

**CAUCASIA AND THE SECOND BYZANTINE  
COMMONWEALTH:**

**BYZANTINIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL  
COHERENCE**

*An NCEEER Working Paper by*

**Stephen H. Rapp, Jr.**  
Independent Scholar



**National Council for Eurasian  
and East European Research**  
University of Washington  
Box 353650  
Seattle, WA 98195  
info@nceeer.org  
<http://www.nceeer.org/>



**TITLE VIII PROGRAM**

## **Project Information\***

**Principal Investigator:** Stephen H. Rapp, Jr.  
**NCEEER Contract Number:** 826-5g  
**Date:** January 19, 2012

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\* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.

## **Executive Summary**

This paper investigates the contribution of the cohesive yet diverse Caucasian region to the formation and life of the Second Byzantine Commonwealth, a multicultural configuration whose origin is typically associated with the so-called Macedonian dynasty of the Byzantine Empire (which, in fact, was likely of Armenian background). Whereas the various Armenias and Armenians played the leading role in the Caucasian milieu during the First Byzantine Commonwealth, the various Georgian polities were at the forefront during the Second Commonwealth. This phase witnessed the unprecedented “Byzantinization” of certain aspects of elite Caucasian society, beginning especially in the bi-cultural districts bordering eastern Anatolia and culminating under the pan-Caucasian empire of the Bagratids based in Georgia.

## Introduction

The Romano-Byzantine landscape was forever changed in the seventh century with Heraclius' defeat of Sasanian Iran, the Arabs' wresting of the Near East from the Byzantines, the removal of the Monophysite problem from Byzantium proper, and the massive devastation brought by this ferocious cycle of warfare.<sup>1</sup> Already at the very start of the century, there had been a surge in K'art'velian religious elites embracing Chalcedon and aligning themselves with Constantinople. The trend accelerated with the passage of Heraclius (r. 610-641) through K'art'li in 627; he even stood before the city of Tp'ilisi during its siege.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely in the extended era of Heraclius, extending back to Maurice (r. 582-602), that Georgian historians for the first time showed a sustained familiarity with Romano-Byzantine history and personalities.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the resistance the Byzantines' had encountered from the Iranian-leaning presiding prince Step'anoz I (ca. 590-627), the K'art'velian Guaramid princely dynasty, which had come to power shortly after the final suppression of the monarchy ca. 580, increasingly looked toward Constantinople for support.

Prior to Heraclius we observe several pivotal moments which had enhanced the possibility for stronger ties between the Romano-Byzantine Empire and Caucasia: the royal conversions of the fourth century; various military alliances, such as that established during the reign of the K'art'velian king Vaxtang Gorgasali (r. 447-522) and the eastern Georgians'

<sup>1</sup> Given his importance for Caucasia, it is not surprising that Heraclius features prominently in several Armenian, Georgian, and Albanian texts. The most important of these is Sebēos: *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, R.W. Thomson trans., James Howard-Johnston comm. with the assistance of Tim Greenwood (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999). For Georgian sources, see below. An important notice is also found in the Armenian-language *History of the Albanians* by Movsēs Dasxuranc'i (Kalankatuac'i), II.10-22 = *History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranöi*, C.J.F. Dowsett trans. (London: Oxford UP, 1961), 76-120.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen H. Rapp Jr., *Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium, and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past*, Ph.D. diss. (Ann Arbor, 1997), vol. 1, 486-492.

<sup>3</sup> In Georgian, see especially the ca. 800 untitled text by Ps.-Juansher (which is clearly based on older materials): *C'xorebay vaxtang gorgasalisa in K'art'lis e'xovreba*, S. Qauxch'ishvili ed., vol. 1 (T'bilisi: Saxlegami, 1955), esp. 223-228.

acceptance of the Christological compromise enshrined in Zeno's *Henotikon*;<sup>4</sup> and the spread of Chalcedonian Christology, especially among the eastern Georgians from the late sixth century. The Sasanians' defeat at the hands of Heraclius was soon eclipsed by their overthrow by the Arabs. Arab incursions into neighboring Armenia commenced in the early 640s; much of southern Caucasia was eventually conquered and organized into the province of Armīniya. The Arab conquest and colonization of southern Caucasia eventually brought economic prosperity, but they also resulted in substantial demographical changes, particularly the exodus of political and religious elites. We observe this trend following the massive uprising of Armenian *naxarars* in the 770s.<sup>5</sup> Following the Arab occupation of eastern Georgia and its former royal capital Tp'ilisi in the second half of the seventh century, significant numbers of K'art'velians migrated southwest to the districts of Tao/Tayk', Klarjet'i/Klarjk', and Shavshet'i/Shawshēt' and created a K'art'li-in-exile, a veritable "neo-K'art'li." Also home to a sizable community of Chalcedonian Armenians and more strongly influenced by Byzantium, Tao-Klarjet'i<sup>6</sup> rapidly congealed into the central hub of Georgian Christianity under the K'art'velian Bagratids. Meanwhile, the politically-fragmented Bagratid and Arcruni kingdoms of Armenia faced the brunt of Arab and Byzantine intervention and were eventually absorbed into the thematic system of the latter.<sup>7</sup> Tao-Klarjet'i was the crucible for the rejuvenation of Georgian political culture under the "Byzantinizing" Bagratid dynasty, the inheritors and relatives of the Byzantine-oriented

<sup>4</sup> Cyril Toumanoff, "Caucasia and Byzantine Studies," *Traditio* 12 (1956): 412.

<sup>5</sup> Aram Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, Nina G. Garsoïan trans. (Lisboa, 1976), 32-34.

<sup>6</sup> This bicultural region might also be called Tayk'-Klarjk'. In light of the focus below on the Georgian branch of the Bagratid dynasty ruling in this area, preference has been given to Tao-Klarjet'i.

<sup>7</sup> Garsoïan, "The Independent Kingdoms of Medieval Armenia" and "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the Eleventh Century," in *The Armenian People*, Hovannisian ed., vol. 1, 143-198.

Guaramid princes.<sup>8</sup> This revival culminated in the unified Georgian kingdom and the pan-Caucasian empire, which extended into Anatolia, northern Iran, and northern Caucasia, in the eleventh through early thirteenth century. Although direct ties with Byzantium had mostly been severed, many Caucasian Christians (particularly exiled K'art'velians in Tao-Klarjet'i) looked to Byzantium for support and, as a sign of their loyalty actively—but selectively—sought to “Byzantinize.” What is more, between the last Byzantino-Iranian war and the Arab conquest, Armenians had to come to terms with the stationing of Byzantine troops on what had once been the Arshakuni (Arsacid) kingdom. The unprecedented influx of Byzantine ideas and institutions was manifest in many spheres, including art and architecture. Christina Maranci, for example, has exposed the negotiation of Armenian and Byzantine concerns and symbolism in the design and ornamentation of seventh-century Armenian churches at Zuart'noc' (Zvartnots) and Mren.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of Arab expansion, the Byzantine Empire permanently lost many of its prized possessions in the Near East, including Syria and Palestine. Much of southern Caucasia was conquered and colonized by the Arabs, too. Over time, many of Byzantium's eastern territories and affiliates were absorbed into the Islamic Commonwealth. But internal divisions and regional particularism among the Arabs enabled Armenian and eastern Georgian elites to regroup, among whom the greatest success was achieved by the Bagratid dynasty. In the course of the ninth century, this pan-Caucasian house seized political authority and revived kingship in both Armenia and eastern Georgia: Ashot I “the Great” assumed the Armenian royal mantle perhaps already in the 860s-880s while his kinsman Adarnase IV restored the K'art'velian monarchy in

<sup>8</sup> The Sin.Geo.N-50 variant of the early medieval *Life of Iovane Zedazadneli* supplies otherwise unknown information about the genetic links between the K'art'velian Bagratid and Guaramid princely houses. A certain Latavri is described as the “mother of the Bagratids and *kuropalatianis*” (*deday bagratunianisay da kuropalatianisay*): *Le nouveau manuscrit géorgien sinaitique N Sin 50: édition en fac-similé*, Z. Aleksidzé intro. (J.-P. Mahé trans.), *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, vol. 586, *Subsidia*, vol. 108 (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 254<sub>2-13</sub> (text) and 33-39 (introduction).

<sup>9</sup> Christina Maranci, “Byzantium through Armenian Eyes: Cultural Appropriation and the Church of Zuart'noc',” *Gesta* 40/2 (2001): 105-124.

