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The Prosopography of High Medieval Georgia: A Digital Approach

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1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This study covers the period of Georgian history from, approximately, the 1120s to the 1220s, within its “high medieval” phase. During this period, the Bagrationid dynasty were able to mostly effectively control a polity based around a land area similar to that of modern Georgia, and frequently also incorporating parts of what are now north-eastern Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with some influence in what is now the North Caucasus and projections of military force that reached the far side of the Caspian to the east, and the western Pontus to the west.

The primary methodological approach of this thesis is prosopographical, with a structured data approach to Caucasus court elites in the period studied. The objective in applying this approach, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, is to use this collective biographical method to re-examine assumptions about the drivers behind the Georgian Bagrationids’ apparent hegemony in the Transcaucasus. In particular, this method is effective for examining the role of personal connectivity and identity in shaping the social structures of the period. It enables both a revision of previous approaches more focused on the state and office-holding, and a more thorough examination of the power and contributions of figures, especially women, whose impact on the polity’s power structures came outside its formal systems of office holding.

The details of the methods deployed in the study are outlined in chapters two, three, and four, which cover the underlying theory, data structures, and analytical methods used respectively.

The thesis then continues with an overview of the chronology of events in the period before moving on to three analysis chapters which examine the social and political history of the period. The first analysis chapter deals with the Georgian court and the relations between identities, the function of offices, and factionalism shaped the period’s politics; the second covers the regions of Georgia and the *eristavis*, the class of dukes or governors who wielded power outside the centre of the polity. The final of the three, on diplomacy, covers the relations between the Georgian polity and its nobility with regions and polities that were outside its core.

The thesis then concludes with a discussion providing some broad overarching conclusions and closing remarks.

PERIODISATION

I refer throughout this thesis to the period as “high medieval”. The existence of a rough chronological span between the loss of overt Byzantine influence in the region of Georgia and the Mongol invasions can be very reasonably argued for, and makes a sensible epoch to study at least regarding the socio-political life of the region; the political culture of this period shows a range of commonalities, including a relatively consistent political terminology, the monarchy as a dominant institution spanning both eastern and western Georgia, and a network of external power relations in which the Georgian monarchy could act on at least an equal footing with all of its immediate neighbours.

Past characterisations of this period, however, focus too heavily upon the centrality of the Bagrationid monarchy and Georgian polity, including the use of terms like “Georgian Golden Age”.¹ These portrayals are heavily loaded towards a number of underlying assumptions – that such a golden age can be defined primarily with reference to the experience of the Georgian state and court, marked by territorial expansionism and a range of cultural moments and productions that since became part of the constitution of Georgian identity. The modern reception of this period, both within Georgia and in its limited reception outside the country, is still very much couched in “golden age” terms.

Rejecting the terminology of a “Georgian golden age” is an important step in starting a fresh, analytically driven approach to the socio-political milieu of this period. We should not start such an analysis by presuming the primacy and centrality of a Georgian state that “golden age” is often taken to imply. Indeed, part of the use of deeper socio-political analyses of our surviving

¹ The term is near-universal: see e.g. the title of Met'reveli, R., *The Golden Age*, (Tbilisi, 2010), or the subheading of a portion of Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, (New York, 2013). Rapp, S., ‘Georgia before the Mongols’, in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (2017), relegates it to within double quotes but does not abandon the term.

evidence may be to reassess exactly how the varied web of relationships that constituted central political structures in this period functioned to begin with. This includes links within the Bagrationid court and those between it and neighbouring or regional administrations. To what extent Georgian power relations in this period could be considered successful – and for whom – additionally requires a deeper, network-based understanding of the aims and objectives of multiple historical actors and how they related and interacted.

The selected periodisation for the thesis emerges from taking a core of material and then expanding the scope as much as constraints would allow, with certain endpoints pre-selected. The initial core body of material covered was the sequence of Georgian chronicles covering the reign of Tamar (ca 1184-1213), then expanded reign by reign to cover three of her immediate predecessors, a process discussed in more detail later on.² The initial focus on Tamar's court resulted from its status as the best documented of the twelfth century Georgian monarchs' reigns, though also as one with significant wider interest. It may fairly be objected that the transfer of the monarchy from bearer to bearer is not necessarily a decisive feature of political, let alone social, change or development, and that therefore some more 'neutral' cut-offs, such as decade boundaries, should have been utilised instead. The difficulty with pursuing such an approach, at least in an initial treatment of the sources, is the extent to which the chronicles of the Kartlis Tskhovreba are structured around particular monarchs' deeds. This means that there is a certain ease of use argument for setting the boundaries. More importantly, though, it means that for many events, where dating is not made clear, the *terminus ante quem* and *terminus post quem* are defined primarily by, or by units of time in relation to, the start and end of the relevant monarch's reign. Handling the chronicle material according to its own regnal driven logic therefore makes sense for producing data from it: in chapter five, the chronologies are

² *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, trans. Gamq'relidze, D., Abashidze, M., and Chant'uria, A. (Tbilisi, 2013). Hereafter KT for brevity. References throughout this thesis are given to this translation; references to the Georgian text are to Q'aukhchishvili, S (ed.), *ქართლის ცხოვრება* (Tbilisi, 1959). Available via Gippert, J., Chitunashvili, D. (eds.) <https://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/cauc/ageo/kcx1/kcx1.htm> and <https://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etca/cauc/mgeo/kcx2/kcx2.htm>, accessed 11/05/2022. These are abbreviated as ქს with a volume number, for similar reasons of brevity.

discussed on a decade-by-decade basis to better show the course of events as they might have been experienced by contemporaries.

