაშვილი, რუის-ურბნისის კრების ძეგლისწერა [The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council] Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1978.

Garland, L. and S. H. Rapp, jr., “Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman and Empress between Two Worlds,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience AD 800-1200*, ed. L. Garland, 91-124. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004.

Garland, L. *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Garland, L. ed. *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

- _____. “The Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women: A Further Note on Conventions of Behavior and Social Reality as Reflected by Eleventh and Twelfth-century Historical Sources”. *B* 58 (1988): 361-393.
- _____. “The Eye of the Beholder: Byzantine Imperial Women and their Public Image from Zoe Porphyrogenita to Euphrosyne Kamaterissa-Doukaina.” *B* 64 (1994): 19-39 and 261-313.
- Garsoian, N. “The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the Eleventh Century.” In *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times. The Dynastic periods from Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century, vol. 1*, ed. G. Hovannisian, 199-240. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997.
- Gaul, N. “Rising Elites and Institutionalization—*Ēthos/Mores*—‘Debts’ and Drafts: Three Concluding Steps Towards Comparing Networks of Learning in Byzantium and the ‘Latin’ West, c.1000–1200” in *Networks of Learning: Perspective on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c.1000–1200*. Byzantinistische Studien und Texte, 2014.
- Gavrilović, Z. “Divine Wisdom as part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology.” *Zograf* 11 (1980): 44-53.
- Gittings, E. A. “Elite Women.” In *Byzantine Women and Their World*, ed. L. Kalavrezou. New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Greenwood, T. “Armenian Neighbors (600-1045).” In *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard, 333-364. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Grégoire, H. “The Amorians and Macedonians, 842-1025.” In *The Cambridge Medieval History IV: the Byzantine Empire*. ed. J. Hussey, 105-192. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Gigineishvili, L. *The Platonic Theology of Ioane Petritsi*. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 4, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007.
- [Goiladze, V.] ვ. გოილაძე, ათასწლოვანი სვეტიცხოველი: ნარკვევები [One thousand years Old Svetitskhoveli: the Studies] Tbilisi, 2011.
- _____. “The Reflection of the Byzantine Oriental Policy in the Georgian Sources.” In *Byzantium in Georgian Sources*, eds., N. Makharadze and N. Lomouri, 394-405. Tbilisi: Logosi, 2010.
- Grierson, P. *Byzantine Coinage*. Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 1999.
- Hartmann, W and K. Pennington eds., *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.

Haldon, J. "Constantine or Justinian? Crisis and Identity in imperial propaganda in the seventh century" In *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, 95-108. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994.

Humphreys, M. *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Heather, P. and D. Moncur, *Politics, Philosophy and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001.

Hill, B. *Imperial Women in Byzantium, 1025–1204*. New York: Longman 1999.

_____. "A Vindication of the Rights of Women to Power by Anna Komnene". *BF* 23 (1996): 45-54.

_____. "Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Women." In *Alexios I Komnenos*. ed. M. Mullet and D. Smythe, 37-54. Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996.

_____. "The Ideal Imperial Komnenian Woman". *BF* 23 (1996): 7-18.

Herrin, J. *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*. Princeton University Press, 2005.

_____. "Female Space at the Byzantine Court". In *The Byzantine Court: Source of Power and Culture*. eds., A. Ödekan and N. Necipoğlu, 79-82. Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2013.

Hillenbrand, C. "the Career of Najm al-Dīn Īl-Ghāzī." *Der Islam* 58 (1981), 250–292;

Holmes, C. *Basil II and the Governance of Empire, 976–1025*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hussy, J. M. *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Jacoby, D. "Constantinople as Commercial Transit Center, Tenth to Mid-Fifteenth Century," *Trade in Byzantium. Papers from Third International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, eds., P. Magdalino and N. Necipoğlu, 193-210. Istanbul: Koc University Press, 2016.

James, L. *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*. London: Leicester University Press, 2001.

_____. "Goddess, Whore, and Wife of Slave? Will the Real Byzantine Empress Stand Up?" In *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. Proceedings of a conference Held at Queen's Collage, London in April 1995*.ed. A. Duggan, 123-140. Woodbridge: The Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1997.

Jeffreys, E. The *sebastokratorissa* Eirene as a Literary Patroness: The Monk Iakovos". *JÖB* 32, no. 3 (1982): 63-71.

_____. "The *sebastokratorissa* Irene as Patron". In *Female Founders in Byzantium and Beyond*. Eds., L. Theis, M. Mullett, and M. Grünbart, 177-194. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2013.