888. The Arab and Islamic peril, though variable, had by no means entirely dissipated. The Christian Bagratids naturally looked toward Byzantium to counterbalance the threat. The Armenian Ashot “the Great” therefore encouraged the convening in 862 of the Council of Shirakawan, the Armenian Bagratid capital, so as to address the Byzantines’ insistence—most immediately in the form of a letter from the Constantinopolitan patriarch Photios<sup>10</sup>—that the Armenian Church align itself with the christology of Chalcedon. The Armenians’ ambiguous response proved enough to placate both the Byzantines and the multi-confessional Christians of southern Caucasia.<sup>11</sup>

Besides tension this period witnessed the unprecedented drawing together of the Byzantine center and Christian Caucasia. In the ninth and tenth century, as the second Byzantine Commonwealth was maturing, the two chief points of contact were the deeply-fractured Armenian lands both within and adjacent to the empire and neo-K’art’li anchored in the bicultural districts of Tao/Tayk’ and Klarjet’i/Klarjk’. Diasporan Caucasians were scattered throughout the Byzantine Empire, however, and many of these maintained contact with the homeland. Tao-Klarjet’i’s stature ascended quickly in this period: it was not only a nexus for interregional trade but it also developed into the primary conduit of direct cross-cultural communication and exchange between the Georgians and Byzantine Greeks not to mention the Chalcedonian Armenians, who made up a sizeable part of the population. The importance of Tao-Klarjet’i’s major city, Artanuji, as the node connecting Transcaspian and Black Sea trade is demonstrated by the space Constantine VII Porphyrogennitos (r. 913-959) devotes to it in his *De*

<sup>10</sup> Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, *Arméniens et byzantins à l’époque de Photius: deux débats théologiques après le Triomphe de l’Orthodoxie*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 609, Subsidia, vol. 117 (Louvain: Peeters, 2004); and Tim Greenwood, “Failure of a Mission?: Photius and the Armenian Church,” *Le Muséon* 119/1-2 (2006): 123-167.

<sup>11</sup> Nina Garsoïan, “Independent Kingdoms,” 146-147.

*administrando imperio*.<sup>12</sup> Artanuji was actually one of several thriving, regional commercial centers—including the Armenian cities of Duin, Kars, and Ani and the former Albanian city of Bardha'a (Partaw)—driving an extensive economic system extending north into Rus', west into Byzantine Anatolia past the Black Sea port city of Trebizond and on to Constantinople, and south past Naxchawan (modern Naxçıvan, Rus. Nakhichevan) into the heart of Iran.<sup>13</sup> In a geographical sense, Caucasia was one of the epicenters of this brilliant microcosm of the final stage of the ancient Silk Roads whose overlapping mercantile zones connected the Mediterranean with the Far East.

Tao-Klarjet'i's efflorescence owed much to the rejuvenation of K'art'velian political and religious life. Even as K'art'li itself, and the former capitals Tp'ilisi and Mc'xet'a, remained under Arab control, the Bagratids resuscitated the monarchy and under the famous prince Davit' of Tao/Tayk' (d. 1000) the area prospered and, for better and worse, was brought fully into the view of Byzantine diplomacy during the reign of Basil II (r. 976-1025).<sup>14</sup> Davit' played a key role during the rebellions of Bardas Skleros and then Bardas Phokas between 976 and 989. In the first case, the 12,000 K'art'velian and Chalcedonian Armenian—"Iberian"<sup>15</sup>—soldiers provided by Davit' turned the tide in Basil's favor, for which he was entrusted with several Byzantine territories in far eastern Anatolia. But when his friend and potential relative<sup>16</sup> Bardas

<sup>12</sup> Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, cap. 46, Gy. Moravcsik ed. and R.J.H. Jenkins trans., *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, vol. 1, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967).

<sup>13</sup> Garsoïan, "Independent Kingdoms," 178.

<sup>14</sup> See Rapp, *Imagining History at the Crossroads*, vol. 2, 542-547. The chief Georgian source for this episode is a *vita* written at Ivērōn on Athos: Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *C'xorebay iovanesi da ep'f'vmesi*, caps. 4-6, in *Dzveli k'art'uli agiograf'iuli literaturis dzegebi* (hereafter: *DzK'ALDz*), Ilia Abuladze ed., vol. 2 (T'bilisi: Mec'niereba, 1967), 45-48, Eng. trans. in *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos: Two Eleventh-Century Hegoumenoi of Iviron*, Tamara Grdzeldidze trans. (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2009), 57-60.

<sup>15</sup> In contemporary Byzantine usage, "Iberian" routinely comprehended Georgians and Armenian Chalcedonians.

<sup>16</sup> Skylitzēs says that Phokas and Davit' had become friends when the former served as the *dux* of Chaldea: Skylitzēs, para. 9 (Basil and Constantine's reign), *Ioannis Skylitzae synopsis historiarum*, Ioannes Thurn ed., *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, vol. 5 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973), 326.



Phokas rebelled, Davit' found himself on the wrong side. As punishment, Davit' was compelled to make Basil II heir to his lands; after Davit''s death in 1000 these were eventually organized into the Byzantine "Theme of Iberia," which was subsequently occupied by the Seljuks and then reclaimed by the all-Georgian kingdom. While Basil imagined himself the inheritor of all Davit''s possessions (which the Byzantines lumped together with lands annexed from the Bagratids and Arcrunis in neighboring Armenia),<sup>17</sup> Davit' insisted that Basil only had the right to the lands bestowed after the insurrection of Bardas Phokas. The setback was temporary, for Davit' *kouropalatēs*, who did not have a son of his own, cunningly maneuvered to secure his place in Caucasian history. On the advice of his advisor Ivane Marushis-dze, he made his fellow Bagratid Bagrat of Abkhazia (Ap'xazet'i) heir to his original patrimony in Tao-Klarjet'i. Davit' was altogether aware of the fact that owing to his pedigree Bagrat would soon be in a position to call himself the first monarch of a united Georgian kingdom, a polity centered to the north: Bagrat could claim the western territory of Abkhazia through his mother, the eastern district of K'art'li—much of which then remaining under Arab rule—through his father Gurgen, the southwestern lands of Tao-Klarjet'i through his adopted father Davit' *kouropalatēs*. In 1008 Bagrat III was enthroned as the first all-Georgian king. He and his successors built a formidable pan-Caucasian empire which endured until the Mongol conquest of the thirteenth century. The Bagratid "Golden Age" witnessed the closest direct relationship of the whole of southern Caucasia and the Byzantine Empire, and despite Caucasia's almost total eclipse by the important Slavic peoples in Dimitri Obolensky fundamental study and notwithstanding their physical distance from Constantinople, southern Caucasia played a central role in the formation and life

<sup>17</sup> These Armenian districts were organized into the short-lived Byzantine themes of Tarōn and Vaspurakan. The locus of Armenian political and cultural life subsequently shifted to the west, first to Cappadocia and then to the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia in southeastern Anatolia, which, owing to its proximity to the Holy Land, entertained close relations with the Crusaders.

of the second Byzantine Commonwealth.<sup>18</sup>

### **Bagratid Political Culture**

In terms of political culture, the association of the Georgian lands and Byzantium was symbolized by the unprecedented proliferation of high Byzantine titles and honors among Caucasian elites.<sup>19</sup> During their conflicts with the Roman and Byzantine empires, the Sasanians of Iran had managed to cast their hegemony over most of southern Caucasia and over the course of 150 years abrogated indigenous kingship in Armenia Major (428) and K'art'li (ca. 580). As part of an effort to build stronger alliances along the eastern frontier, Maurice bestowed the coveted rank of *kouropalatēs* upon Guaram I (r. 588-ca. 590), the first of several “presiding princes” to administer *interregnum* eastern Georgia, in this case from Klarjet'i-Javaxet'i. Most famously, the Bagratid prince Davit' of Tao/Tayk' held the title *kouropalatēs*. A parallel development also unfolded in neighboring Armenia and in Albania and Lazika, too. Because of its peculiar melding of the highest civil and military authority, Cyril Toumanoff was convinced that the Caucasian “presiding princes” were the forerunners and perhaps even the earliest examples of the Byzantine exarchs and their exarchates. The Byzantine approach to governing western Caucasia may have even served as the model for the theme system.<sup>20</sup> Although the dignity of *kouropalatēs* had originally designated the official charged with the maintenance of the imperial palace, it came to be more directly associated with governance. Thus, Justinian I (r. 527-565) designated Justin, his nephew and heir, *kouropalatēs*. Until the end of the ninth century, *kouropalatoi* were usually drawn from the imperial family. Both the *Klētorologion* of

<sup>18</sup> Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe 500-1453* (New York, DC: Praeger, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> For Bagratid *intitulatio*, see Rapp, *Imagining History at the Crossroads*, vol. 2, 560-583.