Some initial outer chronological aims of the project were set some way beyond what could be practically achieved in full, but will be mentioned here in any case. The later bound was hard to define to a specific year, but easier to justify: beyond the Mongol invasions, the socio-political fabric of Georgia's elite society was changed beyond recognition, to an extent where it forms a convenient break from a prosopographical perspective. Ultimately the death of Giorgi IV Lasha was one of the more concrete, dateable points to use as a proxy for the start of this process. This is not to deny the existence of continuities into the mid thirteenth century and beyond.

However, the presence of multiple courts and rulers in the later middle ages, the significant resulting shifts in geopolitical gravity within Georgia, and the additional pressures of Mongol rule all made this an appropriate end point.

The earlier bound, meanwhile, was more difficult. The ultimate early boundary of this period of socio-political development might best be put at the inheritance of Bagrat III, the point at which, due to the policies of his adoptive father David of T'ao, the presence of a single polity that was dominant if not quite universal across the Georgian-speaking world was a plausible reality for the first time since perhaps the heavily mythologised fifth century reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali. This, however, would have given a scope of over two centuries: so the early 1120s, coinciding with the absorption of Kakheti, Lore, and Tbilisi, and the death of David the Builder, seemed the most appropriate point to draw a dividing line. From this period until the 1220s a certain core of Kartvelian-speaking territories all reliably saw the Bagrationids as their highest monarchical authority, and certain features of political culture such as the presence of Tbilisi as a capital were assumed norms. This cohesion made the subsequent period a relatively clear one to study. This meant that the study's maximum aim would be to look at the period from the mid-1120s to the mid-1220s, covering the reigns of five monarchs: Demet're, David V, Giorgi III, Tamar, and Giorgi IV. In the event, all of these except the last were incorporated into this study.

GEOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHIC EXTENT

As well as the temporal bounding of the project, it makes some sense to discuss the basic geographical features of the areas under consideration, and why these particular bounds have been chosen.

The edge of the area considered for this project was largely defined by the limits of the area discussed by the core Georgian chronicle sources. To provide an effective history of the polity in this period, the question is not just the 'extent of the polity' (itself a deeply problematic concept as will be discussed in later chapters) but rather the looser extent of the geopolitical world that the Georgian political infrastructures interacted with.

The Georgian political world was much smaller, as far as we have records of, than the Georgian conceptual world, or indeed the extent of Georgian speaking communities. For the latter, monastic communities existed further to the south and west than anywhere that Georgian monarchs could exercise much influence: the stories of the Georgian Athonite or Mount Sinai communities, whilst far from unrelated to that of Georgia itself, are beyond the scope of this thesis. The Georgian conceptual world meanwhile extended across Eurasia as a whole. To the south and east, Georgian literature from the twelfth century could include casts of Indian, Yemeni, Arab, and Chinese figures, drawing from a literary imagining of the world constructed in Persian epics which were familiar to Georgian writers of the period and which were, in some cases, translated.³ China also notably appears in the family legends of the prominent Orbeli family, whose collective origin legend was of an ancestor fleeing China sometime in the first half of the first millennium AD.⁴ To the west, 'Frankish' western Europeans are noted in the

³ See for example the cast of characters in the "Tale of the Stars" in Mose Khoneli (attr.), trans. Stevenson, R.H., *Amiran-Darejaniani* (Oxford, 1958) pp. 74-75.

⁴ Stepannos Orbelean trans. Bedrosian, R., *Step'annos Orbelean's History of the State of Sisakan* (Long Branch, 2015), 193-197.

chronicles, whilst in the north relations with Rus principalities were of interest to chroniclers and a romanticised Khazaria is one of the places that crops up in the literary canon.⁵

For our purposes, the limits of Georgian power projection are more of interest for setting our bounds. The very outer limits of where Georgian soldiers ever set foot are, however, too extensive to be useful in defining a core area: incorporating the entirety of northern Iran, or the Central and Western Pontus, into the project as a result of one military expedition in each case would seem an excessive response. We can, however, look at the areas in which Bagrationid activity was more intense: where the majority of their warfare took place, in what theatres and against which opponents it did so, and which territories and connections were most involved.

What we end up finding ourselves returning to by this method is not far from an old, somewhat loose definition: it approximates well to the south Caucasus, also known as the Transcaucasus, region. Places and people outside these borders are at times necessary for framing events inside them, and may be included in the core data (the precise rules for inclusion in this study's core dataset are discussed in Chapter Three), but it is this region that forms the basis of the project.



Figure 1: Physical Geography and Notable settlements in the 12th century Caucasus

⁵ KT, 303; 289. ȡȢ II, 146; 119.

To take a brief tour of the important geographical points, the first notable thing is that the region is effectively bounded on two sides by the Black and Caspian Seas and on the north side by the Upper Caucasus Mountains. All of these “borders” should not be considered impervious – the Black Sea in particular was an important vector for mobility and trade, and the North Caucasus range has numerous crossing points and peoples within it who the peoples of the South Caucasus and Georgia in particular interacted with. Indeed, mountain valleys can intensify as much as block commerce routes and networks by funnelling a diverse array of traders through key points. The southern border of the area is the most difficult to discuss, though the general petering out of Georgian discussion of regions beyond a certain point allows us to suggest that a somewhat fuzzy outer fringe with Trebizond, Erzurum, Van, Tabriz, and Ardabil forming a liminal category on the border ring should be ample for our purposes.

The only river which occurs on a significant and regular basis in the Georgian sources is the Mt’k’vari, known internationally as the Kura. The longest river in the Caucasus, the Mt’k’vari loops north from the southern regions of Georgia, then turns east to run past Mtskheta and Tbilisi before becoming a wide, looping river across the flatter plains of what is now Azerbaijan. The Araxes, or Aras, is the other river worthy of particular mention, its valley forming a crucial east-west southern conduit through the regions of Armenia and Adarbadagan.