Jeffreys, M. "Constantine, Nephew of the Patriarch Keroularios, and His Good Friend Michael Psellos," in *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities*, eds., M. Jeffreys and M. Lauxtermann, 59-88. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

_____. "The Comnenian Prokypsis". *Parergon*, N.S. 5 (1987): 38-53.

_____. "Psellos and 'His Emperors': Fact, Fiction and Genre." In *History as Literature in Byzantium*. Ed. R. Macrides, 73-91. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.

[Kapanadze, D.] დ. კაპანაძე, ქართული ნუმისმატიკა [Georgian Numismatics] Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1969.

Kalavrezou, L. Trahoulia, N. and S. Sabar, "Critique of Emperor in Vatican Psalter gr. 752." *DOP* vol. 47 (1993): 195-219.

Kalavrezou, L. "Imperial Relations with Church in the Art of the Komnenians." In *Byzantium in the 12th Century: Canon Law, State, and Society*, ed., N. Oikonomides, 25-36. Athens, 1991.

_____. "Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 31 (1997): 305-325.

Kaldellis, A. *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A. D to the First Crusade*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

_____. *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and Reception of the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

_____. "Classical Scholarship in Twelfth-Century Byzantium" in *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*, eds., C. Barber and D. Jenkins, 1-43. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.

Kazhdan, A and A. Wharton Epstein. *Change in the Byzantine Culture of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1990.

[Kekelidze, K] კ. კეკელიძე, ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორია I [History of Georgian Literature I]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1960.

_____. ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორია II [History of Georgian Literature II]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1952.

_____. ეტიუდები ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორიიდან [Studies in Old Georgian Literature II] Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1945.

Khintibidze, E. *Shakespeare's Late Plays and Medieval Georgian Romance, The Man in Panther's Skin*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert Publisher, 2018.

_____. თანამედროვე რუსთველოლოგიური კვლევებით კომენტირებული ვეფხისტყაოსანი [Comments on the *Knight in the Panther's Skin* on the bases of Contemporary Rustvelological Researches] Tbilisi: Šota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, 2018.

Korobeinikov, D. "Raiders and Neighbours: the Turks", in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, ca. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard, 692-727. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

_____. "The King of the East and the West: the Seljuk Dynastic Concept and Titles in the Muslim and Christian Sources." In *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East*, eds., A. Peacock, and S. Nur Yildiz, 68-90. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

Kotsis, K. "Defining Female Authority in Eight Century Byzantium: The Numismatic Images of the Empress Irene (797–802)". *Journal of Late Antiquity*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring (2012): 185-215.

[Kopaliani, V.] ვ. კოპალიანი. საქართველოსა და ბიზანტიის პოლიტიკური ურთიერთობა [Georgian-Byzantine Political Relationship, 970-1070] Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1969.

Kusabu, H. "Comnenian Orthodoxy and Byzantine Heresiology in the Twelfth Century: A Study of *Panoplia Dogmatica* of Euthymios Zigabenos." Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, Illinois, 2013.

Laiou, A. "The Role of Women in Byzantine Society". *JÖB* 32. no. 1 (1981): 233-260.

_____. "Observation on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women". *BF* 9 (1985): 59-102.

Leonte, F. "Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos." Ph.D dissertation. Budapest: Central European University, 2012.

[Lolashvili, I] ი. ლოლაშვილი, არსენ იყალთოელი [Arsen of Iqalto: Life and Deeds]. Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1978.

_____. ი. ლოლაშვილი, იოანე პეტრიწი: სათნოებათა კიბე [Ioane Petritsi: 'The Leader of Virtues'] Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1980.

Lordkipanidze, M. *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*. Tbilisi: Ganatleba Publishers, 1987.

_____. ტაო-კლარჯეთის “ქართველთა სამეფო” [The “Kartvelian Kingdom” of Tao-Klarjeti. *Studies in Georgian History II*] ed. Š. Mesxia, 445-488. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1973.

_____. ქართული ფეოდალური მონარქიის შექმნა [The Making of the Georgian Feudal Monarchy. In *Studies in Georgian History II*] ed. Š. Mesxia, 507-530. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1973.

_____. საქართველოს შინაპოლიტიკური და საგარეო ვითარება Xს. 80-იანი წლებიდან XIს. 80-იან წლებამდე [The Internal and External Affairs of Georgia from the 980s to 1080s. *Studies in Georgian History III*] ed. Z. Anchabadze, 153-196. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1979.

[Lordkipanidze, M and Z. Papaskiri] მ. ლორთქიფანიძე და ზ. პაპასკირი, ერთიანი ქართული სახელმწიფოს წარმოქმნა და მისი დიპლომატიური უზრუნველყოფა [The Creation of the Georgian Monarchy and its Diplomacy. *History of Georgian Diplomacy I*] ed. R. Metreveli, 206-225. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1998. 222.