<sup>20</sup> Cyril Toumanoff, “Caucasia and Byzantium,” *Traditio* 27 (1971): 118-121, 139-140.

Philotheos (899) and *The Book of Ceremonies* by Constantine Porphyrogennitos ranked *kouropalatēs* in third place after *caesar* and *nōbelissimos*.<sup>21</sup> The presence of the title among Caucasian “presiding princes” thus illustrates the importance of the region for Constantinople. It should be emphasized that despite their possession of high-ranking Byzantine titles, Caucasian “presiding princes” could owe their positions to either Byzantium or the Caliphate, or both.

K’art’velian and Armenian *kouropalatoi* were perhaps the earliest examples of individuals outside the Byzantine imperial family, and non-Greeks at that, to have been granted this esteemed status. From the Byzantine perspective, the title was always dependent upon the will of the emperor, and in practice this seems to have been in case early on. Thus, the Guaramid presiding prince Step’anoz I refused to acknowledge the overlordship of Heraclius and was not only deprived of the *kouropalatē* but was eventually murdered for the affront. When Guaram II recovered the principate for the Guaramids in 684, the head of the family again received the *kouropalatē* from Constantinople.<sup>22</sup> From this time, the heads of the ruling princely dynasty—whether they were Guaramids, Chosroids, Nersianids, or Bagratids—usually were designated *kouropalatēs*. The most important officials directly under him were also typically adorned with Byzantine titles, including *magistros*, *anthypatos*, and *hypatos*. But the dynastic presiding princes came to treat the title as their hereditary property in accordance with the Iranian-like social pattern of contemporary K’art’velian and Armenian society.<sup>23</sup> Such was also the case with the loftier titles assumed by the Bagratid monarchs of all-Georgia. Bagrat IV (r. 1027-1072) was *nōbelissimos* and then *sebastos*; Giorgi II (r. 1072-1089) was *kouropalatēs* (as Bagrat IV’s

<sup>21</sup> Philotheos, *Kletorologion*, in *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century*, J.B. Bury ed. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1911, repr. 1964), 22 and 33-35; Constantine VII, *On the Ceremonies*, cap. 54/45 = Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, *Le Livre des Cérémonies*, Albert Vogt trans., vol. 2 (Paris, 1939), 37-39.

<sup>22</sup> In the interim, Byzantium recognized members of the fallen Chosroid royal dynasty as presiding princes.

<sup>23</sup> There are several indications of Byzantine emperors confirming the K’art’velian *kouropalatē*, for which see Rapp, *Imagining History at the Crossroads*, vol. 2, 565.

heir), *nōbelissimos*, *sebastos*, and *caesar*; and the last Georgian Bagratid to claim Byzantine titles, Davit' II Aghmashenebeli (“the Builder,” r. 1089-1125), was *sebastos*, *panhypersebastos*,<sup>24</sup> and even *basileus* (“emperor”).<sup>25</sup> Confirmation of the imperial status claimed by Davit' II and his successors is found in the anonymous thirteenth-century *Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns*, which boldly describes itself as a *vasiloghrap'ia*, that is to say, a history of Bagratid *basileis*.<sup>26</sup> Though exaggerated, misappropriated, and treated as family property,<sup>27</sup> Byzantine titles are a marker of Byzantine political culture. Just as such titles proliferated in contemporary Byzantium, so too did they proliferate in the Bagratid kingdom and in the emergent pan-Caucasian Bagratid empire.

After usurping the extraordinary rank of *basileus*<sup>28</sup> and pushing ahead with the Bagratids' effort to secure equal status with the Byzantine emperors, Davit' II jettisoned such titles once and for all. Indeed, Byzantine titles were only one component—albeit an important component—of the Bagratid *intitulatio*. In Persian written sources and in the Arabic and sometimes Persian legends of their “Golden Age” coinage, the Bagratid monarchs are described as “king of kings”;<sup>29</sup> this reflects the application of the local term *mep'e't-me'pe*, “king of kings.” Indeed, the period also witnesses the deployment of other native court titles, including

<sup>24</sup> Davit' is styled *panhypersebastos* in the Cqarost'avi Gospels of the late eleventh century: E.A. Pakhomov, *Monety Gruzji* (T'bilisi: Mec'niereba, 1970, repr. of SPB, 1910), 71-74.

<sup>25</sup> Darejan Kldiashvili, “L'icône de Saint Georges du Mont Sinaï avec le portrait de Davit Aghmashenebeli,” *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes* 5 (1989): 107-128.

<sup>26</sup> *Istoriani da azmani sharavanded'ani*, in *Kart'lis c'xovreba*, S. Qauxch'ishvili ed., vol. 2 (T'bilisi: Sabchot'a sak'art'velo, 1959), 218. The use of the word *istoria* in the title is yet another sign of Byzantine influence; earlier royal histories were usually called *c'xorebay*, “life,” following hagiographical practice.

<sup>27</sup> Byzantine sources do not ascribe the lofty title of *basileus* to the Georgian kings. The historian Skylitzēs refers to King Giorgi I (r. 1014-1027) as the “*archon* of Abasgia” and to Bagrat IV as the “*archegos* of Iberia”: Basil and Constantine, para. 45 and Constantine Monomachos, para. 11.

<sup>28</sup> In this he was preceded by Symeon (r. 893-927) of Bulgaria, who styled himself “emperor” (*basileus*) as early as 918.

<sup>29</sup> Rapp, *Imagining History at the Crossroads*, vol. 2, 574-575.

*t'wt'mpqrobeli*, which might be translated “absolute ruler” or “autocrat.”<sup>30</sup> At the height of their power, the Georgian Bagratids also stressed their possession of *sharavandi*, the rays or corona of the Sun.<sup>31</sup> The source of such solar imagery is difficult to trace, for it was common throughout the Near East and even Byzantium. But *sharavandi* was not strictly Byzantine and, in any case, it would have resonated with the multicultural subjects of the Bagratid monarchs.

Beyond public badges, the ideological bases of Bagratid royal authority were not so obviously Byzantine. Although the “Byzantinizing” Bagratids appropriated select aspects of the Eusebian theory and other Byzantine conceptions of imperial rule, such as the emperor’s prerogative to summon ecumenical councils, the Georgian monarchs of this period embraced a rather different model of kingship. Already prior to their attainment of royal status, Armeno-K’art’velian Bagratids claimed descent from ancient Jews, as we see in the seventh-/eighth-century *History of the Armenians* by Movsēs Xorenac’i.<sup>32</sup> As Bagratid fortunes increased this claim morphed into a legend of direct biological descent from the ancient Hebrew King-Prophet David. The Byzantines were aware of the Bagratids’ Davidic claim; it is featured in the forty-fifth chapter of Constantine Porphyrogennitos’ *De administrando imperio*. In Georgian historiography, the Bagratids’ alleged Davidic pedigree is specially highlighted in the eleventh-century *Life and Tale of the Georgian Bagratids* by Sumbat Davit’is-dze.<sup>33</sup>

The conferral and appropriation of Byzantine titles and dignities has a number of parallels, especially in the realm of monumental painting. Antony Eastmond’s *Royal Imagery in*

<sup>30</sup> Stephen H. Rapp Jr., “Sumbat Davit’is-dze and the Vocabulary of Political Authority in the Era of Georgian Unification,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120/4 (2000): 570-576.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen H. Rapp Jr., “From *Bumberazji* to *Basileus*: Writing Cultural Synthesis and Dynastic Change in Medieval Georgia (K’art’li),” in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, Antony Eastmond ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 115-116.

<sup>32</sup> Movsēs Xorenac’i, I.22; cf. the local origin for the Bagratunis reported in *The Primary History of Armenia*.

<sup>33</sup> For a review of the documentary sources of the Bagratid “Golden Age” and their relevance to the prosopography of the Byzantine Commonwealth, see Stephen H. Rapp Jr., “Georgian Sources,” in *Byzantines and Crusaders in Non-Greek Sources 1025-1204*, Mary Whitby ed. (Oxford: The British Academy, 2007), 183-220.