Within the core regions of Georgia – those which were more or less consistently under Bagrationid rule between the 1120s and 1220s, and which with the exception of Hereti in the northeast and the mountainous region of T’ao in the southwest roughly comprise the modern country – some further features are worth noting. Georgia has an east-west divide, with the Likhi ridge stretching between the Upper Caucasus and Lower Caucasus Mountains dividing it in two. The two regions have quite different seasonal temperature and weather patterns, with considerably milder winters and summers in the west where the Black Sea provides a moderating influence on the climate. The difference is sufficient that *kvevris*, the buried clay jars used in traditional Georgian wine making, are traditionally buried outdoors in the west,

whereas doing so in the east would cause them to crack in winter ground frosts. The Likhi is also frequently a political boundary, and the difference between east and west Georgia is one that contemporary writers were conscious of, referring to the “Imiers” as peoples in the west and the “Amiers” as their counterparts in the east.⁶ The southern, southwestern, and northern parts of the country are more mountainous and may at times not fit this division so neatly.

Beyond this region, two major areas should be discussed. To its south lay Armenian-majority regions: the Armeno-Georgian border region of Lori, ruled from the eponymous fortress, and then from west to east the plain of Kars (or K’ari), Ani on the Akhurian river, and the region of Gelakuni around mountain-ringed lake Sevan. Still further south the Akhurian among other rivers flows into the valley of the Araxes, on which sat the important cities of Dvin and Nakhchivan. All of these areas were contested in the period under discussion, passing between the hands of Georgian monarchs and a variety of Turkic rulers.

To the east, meanwhile, lie the flatter lowland plains of Azerbaijan, though the medieval term Adarbadagan refers to an area somewhat south of the present country. This area was already predominantly Muslim controlled by this period. Its north and east sections formed the core territory of Georgia’s key Muslim ally, Shirvan, whilst a triangle between the Mt’k’vari, the Araxes, and the Karabakh mountains formed the region known as Ran or Arran, which had a number of major population centres such as Shamkhor and Ganja and was often contested between regional powers.

TERMINOLOGY

Beside aforementioned problems with the idea of a “golden age”, our analyses should also question to what extent the polity centred on the Bagrationid court can be considered “Georgian”, and the use of terms within the system under investigation. Whilst its portrayal and naming as such, both by its own chroniclers and those of its neighbours, is not in doubt, the

⁶ KT, 229; 240. ქს II, 5; 30.

extent to which its various peoples – including those identified as Armenians, Turks, Kurds, Kipchaks, and Ossetians, as well as the various subdivisions between Abkhazians, Imeretians, Svans, and so on – related to or identified with the core rulership and bureaucracy structures of the polity, and/or identified those structures with something describable as a Georgian ethnic identity is a much more difficult question to pose. This will be returned to at various points in the subsequent chapters, but some initial terminological remarks will be useful at this stage.

The term Sakartvelo (საქართველო) or “place of the Georgians” has some early uses but becomes prominent from the eleventh century onwards, when it could be used to describe the polity created by the unification of the three states of T’ao, Abkhazia, and Kartli under Bagrat III.⁷ This Georgia, however, did not properly incorporate Kakheti for over a century, or Tbilisi, which stood as an emirate in its own right until David the Builder’s capture of it in 1122. The forms used in royal charters, meanwhile, refer to peoples rather than places under Georgian rulership: Tamar for example was ‘Mepe of the Abkhazians, Kartvelians, Kakhis, Rans...’.⁸ We can see some similar forms in the chronicles, where for example David Soslan is ‘King of the Ossetians’ and Iuri ‘King of the Russes and Abkhazians’ rather than of the relevant places in noun form.⁹ Referring to ‘Sakartvelo’ as a place rather than ‘Kartvelians’ as people was therefore possible, but not necessarily the normal mode in this period.

Despite these caveats, reference to this polity in this period as ‘Medieval Georgia’ is a heavily embedded term that this thesis lacks the scope to challenge. Alternatives that would arguably cleave more closely to the source material, such as attempting to derive a term from the attested titulature from this period, are neither less contentious nor necessarily an improvement. They would, arguably, end up encoding only in more explicit terms the central court viewpoint on the makeup of the polity in this period, which we should not assume from the outset either to be a

⁷ Aleksidze, N. ‘Caucasia: Albania, Armenia, and Georgia’ in Lössl, J, and Baker-Brian, N (eds.), *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, (Hoboken, NJ, 2018), 140.

⁸ E.g. the charter in Enukidze, T., Silogava, V., Shoshashvili, T. (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XII სს* (Tbilisi, 1984), 78.

⁹ KT, 203; 244; ქც I, 369; ქც II, 38.

close reflection of the full political or social realities or to be encapsulating anything like a neutral view on those realities.

In this thesis, “Georgia” is thus often used for the Bagrationid polity and “Georgians” interchangeably both for its inhabitants as generally presented in our source material and for those people who were likely considered to be part of the Kartvelian ethno-linguistic category at the time. This is mainly done to improve readability rather than putting forward an entire new terminological groundwork, but also because adopting a more “precise” terminology would be at times to provide false reassurances of precision about the shades of meaning incorporated in some of the source material on which this work is based. Individual cases where disambiguation is necessary between these meanings will be dealt with in the proper detail and context given where they arise.