Nelson, R and P. Magdalino. “The Emperor in the Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century.” *BF* 8 (1982): 123-83.

Nicol, D. M. “Byzantine Political Thought.” In *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350 – 1450*, ed. J. H. Burns, 51-82. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Magdalino, P. *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

_____. “*Basileia*: The Idea of Monarchy in Byzantium, 600–1200”, In *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, eds., A. Kaldellis and N. Siniossoglou, 575-598. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

_____. “Aspects of Twelfth-Century *Kaiserkritik*”. *Speculum* 58 (1983): 326-346.

_____. “The Reform Edict of 1107.” in *Alexios I Komnenos. Papers of the second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14-16 April 1989*. eds., M. Mullett and D. Smythe, 199-218. Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 4.1. Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996.

_____. “Knowledge of Authority and Authorized History: The Imperial Intellectual Programme of Leo VI and Constantine VII,” In *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. P. Armstrong, 187-210. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

_____. “Constantinople=Byzantium.” In *A Companion to Byzantium*. ed. L. James, 43-54. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Marciniak, P. “Byzantine *Theatron* – A Place for Performance?” in *Theatron: Rhetorical Culture in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. ed. M. Grünbart, 277-286. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007.

Mergiali-Sahas, S. “Byzantine Emperor and Holy Relics: Use, and Misuse of Sanctity and Authority.” *JÖB* 51 (2001): 41-60.

Markopoulos, A. “Constantine the Great in Macedonian Historiography: Models and Approaches”. In *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th – 13th Centuries*. ed. P. Magdalino, 156-170. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994.

McClanan, A. L. *Representation of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire*. New York, 2002.

[Menabde, L] ლ. მენაბდე, ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის კერები II [The Georgian Literary Centers II] Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 1980.

[Metreveli, R.] რ. მეტრეველი. დავით აღმაშენებელი; თამარ მეფე. [David the Builder. Queen Tamar]. Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press, 2002.

Mullett, M. “Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal”. In *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, 259-267. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994.

_____. “The Imperial Vocabulary of Alexios I Komnenos.” In *Alexios I Komnenos. Papers of the second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14-16 April 1989*. eds., M. Mullett and D. Smythe, 359-397. Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 4.1. Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996.

Neville, L. *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Obolensky, D. *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 400–1453*. New York, Washington: Prager Publishers, 1971.

[Okropiridze, A.] ა. ოკროპირიძე, ქტიტორის გამოსახულება ბოჭორმის წმინდა გიორგის სახელობის ეკლესიაში [The Image of the donor in the Church of St George of Bochorma] *Literature and Art* 1 (1990): 235-251.

O’Meara, D. *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Panagiotis, A. A. “Public and Private Death in Psellos: Maria Skleraina and Styliane Psellaina”. *BZ* 101 no. 2 (2009): 555-607.

Papaioannou, S. *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Parani, M. “‘Rise Like Sun, the God inspired Kingship’: Light-symbolism and the Uses of Light in the Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonies.” In *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World*. ed. A. Lidov, 159-184. Moscow: Theoria, 2013.

Papaskiri, Z. “The Byzantine Commonwealth and the International status of the Georgian Political Units in the first half of the tenth century”, *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 5, issue 3–4, (2011): 126-144.

[Papaskiri, Z] ზ. პაპასკირი, ერთიანი ქართული ფეოდალური სახელმწიფოს წარმოქმნა და საქართველოს საგარეო-პოლიტიკური მდგომარეობის ზოგიერთი საკითხი [Emergence of United Georgian Feudal State and Some Questions of Georgia’s Foreign Policy] Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1990.

[Pachomov, E] Е. Пахомов, Монеты Грузии [Georgian Coins] Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1970.

[Pantsulaia, I] ი. ფანცულაია, ათონის ივერიის მონასტრის ქართულ ხელნაწერთა კატალოგი [Catalogue of the Georgian Manuscripts from the Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, vol. 4, Collection A] Tbilisi, 1954.

Peacock, A. *The Great Seljuk Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

_____. “Georgia and Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th Centuries.” *Anatolian Studies*, vol. 56 (2000): 127-146.

_____. “Nomadic Society and the Seljuq Campaigns in Caucasia.” *Iran & the Caucasus*, vol. 9, No. 2 (2005) 205-230.

Prinke, R. “Kata of Georgia, daughter of Davit IV the Builder as a wife of *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos,” *Foundations* 3 (6), (2011): 489-502;

Rayfield, D. *The Literature of Georgia: A History*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000.

_____. *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Rapp, C. “Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium.” In *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino, 175-197. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010.