*Medieval Georgia* catalogs, contextualizes, and analyzes extant portrayals of K'art'velian and Georgian Bagratids in Georgian churches. The cultural choices available to the Bagratids were many and varied, and yet by the mid-tenth century the Bagratids in Tao-Klarjet'i "were moving toward an imitation of Byzantine ceremonial practice... but it was not being slavishly or faithfully copied."<sup>34</sup> Thus, at the tenth-century Oshki monastery in Tao-Klarjet'i and "one of the largest and architecturally most complex buildings produced anywhere in the Byzantine and Eastern Christian worlds," K'art'velian rulers are adorned in Byzantine and Byzantine-like imperial dress for the first time in a visual source. Here the brothers Davit' *magistros* (d. 1000) and Bagrat (d. 966) wear *chlamydes* and *pendilia*, both important elements of Byzantine regalia.<sup>35</sup> Eastmond rightly cautions against a literal reading of such monuments, as the Bagratids often deployed Byzantine regalia in creative and rather un-Byzantine ways. In any event, at the end of the tenth century visual depictions of Georgian royal imagery were growing in complexity, and portrayals of local kings in Byzantine and Byzantine-like dress are common through the reign of Davit' II, who is sometimes depicted in Byzantine garb and at others in what we might call an indigenous "court" dress, such in the frescoes of Ateni Sioni near Gori.<sup>36</sup> We have already noted the final proliferation of Byzantine titles and then their complete abandonment under King Davit', and his visual representation in Bagratid "court" dress—also evident in images of Demetre I (r. 1125-1154) and Giorgi IV Lasha (r. 1213-1223)—independently confirms this transformation. And, yet, visual representations of Davit' II are heavily indebted to Byzantine imperial imagery. A full century later Giorgi III (r. 1156-1184) and his daughter Queen T'amar (r. 1184-1213) are depicted in Byzantine imperial dress in a

<sup>34</sup> Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1998), 28.

<sup>35</sup> Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 20-30 (p. 20 for the quotation).

<sup>36</sup> Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 39, 194.

fresco at the cave-monasteries of Vardzia. In this instance, however, the Byzantine emphasis may be an answer to questions raised about T'amar's legitimacy because of her gender.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the Georgian Bagratids were attempting to insert themselves more fully within the Byzantine Commonwealth, but they wanted to be seen as equals of the Byzantine emperors and, in the case of Davit' II and his successors, perhaps even as rulers of a new/another Byzantium based in southern Caucasia.<sup>38</sup>

### **Monastic Cultures and Networks in the Second Commonwealth**

The propagation of Byzantine dignities, regalia, and dress is a manifestation of the shift in noble and especially royal culture from an Iranian and Near Eastern orientation to one that was directed toward Constantinople as never before. Although much of eastern Georgia and some of the most important Christian K'art'velian sites (e.g., Mc'xet'a) had been occupied by the Arabs, the creation of a K'art'li-in-exile to the southwest in Tao-Klarjet'i had given the nascent K'art'velian "national" church a unique opportunity to develop with minimal political and outside interference. Simultaneously, the stronger Byzantine orientation of the K'art'velian Church that had commenced toward the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century intensified, in large measure because of Tao-Klarjet'i's close geographical proximity to the imperial Byzantine border. A network of powerful monasteries and churches thrived in and near the region, including such Ot'xt'a Eklesia, Opiza, Xandzt'a, Oshki, Dolisqana, Ishxani, Parxali, Bana, Axiza, Zarzma,<sup>39</sup> Tbet'i, and Shatberdi.<sup>40</sup> Many of these monastic establishments are

<sup>37</sup> Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 93-184.

<sup>38</sup> Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 70: "[Davit'] did not simply slavishly copy Byzantine models, but rather took over these models in order to use them to his own ends. He wanted to replace Byzantium rather than just copy it."

<sup>39</sup> For a later *vita* mentioning the foundation of Zarzma, see *C'xorebay da mok'alak'obay ghmerf'-sbemosilisa netarisa mamisa cb'uenisay serapionisi*, in *DzK'ALDz*, Ilia Abuladze ed., vol. 1 (T'bilisi, 1963), 319-347.

associated with St. Grigol Xandzt'eli (Gregory of Khandzta),<sup>41</sup> whose life and deeds are commemorated in a lengthy *vita* composed by Giorgi Merch'ule.<sup>42</sup> The consolidation of the exiled K'art'velian Church in Tao-Klarjet'i was of enormous historical importance. Among other things, it kick started the unification of the various Georgian peoples and lands on both sides of the Surami Mountains, which modern scholarship identifies as the geographical divide between the eastern and western Georgian lands. In many respects ecclesiastical union—or more precisely, expansion—anticipated the political unification first achieved by the Bagratids in the initial years of the eleventh century, from which time we can properly speak of a “Georgian” kingdom and a “Georgian” church.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the history of Christian Caucasia, diaspora communities scattered throughout the Byzantine Commonwealth—including but by no means limited to Jerusalem, Antioch, Mt. Sinai, and Constantinople—have served a vital function in the articulation, advancement, and preservation of the Armenian and Georgian culture. In the fifth century, Palestine emerged as an important center of Armenian and Georgian literary activity, and many Byzantine, or more properly, Christian texts were transmitted to Caucasia through such nodes. Some Caucasian ecclesiastics based in Palestine attained ecumenical importance and fame; the most well-known of these is Peter “the Iberian,” the fifth-century monk, bishop of Maiuma, and outspoken

<sup>40</sup> See Wachtang Djobadze, *Early Medieval Georgian Monasteries in Historic Tao, Klarjet'i, and Shanshet'i* (Stuttgart, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Korneli Kekelidze, *K'art'uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1 (T'bilisi: Sabchot'a sak'art'velo, 1960), 134-136; and Wachtang Djobadze, “A Brief Summary of the Monastery of St. George of Handzt'a,” *Oriens Christianus* 78 (1994): 145-176.

<sup>42</sup> Pavle Ingoroqva, *Giorgi merch'ule: k'art'veli mcerali meaf'e saukunisa* (T'bilisi, 1954); and Kekelidze, *K'art'uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 152-157.

<sup>43</sup> The adjective *k'art'veli* and its inanimate form *k'art'uli* could now be applied in the sense of either K'art'li or all-Georgia. On “Georgia” and associated toponyms, see: *Sak'art'velosa da k'art'velebis aghmnishvneli uc'xouri da k'art'uli terminologia*, Giorgi Paichadze ed. (T'bilisi: Mec'niereba, 1993).



opponent of Chalcedon.<sup>44</sup> For Georgian literature, the Monastery of St. Sabas—Mar Saba—about nine miles southeast of Jerusalem was of special importance. Martwri Sabacmideli (Martviri/Martyrios Sabatsmideli, “of St. Sabas”),<sup>45</sup> Seit’i,<sup>46</sup> Ilarion “the Iberian,” Basil Sabacmideli,<sup>47</sup> and other K’art’velian monks resided there as early as the sixth century. Eastern Georgians living there in the eighth century are likely to have interacted with John of Damascus and they would have been familiar with the monastery’s *typikon*, which was well-known throughout the Byzantine Commonwealth. Indeed, Grigol Xandzt’eli had a copy of the Sabaite *typikon* sent to him in the 820s.

The literary connection with St. Sabas and other Christian centers in the Holy Land was extremely important, for up to the tenth century the K’art’velian Church adhered to the Palestinian rite and liturgy, only substituting it for the Constantinopolitan during the heyday of Tao-Klarjet’i and the rise of the “Byzantinizing” Bagratid dynasty. Lectionaries, *polykephala*, *tropologia*, *horologia*, and other kinds of liturgical and ascetic literature were translated into Georgian by monks in the Holy Land.<sup>48</sup> Extant Georgian hymns and chants are a vivid testimony to the Jerusalemite connections of early Christian Georgia. Indeed, Georgian manuscripts now preserve many hymns and chants originating in Jerusalem—some have been traced directly to the Monastery of St. Sabas—which are otherwise lost.<sup>49</sup> St. Sabas’ was closely associated with the production of the earliest Georgian liturgical-homiletic compilations known

<sup>44</sup> Cornelia B. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Kekelidze, *K’art’uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 125-127.

<sup>46</sup> Kekelidze, *K’art’uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 133-134.

<sup>47</sup> Kekelidze, *K’art’uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 163.

<sup>48</sup> Tamila Mgaloblishvili, “The Georgian Sabaite (Sabatsminduri) Literary School and the Sabatsmindian Version of the Georgian *Mravaltavi* (Polykephalon),” in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Joseph Patrich ed. (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 230.