Other terminology is likewise difficult to present in a consistent form, given the kaleidoscope of languages in the region and the equally large set of differences in how those words may be rendered into Latin script and anglicised. For example, the prominent Turco-Persian atabeg Eldiguz may also have his name (and by extension his dynasty’s name) rendered as Eldigoz, Ildegiz, Ildeniz, Il-Deniz, and other variants in different sources. Georgian names may be better known by international or anglicised forms – we tend for example to speak of David the Builder rather than Davit, and Zachariah rather than Zakaria. In general, for names that appear in the Georgian materials a more direct rendering has been used throughout this text, except in one or two cases such as that of David where a common international version of the name is far better known. For non-Georgian names and those that do not appear in the chronicles, the aim has been consistent use of a recognisable name in each case, rather than to adopt a genuinely linguistically consistent strategy. The preference has been for adoption of the most standard internationally used name or term, even if this creates minor inconsistencies in the orthography: so that for example *ყუბასარი* is rendered in the Georgian style as Q’ubasar, but *ყოჭასი* is transformed into the more familiar Kipchak despite starting with the same letter.

This problem of approach to nomenclature is perhaps even more of an issue when it comes to titlature and whether to leave terms like mepe (monarch), dedopali (queen) or ukhutsesi (vizier) in the original. On the one hand, avoiding anglicisations can end up making a text such as this more difficult for the reader to follow, and risks exoticising the Georgian terminology by portraying it as essentially different in kind to equivalents more familiar to the reader. On the other hand, the terms do not translate entirely neatly. To take the monarch's title, in English, the terms King and Queen are heavily gendered but do not always carry strong implications of whether they are regnant: thus the regnant Queen Elizabeth I of England carried the same title as, for example, her mother Anne Boleyn. In the Georgian nomenclature, however, mepe carries the connotation of a regnant monarch regardless of gender: thus in our example, Elizabeth should properly be mepe and Anne should be a dedopali, a term that strictly denotes a monarch's wife. That the application of mepe was not a singular feature of Tamar's reign or a unique recognition of her ability and status can be seen by the fact that her daughter Rusudan later carried the same title. Attempts to render the words in a one to one meaning have led both to works in English referring frequently and incorrectly to King Tamar (and conversely, Georgian works discussing other cultures tend to translate terms meaning 'Queen' consistently to dedopali, furthering the confusion). In this text, mepe is thus generally preferred in order to avoid this problem, and where English terminology is brought in it is as per the English usage rather than trying to reflect the Georgian. Similarly, for other roles, terms like ukhutsesi are preferred as opposed to attempting to consider whether "vizier" or "minister" gives the appropriate emphasis for how a particular title should be viewed by the reader.

SOURCE MATERIAL

An analysis of the available source material for Georgia in this period is a further important point of departure before considering the background to this project.

The Georgian material for this period is written in Middle Georgian, which in Georgian scholarship is treated as a linguistic period spanning from the tenth/eleventh to the eighteenth centuries.¹⁰ This variant of the language exhibits a number of features different to the modern version, from differing plurals to a left-branching structure for adjectives (modern Georgian tends to be right-branching). These features can make it somewhat impenetrable even for a fluent modern Georgian speaker in places. Whilst the Georgian materials in this thesis have in most cases been consulted where useful in the original language, therefore, it should be noted here that this thesis is not a work of philology and in numerous places the understanding of the text used here is necessarily reliant on the understandings of the most recent academic translators of the text.

One unusual feature of Georgian is its multiple scripts. These are sometimes slightly inaccurately referred to as three alphabets, whereas in fact all three have the same letters and letter order, differing only in the letter forms. While there is an order of appearance for the scripts, the usage differences are largely in function rather than representing an “evolution” per se, and medieval texts were written with all three.¹¹ The script variant used for most texts under discussion is the Mkhedruli familiar as the script used for modern Georgian, though in this period it included several additional letters that were later removed in eighteenth and nineteenth century linguistic reforms. The older Nuskhuri and Asomtavruli scripts were still in use in this period, largely for inscriptions and religious texts; the bulk of the prosopographical material is in Mkhedruli writings. For many texts, too, we lack extant originals, and so seventeenth and eighteenth century copies in Mkhedruli script are the earliest available, as discussed further below.

The core body of source material available to us for historical description of Georgia in this period is the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (ქართლის ცხოვრება), literally the “Life of Kartli”, but often known in English as the “Georgian Chronicles”. This is the primary narrative source for

¹⁰ Kamarauli, M., *The Nominal Domain in Georgian: A diachronic analysis* (Wiesbaden, 2022), 44.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

medieval Georgian history, and does not form a single work but is rather a collection of chronicles of differing length and about different rulers written throughout the medieval period. Most of these tend to focus on the reigns of one or two rulers, and in the areas of interest for this thesis there is noticeable overlap only for the reign of Tamar, where both the *Life of Tamar* and the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs* focus on her reign as their primary subject matter.

The original manuscripts of the text are long since lost: the oldest thing that can be considered anywhere close to a complete is a manuscript of an Armenian shortening and translation of some of the texts, from the late 13th or early 14th century.¹² The major edition on which modern translations tend to be based is Vakhtang VI's compilation from the seventeenth century, though more recent translations incorporate other manuscripts as well, not all of which contain precisely the same body of texts.¹³ The Georgian edition used for consultation in this work is the 1959 edition by Simon Q'aukhchishvili: the reasons for choosing this edition were primarily for the practicality of working with it, as the text is easily available in digital form allowing more effective searching approaches and easing working on areas such as name variants for prosopographical work.¹⁴ The 2013 English translation was, as the most recent available, the primary modern-language rendering of the text consulted throughout.

Outside the chronicle material, some other literary texts survive – again, largely from seventeenth century or even later copies, though with fragments or references attested earlier. The one of these given most importance in Georgian writing is the Vepkhist'q'aosani, or the Knight in Panther Skin, which became over time an iconic part of Georgian culture.¹⁵ Its author, Shota Rustaveli, is known only from a few tangential (and not incontestable) references outside self-reference in his aforementioned magnum opus, which is the only work that can be attributed to him with a reasonable degree of certainty. The two other literary texts worth

¹² Thomson, R. W., *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford, 1996), xxxviii.