_____. “A medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its Foreign Inhabitants”, in Alexander’s Revenge: Hellenistic Culture Through Centuries, eds., J. Asgeirsson, and N. Van Deusen, 153-171. Reykjavik: The University of Iceland Press, 2002.

Rapp, H. S. Jr. *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasian and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature*. London, New York: Routledge, 2016.

_____. “Caucasia and Byzantine Culture.” In *Byzantine Culture: Papers from the Conference ‘Byzantine Days of Istanbul,’ May 21-23, 2010*. ed. D. Sakel, 217-234. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014.

_____. *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 113 (2003).

_____. “Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium, and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past.” PhD dissertation. The University of Michigan, 1997.

_____. “Caucasia and the Second Byzantine Commonwealth,” <
https://www.academia.edu/15250940/Caucasia_and_the_Second_Byzantine_Commonwealth_Byzantinization_in_the_Context_of_Regional_Coherence_Working_paper_2012 > Last accessed: 25/10/2019.

_____. “From *Bumberazi* to *Basileus*: Writing Cultural Synthesis and Dynastic Change in Medieval Georgia (Kartli).” In *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*. ed. A. Eastmond, 101-116. Ashgate, 2001.

_____. “Sumbat Davitis-ze and the Vocabulary of Political Authority in the Era of Georgian Unification”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 120, No. 4 (Oct-Dec. 2000): 570-576.

Riedel, M. *Leo VI and Transformation of Byzantine Christian Identity: Writings of an Unexpected Emperor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Ringrose, K. *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium*. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Roilos, P. *Amphoteroglosia: A Poetic of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel*. Washington, DC: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Ryder, J. “Leo of Chalcedon. Conflicting Ecclesiastical Models in the Byzantine Eleventh Century.” In *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century. Being in between. Papers from the 45th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, Oxford, 24-26 March 2012*, ed. M. D. Lauxtermann, M. Whittow, 169-180. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

[Samushia, J] ჯ. სამუშია. ბაგრატ IV [Bagrat IV] Tbilisi: Palitra L, 2019.

Seibt, W. “Byzantine Imperialism against Georgia in the later 10th and 11th Centuries?” In *the Annual of Georgian Diplomacy*, vol. 16, ed. R. Metreveli, 103-114. Tbilisi: National Academy of Georgian Sciences, 2013.

_____. “Der Byzantinische Rangtitel Sebastos in vorkommenischer Zeit”, *TM* 16 (2010), 759-764.

Sivertsev, A. *Judaism and Imperial Eschatology in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Smythe, D. “Behind the Mask: Empress and Empire in Middle Byzantium”, in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan, 141-152. Woodbridge: The Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1997.

_____. “Alexios and the Heretics: the account of Anna Komnene’s Alexiad” in *Alexios I Komnenos*, ed. M. Mullett, and D. Smyth, 232-259. Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996.

Stafford, P. “Emma: The Power of the Queen in the Eleventh Century”, in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Duggan, 3-26. Woodbridge: The Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1997.

Strumgell, E. “The Representation of Augustae in Skylitzes”. In *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honor of Roger Scot*. Ed. J. Burke, 120-136. Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2006.

[Sxirtladze, Z] სამეფო კტიტორული პორტრეტი გარეჯის ნათლისმცემლის მონასტორს მთავარ ტაძარში [Royal donor portraits in the main church of Natlismcemeli Monastery in Gareji], *SabXel* (198): 95-110.

Tougher, S. F. “The Wisdom of Leo VI.” In *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino, 171-180. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994.

Trizio, M. “Trials of Philosophers and Theologians under the Komnenoi,” In *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*. eds., A. Kaldellis and N. Siniosoglou, 397-413. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

[Tavadze, L] ლ. თავაძე. მაგისტროსი საქართველოში და ქართველი მაგისტროსები ბიზანტიის იმპერიაში [Magistros in Georgia and the Georgian Magistroi in Byzantium] Tbilisi: Meridian Publishers, 2016.

Toumanoff, C. “The Bagratids of Iberia from the Eight to the Eleventh Centuries.” *Le Muséon* 74 (1961): 5-41.

_____. “Armenia and Georgia.” In *The Cambridge Medieval History IV: The Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. Hussey, 593-637. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.

_____. “On the Relationship Between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and Queen Tamar,” *Speculum* XV (1940): 299-312.

_____. “Caucasia and Byzantium,” *Tradition*, 27 (1971): 111-158

_____. “Introduction to Christian Caucasian History II: States and Dynasties of the Formative Period,” *Tradition*, 17 (1961): 1-106.

Tvaltvadze, D. “Some aspects of Georgian-Byzantine cultural relations according to the colophons of Georgian scholars in Antioch.” *Pro Georgia, Journal of Kartvelian Studies*, N2-2010, 45-57.