<sup>49</sup> For the connection of Georgian *mravalt’avis* and the Holy Land, see Mgaloblishvili, *Klarjuli mravalt’avi* and Michel van Esbroeck, *Les plus anciens homéliaires géorgiens: étude descriptive et historique* (Louvain: Université catholique de Louvain, 1975).

as *mravlt'avis* (*polykephala*).<sup>50</sup> Among the eastern Georgians, Sabas was a popular figure: his *vita* may have been translated into Georgian as early as the late sixth/early seventh century and no fewer than five churches and monasteries in Georgia are dedicated to him.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of the Byzantine Commonwealth is now widely accepted, yet many aspects of the internal dynamics of that expansive zone of cross-cultural interplay remain *terra incognita*. One potentially fruitful line of inquiry involves the Georgian monastic network which joined disparate points of the Byzantine Commonwealth, and after the Arab conquest, even points beyond. Medieval Georgian texts and colophons attest regular communications which linked Georgian ascetics throughout Eastern Christendom. Along with the physical movement of monks, we possess rich evidence for the mutual influence of literary schools and well as the large-scale transfer of Georgian manuscripts, many of which were transmitting translated Byzantine and ecumenical texts. As the first Byzantine Commonwealth was evolving into the second, Georgian ascetics based at St. Sabas, St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai in Egypt, the energetic monasteries of Tao-Klarjet'i, Ivērōn and other communities on Mt. Athos,<sup>52</sup> Antioch in Syria (especially in the vicinity of the Black Mountain),<sup>53</sup> and elsewhere engaged in a massive exchange of information, manuscripts, and personnel.<sup>54</sup> Judging from the extant manuscripts, the vast majority of texts circulating within this tri-continental network were

<sup>50</sup> Mgaloblishvili, "Georgian Sabaite Literary School," 229-233.

<sup>51</sup> George Gagoshidze, "Georgian Churches Dedicated to St. Sabas the Purified," in *Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church*, 363-365.

<sup>52</sup> Elene Metreveli, "Le rôle de l'Athos dans l'histoire de la culture géorgienne," *Bedi Kartlisa* 41 (1983): 17-26.

<sup>53</sup> Wachtang Djobadze, *Materials for the Study of Georgian Monasteries in the Western Environs of Antioch on the Orontes* (Louvain, 1976); and Elene Metreveli, "Shavi mt'is k'art'veli mcignobrebi," *P'ilologiur-istoriuli dziebani*, pt. 1, 87-108.

<sup>54</sup> The physical manuscripts, particularly when they contain colophons about their origin, constitute the most direct proof of this exchange. Thus, we know that the Georgian colony at St. Catherine's monastery on Mt. Sinai in Egypt possessed nearly all of the liturgical translations produced on Athos by Giorgi Mt'acmideli: *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai*, Zaza Alek'sidze, Mzek'ala Shanidze, Lili Xevsuriani, and Mixeil K'avt'aria eds. (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture/Mount Sinai Foundation, 2005), 370. Contemporary Georgian texts also allude to this exchange, e.g.: Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *C'xorebay iovanesi da ep'f'wmesi*, cap. 13, Abuladze ed., 61, for the translations of the Athonite father Ep't'wme being sent to Davit' of Tao/Tayk'.

translations and adaptations from Greek, not original Georgian works. This circumstance demonstrates the seriousness of the effort to bring the Georgian “national” church into line with its imperial counterpart. The tenth-century Shatberdi Codex (Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, S-1141) produced at scriptorium the Shatberdi monastery in Tao-Klarjet’i is typical. The majority of its texts are translations of Byzantine and early Christian literature, e.g., Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius of Cyprus, and Hippolytus of Rome. Only one text is an original Georgian composition: an early redaction of *Mok’c’evay k’art’lisay*, “The Conversion of K’art’li.”<sup>55</sup> Another, “On Faith,” is an extract from the Armenian historian Agat’angelos despite its attribution to Hippolytus.<sup>56</sup>

Numerous other contemporaneous manuscripts—primarily collections of translated ecclesiastical varia—produced by Georgians in the Georgian lands and throughout Eastern Christendom repeat this pattern. Several of these manuscripts transmit the earliest extant versions of the earliest original Georgian hagiographies, but in the spirit of the times they are embedded within corpora of translated church literature.<sup>57</sup> This broader phenomenon is also evident in the so-called “new” Sinai collection of Georgian manuscripts which were discovered in the aftermath of a fire in 1975.<sup>58</sup> More than half of these “new” manuscripts transmit liturgical texts while redactions of the Gospels, Psalters, and ecumenical saints’ lives are also represented.<sup>59</sup> When considered with the older collection of Georgian manuscripts from Mt. Sinai,<sup>60</sup> it

<sup>55</sup> *Shatberdis krebuli X sankumisa*, B. Gigineishvili and E. Giunashvili (T’bilisi: Mec’niereba, 1979).

<sup>56</sup> Another tenth-/eleventh-century version of this text is transmitted in the lowest layer of the Vienna Codex: *The Old Georgian Palimpsest: Codex Vindobonensis georgicus 2*, Jost Gippert ed. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), MS #10.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., National Centre of Manuscripts A-95, eleventh century, includes numerous translated works by authors such as Gregory Nazianzenos, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Neocaesarea, and Athanasius of Alexandria, and also the original Georgian *vitae* of Shushanik and Habo.

<sup>58</sup> *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine’s Monastery*, in English, Georgian, and Greek.

<sup>59</sup> *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine’s Monastery*, 364-365.

<sup>60</sup> For the older collection, see Gérard Garitte, *Catalogue des manuscrits géorgiens littéraires du Mont Sinai* (Louvain, 1956).

becomes clear that K'art'velians were resident at the monastery already in the sixth century and that Georgian activity there intensified in the ninth and tenth centuries, precisely during the zenith of Tao-Klarjet'i and the rise of the Bagratids. Moreover, the Sinai collection yields indisputable evidence for contacts between Georgians at St. Catherine's and at St. Sabas in Palestine: the homiliary known as the Sinai *mravalt'avi* (Sin.Geo.N.89) was produced at St. Sabas in 864 precisely for the monks of St. Catherine's monastery, in whose collection it remains to this day.<sup>61</sup> The St. Catherine's-St. Sabas' connection was bolstered at the end of the tenth century, when Georgian monks fled Jerusalem under Islamic pressure.<sup>62</sup> Among the refugees was well-known hymnographer Ioane-Zosime.<sup>63</sup> During his residence at St. Sabas, Zosime worked extensively with hymns and chants. His *iadgari* dated 956 is the oldest extant calendar of the Georgian Church.<sup>64</sup> Other Georgian hymnographers were active in this period, including Ioane Minch'xi (John Minchkhvi), Mik'ael Modrekili, and back in Tao-Klarjet'i, Ioane Mtbevari (John of Tbet'i). All of these men were intimately acquainted with Byzantine ecclesiastical literature, yet none of them slavishly imitated Byzantine hymns and instead contributed to the building of a distinctive Georgian hymnographic tradition within the parameters of Orthodox Christianity.

### **The Textual “Byzantinization” of Georgia**

The background of the famous Georgian Athonite Giorgi Mt'acmideli epitomizes the wide-ranging cross-cultural contacts of the period. Giorgi's *vita* emphasizes that he was “by race

<sup>61</sup> *Sinuri mravalt'avi 864 clisa*, Akaki Shanidze ed. (T'bilisi: T'bilisis stalinis saxelobis saxelmcip'o universitetis gamomc'emloba, 1959); *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery*, 357, and 432-433.

<sup>62</sup> *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery*, 367-368.

<sup>63</sup> Kekelidze, *K'art'uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 164-170.

<sup>64</sup> *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)*, Gérard Garitte ed. (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1958).

a K'art'velian" (*natesavit' k'art'veli*), having been born in the southwestern Georgian region of Same'xe.<sup>65</sup> Giorgi's father, Iakob, had been in the service of the K'art'velian king Giorgi I (r. 1014-1027) while his two elder brothers became monks and entered the Georgian monastery of Xaxuli (Khakhuli) in Tao-Klarjet'i. Eventually Giorgi's training was entrusted to the monk Hilarion of Tuala (Ilarion T'ualoeli), who resided in the vicinity of the Black Mountain near Antioch, an area which attracted ascetics from across the Christian Near East.<sup>66</sup> At age 25, as Hilarion was on his deathbed, Giorgi formally took monastic vows and was determined to live as a "stranger" and to go on pilgrimage. On the Black Mountain in Syria he climbed Mt. Mirabilis—the Wondrous Mountain, home to the monastery of St. Symeon the Younger (d. 592) and at this time a magnet for Caucasian and other ascetics—and kissed the urn of St. Symeon the Wonderworker. On the Wondrous Mountain, Giorgi also acquired a new spiritual advisor, the stylite George the Recluse. George was impressed with the potential of his pupil and desired that the young Giorgi should complete the translation work started by the Georgian Athonite Ep't'wme. Having received additional training from his mentor at the Romana monastery near Antioch, Giorgi eventually made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and then traveled to Athos where he positioned himself as successor of the deceased Ep't'wme. First he set his sights upon a complete translation of the Byzantine *synaxarion* and later came to serve as the *hēgoumenos* of Ivērōn.