¹³ KT, 6-10.

¹⁴ Q'aukhchishvili, S (ed.), *ქართლის ცხოვრება* (Tbilisi, 1959).

¹⁵ Rustaveli trans. Vivian, K., *The Knight in Panther Skin* (London, 1977); Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, M., *The Man in the Panther's Skin* (Tbilisi, 1966).

mentioning from this period are named for their protagonists: Amirandarejaniani, the tale of Amiran Darejanisdze, and Visramiani, the story of the love of Vis and Ramin. The Amirandarejaniani's loose attribution to 'Mose Khoneli' is found only in a reference in Vepkhist'q'aosani which may itself be an early modern interpolation, but is nonetheless commonly accepted in lieu of anything else to call its author.¹⁶ The Visramiani meanwhile is thought to be a fairly direct translation of a Persian original.¹⁷ Both, like other significant medieval works, only survive in full copies from the early modern period. All of these literary texts are fantastical in nature, but nonetheless provide useful information on expectations and social mores for the elites in this period. They provide a useful counterpoint to the outlooks given in religious or chronicle texts, too, with their heavily eastward-facing outlook and often comparatively loose approach to religion in favour of centring romantic or warlike heroic values for their not explicitly Christian protagonists.

A sizeable majority of surviving originals of medieval Georgian manuscripts are religious texts, many of them translations from Greek originals but including a number of important theological works and saints' lives that are specific to the Georgian corpus: the thematic index of a study of Georgian manuscripts kept abroad in 2018 shows around twice as many religious texts as secular ones, and survivals of full secular texts in manuscripts often tend to be from the early modern period.¹⁸ These tend to have comparatively few points of prosopographical interest despite their importance otherwise, and so are not considered here in great detail, though they may provide interesting additional snippets of information for future studies. Poetic and philosophical works may also contain scattered pieces of prosopographical information, and a number of them are traditionally attributed to notable figures from the period, with varying degrees of certainty. Unfortunately, with most minor texts, published editions are either non-existent or not easily available.

¹⁶ Rayfield, D. *The Literature of Georgia: A History* (New York, 2013), 69-70.

¹⁷ Rayfield. *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, 73.

¹⁸ Chkhikvadze, N., et al, *The Georgian Manuscript Book Abroad*, (Tbilisi, 2018), 347-351.

Some charters survive from the period, though the number (at least, of those known and available for research) is small. These nonetheless provide considerable additional insight into the scope of monarchs' activities, especially how monarchs interacted with religious institutions or with particular localities, which are the primary survival reason for most extant charters. They also provide important evidence on styles and titulature for monarchs, which has been the subject of some discussion in the Georgian secondary literature.¹⁹

The Georgian-language material also includes notable quantities of epigraphy and visual work. A wide range of inscriptions and church art survive from the medieval period, including paintings of a number of monarchs and a handful of other identifiable figures mentioned in the material. Art-historical analysis of the visual sources, perhaps most notably Eastmond's work on royal imagery in this period, is a well-developed field within historical studies of Georgia.²⁰

Epigraphy is also reasonably widespread, including beyond church contexts a number of impressive surviving boundary markers recognisable by the distinctive hand symbols used on them: these can contain extended inscriptions of some value. Georgian epigraphic volumes and dictionaries have expanded in recent years. These materials, like many Georgian secondary sources, are not always easy to access for researchers outside the country, and may lack easily accessible digitised text - as such, they are rarely used in the discussions in this thesis, despite the significant contribution it is to be hoped that they will make to similar prosopographical works or further extensions of this core project in the future.

Discussions of Georgia and its surrounding regions in other language sources vary in quantity and type. Armenian historical works that cover this period tend to discuss Georgia in varying levels of detail, with a noticeable divide between those focused on eastern Armenia and those which are very heavily focused on Syria and Armenian Cilicia. Effectively no interactions

¹⁹ Several charters are collected in Enukidze, T., Silogava, V., Shoshashvili, T. (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XII სს* (Tbilisi, 1984).

²⁰ Eastmond, A., 'Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar'. In Magdalino, P. (Ed.), *New Constantines: the Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries* (1994), 283-293; 'Gender and Orientalism in Georgia', in James, L. (ed.) *Women and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London, 1997).

between the Cilicians or Crusader states and Georgia are mentioned in the Georgian chronicles, which is interesting given their proximity. In addition to the medieval Armenian translation of *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, perhaps the most notable Armenian coverage of Georgia in this period is given by Stepannos Orbelean in the thirteenth century, whose Armeno-Georgian family were deeply involved in politics especially in the middle decades of the twelfth century and who gives a valuable alternative, if naturally defensive, account of their actions in the reigns of Demet're and Giorgi III.²¹ Kirakos Ganjakets'i meanwhile gives some detail on the Mkhargrdzeli (or Zakarid) Armeno-Georgian house that succeeded their Orbelian relatives as key military figures in Tamar's reign, Vardan Areweltsi provides an alternative broad outline of events, and brief mentions of Georgian events (at least as they pertained to Armenia) are made in other sources.²²

Regarding the region's other politically notable non-Muslim groupings, western European military adventurers and Crusader forces never really penetrated the Caucasus or had significant direct interactions with Georgian forces or Georgian-controlled areas. In the Greek texts, perhaps more surprisingly, references are likewise sparse. We do find mentions of Georgians supporting grandsons of the former emperor Andronikos Komnenos in the Byzantine civil wars around the time of the Fourth Crusade, and these are corroborated by Georgian material. However, Niketas Choniates, perhaps the period's most prominent Byzantine chronicler, never mentions Tamar or any other Georgian monarch specifically, and nor do other twelfth century authors such as John Kinnamos. Meanwhile, the passage in Panaretos' fourteenth century chronicle of Trebizond that covers that polity's founding is sufficiently vague about the relationship between Tamar and Trebizond's ruling dynasty that the text has caused significant genealogical confusion and debate over the years.²³ Greek texts are mostly, therefore,

²¹ Stepannos Orbelean trans. Bedrosian, R. *Step'annos Orbelean's History of the State of Sisakan* (Long Branch, 2015).