Direct Byzantine, especially Constantinopolitan, influences upon medieval Caucasian Christianity—which are most evident in the translations of Byzantine literature into Georgian—reached their apex with the Georgian monks on Mt. Athos, particularly at the Ivērōn monastery

<sup>65</sup> For this and the episodes that follow, see Giorgi Mc'ire, *Life of Giorgi Mf'acmideli*, caps. 2-10 = *DzK'ALDz*, Abuladze ed., vol. 2, 109-128.

<sup>66</sup> Armenian sources of the eleventh through the thirteenth century, including Aristakēs Lastivertc'i, Matthew of Edessa, and Samuēl Anec'i, provide valuable information about Armenian monasteries on the Black Mountain.

where Giorgi tirelessly worked. Spurred by the flourishing of Tao-Klarjet'i and the rise of a united Georgian kingdom under the Bagratid dynasty, Ivērōn eclipsed even the monasteries of southwestern Georgia in terms of its literary importance and output. In this regard it was even more important than Jerusalem had been in late antiquity. The literary activities of the Georgian Athonites—who were individually called Mt'acmideli, “of the Holy Mountain”—are first and foremost a testimony to Georgia's unprecedented ties to the core of the Byzantine Empire. These ascetics surpassed the Bagratid dynasty in their effort to “Byzantinize” the Georgian Church while, at the same time, they strove to preserve its individuality and autonomy. Even the relatively few original Georgian works composed by the Athonite fathers feature Byzantium and especially Byzantino-Georgian relations, a circumstance that is particularly evident in two *vitae* celebrating the memory of the most renowned and productive early Georgian Athonites: Giorgi Mt'acmideli's *Life of Iovane and Ep't'wme* and Giorgi Mc'ire's aforementioned *Life of Giorgi Mt'acmideli*.<sup>67</sup>

Ivērōn's very existence owed much to the increasing relationship between the emergent all-Georgian kingdom and the Empire. Following the support lent by the *kouropalatēs* Davit' of Tao to Basil II during the rebellion of Bardas Skleros in 976-979, the K'art'velian general T'ornik—who been lured out his retirement an Athonite monk by the young co-emperors Basil and Constantine, sons of Romanos II (r. 959-963)—established an independent Georgian monastery, in Greek called Ivērōn (Iviron, “of the Iberians”), with funds and lands awarded by Emperor Basil.<sup>68</sup> Iovane, Ivērōn's first *hēgoumenos*, was followed by his son Ep't'wme (Euthymius, b. ca. 955), one of the most famous of the Georgian Athonites. Earlier in his

<sup>67</sup> Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *C'xorebay iovanesi da ep't'wmesi*, Abuladze ed., 38-100, and Giorgi Mc'ire, *C'xorebay giorgi mt'acmidelisay*, Abuladze ed., 101-207. For complete English renderings, see *Georgian Monks on Mount Athos*, Grdzeldidze trans. For the literary activities of Giorgi Mc'ire, see Kekelidze, *K'art'uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 247-250.

<sup>68</sup> Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *C'xorebay iovanesi da ep't'wmesi*, cap. 7, Abuladze ed., 48-50, Grdzeldidze trans., 59-60.

monastic career, Iovane had entered the lavra at Ot'xt'a Eklesia in his native Tao-Klarjet'i and subsequently moved to the Anatolian monastery of Mt. Olympus in Bithynia, today known as Uludağ. At the time, the leader of Tao-Klarjeti, Davit' *kouropalatēs*, sent children of prominent nobles to the imperial court at Constantinople as hostages; among them was Iovane's son, Ep't'wme.<sup>69</sup> After his release, he resided at the monastery of Mt. Olympus in Anatolia before moving to the lavra of Athanasius the Great on Mt. Athos around the year 985. When Ivērōn opened in 1003, Ep't'wme transferred there and succeeded his father as *hēgoumenos* in 1005. He simultaneously served as *epitropos* of the Great Lavra of Athos.

By any standards, the literary output of the Georgian Athonites in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was prodigious, this continuing a trend had been nourished by the political, cultural, and economic consolidation of Tao-Klarjet'i in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>70</sup> Ep't'wme, Giorgi, and their compatriots labored to redefine and reform the Georgian “national” church with the goal of maintaining its autocephaly and distinctiveness while bringing it into closer alignment with the Imperial Church, the very core of the Commonwealth. Sharp religious and political competition between the Byzantines and Georgians also fueled the effort. The shift from the Jerusalemite liturgy of St. James to that of Constantinople and the obsession with heresy which rapidly grew after the schism with the Armenians back in the seventh century proved an even stronger stimulus for the massive translation of Byzantine and Christian material not previously available in Georgia. In addition, works that had already been translated into

<sup>69</sup> Giorgi Mt'acmideli, *C'xorebay iovanesi da ep't'wmesi*, cap. 2, Abuladze ed., 42-44, Grdzeldze trans., 55-56.

<sup>70</sup> In addition to such texts, numerous documents pertaining to the administration of the monastery are extant: *Actes d'Iviron*, Jacques Lefort, Nicolas Oikonomidès, and Denise Papachryssanthou eds. with Héléne Métrévéli (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1985-1990).

Georgian—including the Gospels<sup>71</sup>—were scrutinized for their accuracy. The most important of these texts were retranslated wholesale. In earlier centuries, Byzantine texts had usually been rendered into Georgian in a relatively free-style manner. But the Georgian Athonites endeavored to improve translations from Greek both in terms of their precision and sheer numbers. In the case of the New Testament, because Ep't'wme's superior rendering still exhibited traces of the received "free-style" method, his fellow Athonite Giorgi translated it yet again. Among the plethora of Byzantine ecclesiastical texts of ecumenical importance—including liturgical, exegetical, homiletical, polemical, hagiographical, and apocryphal literature—rendered into Greek by Ep't'wme are works by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzenos, Gregory of Nyssa, Anastasios of Alexandria, John Klimakos, John of Damascus, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor,<sup>72</sup> Michael Synkellos, and Andrew of Crete.<sup>73</sup> Giorgi carried on the far-reaching work of Ep't'wme, taking even greater care to achieve precision in translation although not completely abandoning all aspects of free-form translation. His numerous translations include works by Byzantine authors such as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Wonderworker, John of Damascus, Athanasios of Alexandria, Theodore the Studite, and the Constantinopolitan patriarch Photios.<sup>74</sup>

The approach nurtured at Ivērōn was perpetuated and further developed by Georgian ecclesiastics throughout the Commonwealth, including Ep'rem Mc'ire (Ephrem Mtsire, d. *ante* 1105) in Syria as well as Arsen Iqalt'oeli (Arsenius of Iqalto) and Ioane Petrici (John Petritsi), both of whom were educated at the Constantinople Academy in Constantinople. Ep'rem pushed

<sup>71</sup> E.g.: the Adishi Gospels (897), Jruchi Gospels (936), Parxali Gospels (973), Oshkuri/Athos (978), Urbnisi Gospels (eleventh century), Jerusalem (eleventh century), and Palestine Gospels (eleventh century).

<sup>72</sup> See now *Maximus the Confessor and Georgia*, T'amila Mgaloblishvili and Lela Khoperia eds. (London: Bennett & Bloom, 2009). For Maximus' works translated by Ep't'wme, see pp. 27-30.

<sup>73</sup> Kekelidze, *K'arf' nli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 184-213 ("Ek'vit'ime Mt'acmideli").