²² Kirakos Ganjakets'i trans. Bedrosian, R. *Kirakos Ganjakets'i's History of the Armenians* (New York, 1986), Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, R. *Vardan Areweltsi's Compilation of History* (Long Branch, 2007)

²³ Panaretos, trans. Asp-Talwar A., *Chronicle*, in *Byzantium's Other Empire: Trebizond* (Istanbul, 2016), 188. The classic discussion of the genealogical issues is Toumanoff, C. 'On the Relationship between the

of use here for assisting in disambiguating the numerous Byzantine Greek suitors, exiles, and dignitaries who occasionally arrived at Georgian courts.

Alongside perhaps the possibilities of better epigraphy studies, the most fruitful potential area which is under-utilised in studies of Georgia in this period is likely to be the Arabic and Persian material. This has been consulted, where possible and where translations are available, for the present work, but language and availability have imposed certain limitations. Important texts include the works of Ibn al-Athir which, whilst not providing frequent references to Georgia and despite minimal discussion of Georgian internal affairs, provide a key alternative perspective on Georgian military exploits and are invaluable as evidence for dating, linking conflict points into a wider middle-eastern narrative.²⁴ The work of Ibn al-Azraq, perhaps less well known, is of great importance for the otherwise sparsely chronicled reign of Demet're, in whose employ the author was for a short time. Sections translated by Minorsky and Hillenbrand have been consulted here.²⁵ Shirvani material is likewise difficult to access, with the works of for example Khaqani, a court poet in this period, providing potentially useful information but being only sparsely available in forms accessible to modern and international scholarship.²⁶

Due to the wide range of languages involved and the impracticality of a single scholar learning all of them, original sources in languages other than Georgian have all been consulted and cited in translation for this thesis. Consultation with relevant scholars in the appropriate fields for clarification on terminology, linguistic and source provenance issues has taken place where possible, and may be noted where relevant.

Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Tamar', *Speculum* 15, No. 3 (Jul., 1940), pp. 299-312.

²⁴ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, D.S., *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period* (Aldershot, 2006).

²⁵ Minorsky, V. 'Caucasica in the History of Mayyaifriqin', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13, No. 1 (1949); Ibn al-Azraq trans. Hillenbrand, C., in *The History of The Jazira 1100-1150: The Contribution of Ibn Al-Azraq al-Fariqi* (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1979).

²⁶ Smith, P. *The Book of Khaqani* (Campbells Creek, 2017) contains a selection of poems.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Having established our scope and terms, we can now turn to an extremely brief synopsis of the standard narratives of Georgian history in this period. The most prominent figure in the historiography, perhaps alongside Vakhtang VI, is the early 20th century historian Ivane Javakhishvili, whose *History of the Georgian Nation* is still often treated as a standard work and starting point. In for example the 2013 English edition of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, it is Javakhishvili's notes on the relative reliability of different parts of the Georgian chronicles that are presented in the introduction, without further argumentation or justification from the edition's authors.²⁷ A number of general successor works and works in other languages, such as Mariam Lordkipandze's *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, Roin Met'reveli's *The Golden Age*, or Ronald Grigor Suny's *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, have tended to follow a broadly similar core narrative, though with certain variations.

David the Builder (also translatable as David the Restorer or David the Renewer) is traditionally seen as the chief architect of Georgia's twelfth century high point.²⁸ His victory at the battle of Didgori is treated as a turning point after which he was able to act effectively free from Arab and Turk influence, stabilising his incorporation of Kakheti, Lore, and Tbilisi into his realm and fundamentally shifting its centre of gravity east to be centred on Tbilisi. A rapid expansion in the later part of his reign also nominally incorporated much of Armenia and all of Shirvan into the Georgian domains, leading to what can be presented as an exceptionally large border-line that is often shown, somewhat uncritically, on modern maps of Georgia in this period.²⁹

His son and heir, Demet're, and grandson, Giorgi III, are largely seen as having continued David's policies but without David's success or ability, losing control of parts of Armenia and returning

²⁷ KT, 9-10.

²⁸ Lordkipanidze, M., *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, (Tbilisi, 1987), 108.

²⁹ Vivian, *The Knight in Panther Skin*, front-piece map, is a good example. A more detailed and scholarly but not wholly dissimilar example is Muskhelishvili, D. (ed), *საქართველოს ისტორიის ატლასი* (Tbilisi, 2003), 28.

Shirvan to its previous ruling family.³⁰ Giorgi III died without a male heir, and was succeeded by his daughter, Tamar. The first part of her reign, including a deeply unhappy marriage to the Russian prince Iuri Bogolyubsky, was a struggle, but after her second marriage to the Ossetian prince David Soslan and her defeat of a number of attempts to disempower her, she was able to pursue an aggressive foreign policy that included significant expansion into Armenia and major battles against the Turks, culminating in the battle of Basiani which, like Didgori before it, confirmed the results of Georgian expansion.