<sup>74</sup> Kekelidze, *K'arf' nli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 213-234.



the Athonite method to its logical conclusion: he emphasized the necessity of rendering translations from the original text and of translating the Greek as precisely and literally as possible, with commentaries explaining troublesome passages. Thus, he undertook a new translation of Gregory the Theologian's homilies directly from the Greek since the existing Georgian version, attempted by Grigol Oshkeli ("of Oshki"),<sup>75</sup> was based on an Armenian translation. Ep'rem Mc'ire reworked and sometimes retranslated texts originally rendered into Georgian from Greek by the Athonites Ep't'wme and Giorgi. Ep'rem's output was every bit as deep and broad as that of his Athonite compatriots. Among the Byzantine authors whose works were translated by Ep'rem Mc'ire are: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzenos, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, Theodoret of Cyrus, George of Nikomedia, and Sophronios of Jerusalem.

It should briefly be noted that the "Byzantinization" of texts and textual culture in Georgia has a parallel in visual culture. While an influx of Byzantine styles and motifs is undeniably evident in "Golden Age" Georgian ecclesiastical art, the strongest artistic manifestation of the rising tide of Byzantine culture is evident in manuscript miniatures, which most commonly occur within ecclesiastical texts up to the fifteenth century. Sirarpie der Nersessian observed that "[a] complete change occurs in the eleventh century [when] Georgian miniatures can hardly be distinguished from the Byzantine."<sup>76</sup> While this assessment is generally correct, Elene Machavariani reminds us that "Georgian masters were never blind followers of foreign originals; they always stamped their work with distinctive national

<sup>75</sup> Kekelidze, *K'arf uli literaturis istoria*, vol. 1, 170-171.

<sup>76</sup> Robert P. Blake and Sirarpie der Nersessian, "The Gospels of Bert'ay: An Old-Georgian MS. of the Tenth Century," repr. in der Nersessian, *Études Byzantines et arméniennes*, vol. 1 (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1973), 222.

features.”<sup>77</sup>

### **The Non-Monastic Diaspora: Mary “of Alania” and Gregory Pakourianos**

Georgian monks residing in imperial and formerly imperial domains were not the only conduit through which Byzantine ecclesiastical concepts and texts were transmitted during the Bagratid “Golden Age.” Another point of contact attested in Caucasian and Byzantine sources are the numerous “diplomatic marriages,” particularly those involving the Georgian Bagratid and imperial courts. For example, the first wife of King Bagrat IV was the Byzantine princess Helena Argyropoulaina, a niece of Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028-1034). The most famous of these “diplomatic marriages” involves Bagrat’s daughter Mart’a, who is called Mary “of Alania” in Byzantine sources. It is not entirely clear why Mary was not called “the Iberian,” although her mother, Borena, was the daughter of the chieftain of the Ovisi-Alanians.<sup>78</sup> Mary was not only just the second non-Greek to ascend to the Byzantine throne in over three centuries, but she was also the wife of two emperors: Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071-1078), with whom she is pictured in an ornate enamel on the Xaxuli (Khakhuli) triptych, now in the collection of the Georgian National Museum (T’bilisi), and Nikēphoros III Botaneiatēs (r. 1078-1081). Following Mary, high-level Georgian marriages in Byzantium were relatively common: for example, Theodore Gabras, the grand *droungarios* Constantine, and two sons of Anna Komnēnē married prominent Georgian women.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the barriers posed by her foreign extraction and gender, Mary accumulated a

<sup>77</sup> Helen Machavariani, “The Art of Georgian Manuscripts,” in *National Treasures of Georgia*, O.Z. Soltes ed. (London, 1999), 120.

<sup>78</sup> For Mary “of Alania” and an overview of the sources and scholarship devoted to her, see Lynda Garland and Stephen H. Rapp Jr., “Mary ‘of Alania’: Woman and Empress between Two Worlds,” in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800-1200*, Garland ed. (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 91-123.

<sup>79</sup> Garland and Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania,’” 120.

great deal of power, and although her ability to promote Georgian culture in Constantinople was severely restricted, she managed to do so through her estates outside the capital, especially Petritzos in Bulgaria. With Mary's financial support, the Byzantine general and *megas domestikos* of the West Gregory Pakourianos established the Petritzonissa—Petriconi (Petritsoni) in Georgian—monastery, in 1083.<sup>80</sup> The background of Pakourianos (Bakuriani in Georgian, Bakoulean in Armenian) has aroused heated debate, especially as modern Georgians and Armenians try to claim him for the glorious histories of their nations. The *typikon* he drew up for Petriconi was in Greek and Georgian, and he signed it in “Armenian characters” while referring to himself in Greek as “Iberian.” Given that the members of the Pakourianos house are first attested as members of the army of Davit' of Tao/Tayk' and because the region under Davit''s jurisdiction was heavily populated by Chalcedonian Armenians, it is possible that “Iberian” in this context—as was not uncommon in contemporaneous Byzantine sources—indicates “Chalcedonian Armenian.” In any event, the most reasonable interpretation is to identify the Pakourianoι as Armeno-Georgian, as so many families of Tao-Klarjet'i and eastern Anatolia were.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Pakourianos clearly favored Georgians and Chalcedonian Armenians. In his *typikon* of December 1083, he prohibited the admittance of “Roman”—i.e., Greek—monks and priests because of the troubles they would cause the Caucasians. The cosmopolitan condition of the Byzantine Commonwealth was not always a happy one, and Pakourianos was surely aware of the well-known rivalries between the Greeks and Georgians on Mt. Athos. In relating these tensions, Giorgi Mt'acmideli insists that the Greeks “applied all their effort toward the extinction

<sup>80</sup> Garland and Rapp, “Mary 'of Alania,” 107.

<sup>81</sup> Nina G. Garsoïan, “Pakourianos,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Alexander P. Kazhdan ed., vol. 3 (New York—Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 1553; and *eadem*, “The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire,” in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou eds. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks/Harvard UP, 1998), 88-94.

of the Georgians in this monastery.”<sup>82</sup>

Notwithstanding the challenges they faced owing to their Caucasian origin, Mary “of Alania” and Gregory Pakourianos exploited their extraordinary positions within the imperial leadership to sponsor Georgian and, in the latter’s case, Chalcedonian Armenian culture, particularly monastic activity pertaining to literature. Mary and Gregory both lent financial support to Georgian Athonites at Ivērōn.<sup>83</sup> Mary sponsored a number of Byzantine authors, including Theophylakt of Ohrid and Eustratios of Nicaea, the latter of whom wrote a multidisciplinary Aristotelian treatise in her honor.<sup>84</sup> She also was a patron of the famous philosopher John Italos, who, in a brilliant display of the Byzantine-oriented Georgian “national” church and Bagratid dynasty, wrote a short essay to “the Abasgian grammarian” who himself had corrected two of Italos’ grammatical errors.<sup>85</sup> There can be little doubt that Italos is referring to the Georgian neo-Platonist Ioane Petrici, a student of Michael Psellos and the translator of several Greek philosophical works, including texts by Nemesios, Proclus, and Aristotle.

All of this took place, it should be remembered, as the Georgian Bagratids assembled the largest sovereign indigenous polity that has ever existed across the long history of Caucasia. This was not merely a Georgian achievement, for many peoples lent their assistance, including Armenians<sup>86</sup> and resettled Cumani-Qipchaq mercenaries.<sup>87</sup> The Bagratids imagined themselves as a radical break from the K’art’velian, Georgian, and Caucasian past. According to their

<sup>82</sup> Giorgi Mt’acmideli, *C’xorebay iovanesi da ep’f’wmesi*, caps. 24-25, Abuladze ed., 92-99, Grdzeldidze trans., 89-94, quote from cap. 25. For a similar episode, see Giorgi Mc’ire, *C’xorebay giorgi mt’acmidelisay*, cap. 17, Abuladze ed., 149-150.

<sup>83</sup> Garland and Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania,’” 107, 133.

<sup>84</sup> Garland and Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania,’” 110-111.

<sup>85</sup> Garland and Rapp, “Mary ‘of Alania,’” 111-112.

<sup>86</sup> Most notable in this regard are members of the Armenized Kurdish Zak’arean/Mq’argrdzeli (Mxargrdzeli, Mkhargrdzeli) house who served under Giorgi III and T’amar.

<sup>87</sup> P.B. Golden, “Cumanica I: The Qipčaqs in Georgia,” *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi* 4 (1984): 45-87.

eleventh-century court historian and propagandist Sumbat Davit'is-dze, they deemed themselves to be unique and without parallel. Thus, on the one hand, the Bagratids strove to insert the whole of Christian Caucasia firmly and irrevocably within the Byzantine Commonwealth. In so doing, the Bagratids and their supporters consciously adapted many aspects of Byzantine political and ecclesiastical culture in order to enhance their authority both within Caucasia and throughout western Eurasia. The depiction of the monarchs Giorgi III and his daughter T'amar in full imperial regalia in a fresco at Vardzia is a brilliant display of this development. On the other hand, although the Tao-Klarjet'ian Bagratids first sought a respectable place within the Byzantine Commonwealth, by the end of the tenth century they were seeking equality. Then, a century later in the reign of Davit' II, the supremely confident Bagratids came to see themselves as surpassing the Byzantine Empire, at least within the purview of Caucasia and the Near East. The Bagratids of the so-called Golden Age imagined themselves as governing a parallel Byzantium in Georgian and Caucasian colors. Thus, the Gelat'i academy founded by Davit' II near K'ut'aisi (K'ut'at'isi) in western Georgia was not only inspired by but actually functioned like one of the imperial foundations of Constantinople.<sup>88</sup> The aforementioned Ioane Petrici was among the scholars attracted to Gelat'i. During the apex of Bagratid power, the all-Georgian *katholikos* assumed the lofty title of patriarch (*patriark'i*), thus claiming a place at the table alongside the original pentarchs and carrying to its logical conclusion the apostolic tradition of Andrew which earlier had been imported to Georgia from Byzantium.<sup>89</sup> Not long before the dismemberment of the pan-Caucasian empire and all-Georgian kingdom by the Mongols, the Bagratids were presented with an opportunity to act as *basileis* on the world stage. Following the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by the Fourth Crusade, three Byzantine successor states were

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia*, 58-59.

<sup>89</sup> Rapp, *Imagining History at the Crossroads*, vol. 2, 635-638.

established, the most famous of which was based at Nicaea. The brothers Alexios and David, grandsons of Emperor Andronikos I Komnēnos (r. 1183-1185), made their way to Georgia where their relative,<sup>90</sup> Queen T'amar, lent support which guaranteed the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond in nearby Pontos. With T'amar's aid the city was built up from the meager fortifications which existed there at the beginning of the thirteenth century;<sup>91</sup> "diplomatic marriage" links between the Georgian Bagratids and Grand Komnēni, commercial activity, and cultural exchanges solidified the bond. Georgia could now claim to have played a role in preventing the destruction of Byzantium. In an ironic twist, the Empire of Trebizond outlived Constantinople itself, falling to Ottoman forces in autumn 1461.

## **Epilogue**

Between the tenth century and the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and the Mongol conquest of Caucasia a few decades later, Tao-Klarjet'i, the all-Georgian kingdom, and the pan-Caucasian empire based in Georgia entertained unprecedented contacts with the Byzantine core. More than at any other time in Caucasian history, Byzantine concepts and models, particularly ecclesiastical ones, flowed into the heart of the isthmus. The "Byzantinizing" Georgian "national" church and the Bagratid royal dynasty did not slavishly adopt Byzantine culture; rather, it was creatively and deliberately adapted to the local environment.

Their Christian affiliation and wide-ranging associations with the Byzantine Empire provided a window onto Byzantine Greek culture, yet Caucasia's traditional orientation to the

<sup>90</sup> Andronikos' first wife was a Georgian: Cyril Toumanoff, "On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Thamar," *Speculum* 15/3 (1940): 299-312.

<sup>91</sup> A.A. Vasiliev, "The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1222)," *Speculum* 11-1 (1936): 3-37.

Near and Middle East, especially Iran, remained intact even at the height of Bagratid power in the twelfth century. At the very moment when the Georgian Church looked and felt the most Byzantine and when the Bagratid monarchs imagined themselves to be independent Byzantine-like rulers who were every bit the equal of the *basileis* in Constantinople, Iranian, Turkic, and Arabic influences and connections remained strong. A brilliant manifestation of medieval Georgia's enduring connections with the Near and Middle East is *Vep'xistqaosani*, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, an epic poem attributed to Shot'a Rust'aveli. The most famous literary work written in Georgian, Rust'aveli's epic was likely written at the very apex of Bagratid authority in the late twelfth or thirteenth century. By tradition, the poet was a contemporary of Queen T'amar (r. 1184-1213). Although Bagratid Georgia was undoubtedly a Christian kingdom, *Vep'xistqaosani* is first and foremost an Iranian epic. It is, as Donald Rayfield observes, fundamentally a contribution to the "Persian canon."<sup>92</sup> In the prologue, which might have been added later, Rust'aveli claims authorship and describes his poem as a "Persian tale, now done into Georgian..."<sup>93</sup> *Vep'xistqaosani*'s creator was well read and exhibits a familiarity with ecclesiastical literature, including Ep'rem Mc'ire's *On Divine Names*. And yet he espoused a remarkable religious plurality and cosmopolitanism, recalling to some extent the conditions in late antique Caucasia.<sup>94</sup> While there are some explicit allusions to Christianity, including a reference to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Rust'aveli never mentions Christ, the Trinity, or the Virgin Mary.<sup>95</sup> Rust'aveli's Iranian influences likely included the *Visramiani*, *Nezāmi-ye*

<sup>92</sup> Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 80.

<sup>93</sup> Shot'a Rust'aveli, *Vep'xistqaosani*, quatr. 15-16.

<sup>94</sup> However, Rust'aveli was not without prejudice, as is evidenced by his mocking of Islam (which, it should be noted, is infrequently mentioned), e.g., quatr. 339 and 1144.

<sup>95</sup> Rayfield, *Literature of Georgia*, 74-75.

Ganjavi's *Leila and Majnun*, and, of course, Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*.<sup>96</sup> And while there are unmistakable traces of Byzantine influence, including neo-Platonic ideas, *Vep'xistqaosani* belongs fundamentally to the Middle Eastern and especially Iranian genre of epic poetry.

Another indication of Caucasia's enduring relationship with the Near and Middle East during the Second Byzantine Commonwealth is the coinage minted by the Bagratids in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Given the dynasty's appropriation of Byzantine models, we might expect its coinage to mimic that struck in the empire. But this is not the case. With few exceptions, coins minted during the Bagratid "Golden Age" are Islamic in type.<sup>97</sup> And while Greek legends do not appear on contemporary Georgian coins, Arabic and to a lesser extent Persian legends are common, and these frequently name the reigning Bagratid monarch. Typical of this trend is a series of coins minted in the name of Queen T'amar in 1210, whose Arabic legend reads: "The great queen || Glory of the world and faith || T'amar, daughter of Giorgi || Champion of the Messiah..."<sup>98</sup> The annexation of lands in eastern and southern Caucasia containing large numbers of Muslims as well as the thriving economic relationship between Georgia and the Middle East probably explain this phenomenon. On another series of coins issued under T'amar, this time in 1200, the customary Arabic inscription on the reverse is joined on the obverse by the Bagratid royal emblem, which is likely a "Georgianized" rendition of the Byzantine *labarum* which was perhaps introduced in part through a Rus'ian intermediary, namely T'amar's first husband, Iurii Bogoliubskii.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Rayfield, *Literature of Georgia*, 80.

<sup>97</sup> Stephen H. Rapp Jr., "The Coinage of T'amar, Sovereign of Georgia in Caucasia," *Le Muséon* 106/3-4 (1993): 309-330.

<sup>98</sup> E.A. Pakhomov, *Monety Gruzii* (T'bilisi: Mec'niereba, 1970), 94-95; and D.G. Kapanadze, *Gruzinskaia numizmatika* (Moskva: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1955), 65-67.

<sup>99</sup> Rapp, "Coinage of T'amar," 321-325.



Caucasia is traditionally considered to constitute the far eastern periphery of the Byzantine world. Indeed, the deep and longstanding cultural, social, political, and economic associations with the Near and Middle East of the peoples of Caucasia diverged from those of the imperial core, who first and foremost were citizens of the Mediterranean world. And yet, despite their considerable physical distance from Constantinople, the various Armenian and Georgian peoples and lands played an important and sometimes even central role in the formation of the First and Second Byzantine Commonwealths. Even after the sacking of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade, the Bagratids continued to make their mark in Byzantium through their support of their exiled Komnēni kinsmen in establishing the Empire of Trebizond which outlasted the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Further, the Christian Caucasian experience is a vivid demonstration of the polycentric nature of the expansive Byzantine cultural world, even when the Empire waxed strong. Its greatest lesson, however, is that the Byzantine Commonwealth was far more culturally and socially diverse than is usually thought. Finally, when a regional approach is applied, the cohesive history of the Caucasian region and its peoples illuminates the limitations of the terms “Byzantium” and “Byzantine” and it warns against the reduction of the empire and commonwealth to the Greek majority in Constantinople and the imperial core.