Continuity of policy is frequently emphasised in typical Georgian narratives. The precise characterisations of what that policy may have been vary somewhat, but they tend to an understanding that the aim of the twelfth century Bagrationids was a territorially expansive, politically dominant, state, and one that wished to have as few other power centres around it as possible. "Georgia," is treated as an actor with the above goals, as much as a polity, in such a way that it is rarely clear where the Bagrationid monarchy ends and any wider conceptions of *Sakartvelo* begin. This problem may be understood in the context of the Bagrationids' supremely successful retention of power throughout subsequent Georgian history, but is one that merits some caution.³¹

A struggle between church and state is evident in the standard narratives, and between the state and aristocracy.³² The aristocracy is typically treated as primarily a major force for, and source of, dislocation – in part this is a result of their being analysed in the same light as the state, treating politics as a zero-sum game in which they attempt to pull power away from the state, control royal power, and assert their own power centres over those of the central ones. The role of the church is more complex, but generally royal church councils which happened more than once in the twelfth century are treated as attempts by the monarchy to assert authority over the church.

³⁰ Rayfield, D., *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London, 2012), 98-99.

³¹ Rapp, S., 'Georgia before the Mongols' in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, (Oxford, 2016), 16.

³² Met'reveli, R., *The Golden Age* (Tbilisi, 2010), 122.

Finally, the collapse of Georgia in the 1220s and 1230s is largely seen as a simple exogenous shock as the Mongols overran Georgia by after the untimely death of Giorgi IV Lasha, Tamar's son. There is perhaps a good deal to be said for this characterisation, given the similar experience of a wide range of other political units at this time. It is hard to think of an equivalently sized polity that was similarly reachable from Karakorum and did not get overrun to some extent in the rapid Mongol expansions. Nonetheless, the apparent simplicity of the historical answer in this case should also be questioned, especially in light of the extent to which Georgia remained fundamentally divided long after the Mongol period.

More recent historians both inside and outside Georgia have started to take a more critical approach to elements of this received narrative and to expand it significantly from a narrower national historiography into seeing Georgia within a more interconnected system. Antony Eastmond for example has argued for the debt of Georgian representations of power to Byzantine models, a case which Sandro Nikolaishvili has ably supplemented with similar work on literary representations.³³ Stephen Rapp, meanwhile, has focused on the Iranian cultural heritage in Georgia, which whilst less prevalent by our period than it had been before the turn of the millennium was still very much felt in literature, cultural connections, and through Georgia's economic ties to the Islamic world.³⁴

RECEPTION

A final note in this chapter must be given to the reception and status of this period in the contemporary Georgian imagination, which may help to provide context to some of the narratives and discussions. The earlier history of Georgia tended to be a focus for Georgian scholarship during the Soviet period. This was in part because premodern work was deemed

³³ Eastmond, 'Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar'; Nikolaishvili, S., *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210: Ideology of Kingship and Rhetoric in the Byzantine Periphery*, PhD Thesis, Central European University (2019).

³⁴ E.g. Rapp, S., 'Georgia before the Mongols' in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (2016).

safer than studies of the more recent past under Soviet rule.³⁵ In part, too, the medieval period offered a meeting-point for scholars where a careful line could be trod between Georgian ideas of nation and identity and Soviet ideas of stadial progress. The medieval history of the state both allowed a continuity of transmission of constitutive moments and ideas in the making of Georgian identity, and at the same time allowed the presentation of the state as the essentially progressive historical actor, representing centralisation and the eventual path to capitalism and communism as opposed to the decentralising, regressive forces of the nobility.

This meeting point was important in synthesising a range of ideas about the Georgian past with different modern narratives and ideals. The twelfth century has, for much of the intervening period between then and the present, been treated, as we have mentioned, as being a “Golden Age” of Georgian history. In modern times, this attitude especially rests in the extent to which the medieval Georgian polity may be seen as a precursor to modern Georgian independence. Nineteenth century Russian domination led to significant suppressions of Georgian culture, and the country’s brief moment of Social Democrat led statehood after the Russian Revolution was firmly crushed by the Red Army.³⁶ The association between ideas of independence, national unity, and the twelfth century Georgian polity is a core part of popular Georgian understandings of their own history.

The Orthodox Church has also played an important role in providing a basis for a Georgian identity over the centuries, and has significant influence in shaping perceptions of the medieval past today.³⁷ This has included a number of Georgian monarchs being venerated as saints, including Tamar and David the Builder. Tamar is a common feature of church icons in Georgia. The religious veneration of this period, combined with its being embedded in national narratives, have made it valuable to Georgia’s religious-nationalist political factions, who have looked to both Russian and American religious nationalists for support in recent years.

³⁵ Dundua, T., ‘Georgian Historiography – Reality and Perspectives’, *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakishvili State University Institute for Georgian History I* (2011).

³⁶ Suny, R.G., *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington, 1994), 141-142; 206-208.

³⁷ Dundua, S., Karaia, T., Abashidze, Z., ‘National narration and Politics of Memory in post-socialist Georgia’, *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 17, No. 2 (2017), 230-232.

Georgians opposed to Russian hegemony have meanwhile tended to look west for support – it is far from difficult to find the European circle of stars flag flying in Tbilisi today, and NATO accession has also been a notable foreign policy goal in the post-Soviet period.³⁸ Some Georgian academics have in recent years explicitly tied the medieval history of the country to modern values and aspirations, including Giuli Alasania arguing that medieval Georgian institutions prefigured modern ideas of private property, women's rights, and liberalism, and Tedo Dundua linking Georgian-Crusader interactions with modern military coordination with the West.³⁹ The idea of independence, complete with its twelfth century connotations, is vital to the Europhile wing of Georgian politics, among whom Russian hegemony is seen as the big geopolitical threat.

Georgia's internal politics have thus made claiming some sort of ownership of the twelfth century both possible and desirable for its major political players. For the liberal political wing, Georgia's medieval past represents independence from domineering powers like Russia, a tradition of multi-ethnic tolerance, and in figures like Tamar a point of feminine strength that helps cement Georgia's forward-thinking nature.⁴⁰ For conservatives, the medieval period represents cultural warfare with Georgia as a lone Orthodox power surrounded by largely Muslim neighbours. Externally, too, the twelfth century can be a contested space, with the complex identities of the Bagrationids and other senior families like the Mkhargrdzelis contested between Armenian and Georgian ethnonational historiographical positions.⁴¹

We should also consider a little more closely what this means for Georgian analyses of some specific aspects of the period. The role and concept of "the state" in particular is important to consider. This discussion draws both on Soviet era representations of the centrality of the state, seen in traditional Marxist historiography both as being key to moving forward in the stadal

³⁸ Kyle, J. 'Perspectives Roadblocks: Georgia's Long Road to NATO Membership', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 27 No. 2, (Spring 2019). 237.

³⁹ Alasania, G, 'European Integration – Longstanding Aspiration of Georgia', *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 4 No. 1 (2010), 160-161; Dundua, T., 'Georgian and European Armies in Action', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 17 (2021).

⁴⁰ Dundua, Karaia, Abashidze, 'National narration and Politics of Memory in post-socialist Georgia', 228.

⁴¹ Rapp, S., 'Georgia before the Mongols' in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, (2016), 16.

progression of modes of production and as a counterweight to the aristocracy as villains of the piece. It also draws on the requirements of national, whether liberal-national or nationalist-right, historiographies that, as mentioned above, see in the conception of a Georgian state the ultimate counterweight to fears and recent histories of external domination.

The above is a heavily simplified discussion of the factors impacting on modern Georgian historiography, but hopefully a useful one to bear in mind in the remaining chapters of this thesis when the works of Georgian scholars are discussed. Having covered this brief assessment of the geography, the overarching chronology, and a little on the material under discussion, we can move on to discussing the primary prosopographical approach of the thesis, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

This chapter will discuss the reasoning for undertaking a database-driven prosopography project at all, and broader questions of the philosophy and interpretation of such databases and tools. The specifics the project's own systems will then be developed in the following two chapters which cover data structures and analytical tool development respectively.

We should begin this discussion by considering our core aims – not simply the core aims of the specific project, but the still wider questions that this project attempts to contribute to answering. In the case of this thesis, this may be summed up as “how did medieval society, or societies, in the Caucasus work?”

Such a question may seem too broad to be useful, but it is important as a starting point for discussions of whether a particular methodology is applicable and will provide a valid historical discussion as a result. By embarking on a project within this field-level question, we are taking as valid the axiom that, at a fundamental level, that question is one at least partially answerable by historical research. In other words, we are choosing to believe that the documents we possess, looked at with whatever caveats and supplementary work we can build around them, can usefully form an imperfect reflection of events, and a culture, that existed and shaped those works in turn.

It is of course possible – perhaps even easy – to dispute this core belief. Some scholars and philosophers suggest that in fact all we can usefully discuss is the presentation and narrative in past works, and that conceptions of history as opposed to the unreachable entities mentioned in those conceptions are the proper province of the historian.⁴² From such a perspective, all chronicled material is of use predominantly as a record of narrative and thought, because each source represents the constructions of its author to the exclusion of a useable picture of those

⁴² Southgate, B. *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?* (London, 2003), 157.

entites the text signifies.⁴³ If one rejects the idea that it is possible to construct an approximation of the activities of an existent society from such materials, then this thesis may be satisfactorily closed after this chapter – for in that case, analysing the people and places and events contained in a text as data objects separate to those presentations is worse than useless, providing only a false sense of reality based upon literary constructions that were never intended to provide the information we want in constructing a coherent picture of a past society. The primary advantages of an analytical prosopography in particular, those of being able to look at mentions of people or places or events in ways that do not simply take them as part of the narrative flow of the text, become especially compromised when working with such a view, in which to rob a text section of its narrative position and context is to remove the only thing that provides it with useful meaning.

This viewpoint, however, is an overstatement that extends a position of reasonable caution regarding source material until it simply forms a counsel of doom for historical research. The chronicle documents that comprise most medieval primary material for work of this sort, such as the component sections of the Georgian *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, may not be intended as histories in precisely the modern academic sense, but what we can say is that they appear to have been produced close to the time period in question and that their core apparent aim is chronicling the deeds of particular monarchs. Whilst that does not make them arbiters of any sort of “objective fact”, it does mean that the viewpoint they gave needed to be effective for its task. The internal logic of the source, to function, relies upon reference and appeal to an external set of ideas and perceptions held by contemporary audiences at the time of writing – a shared construction of the surrounding world – and this in turn was significantly influenced by, if not wholly dictated by, shared observations of contemporary events.

Chronicle sources therefore preserve the perceptions of the world that filtered their authors’ views, but what was being filtered through this mixture of prejudices, perceptions, and

⁴³ Thompson, W. *Postmodernism and History* (Basingstoke, 2004), 35-39.

incomplete information was initial information based upon events. This initial information needed to be in agreement with the equivalent, albeit differently skewed, portrayals that other writers constructed or that audiences would have gained from oral sources or lived experience at the time. This does not in any sense obviate the certainty of intentional falsification or misinformation from ignorance appearing in such sources, as will be discussed in detail throughout this thesis. Rather, it has the far more modest meaning that unless a reason existed not to do so, it is a reasonable starting expectation that chroniclers would have used versions of events that their readers could have accepted as observed reality – there being an obvious incentive to do so in that this established the chronicler's overall credibility as a reporter of events, and no obvious converse disincentive to do so. We can, therefore, use the information from the chronicles, suitably discussed and checked against other material, as a core tool for assessing the individuals, places, and events of the period.

It is worth mentioning briefly here the consequences of the internal logic of non-chronicle sources, which varies greatly according to their form. Charters, rather by definition, require their signatories and mentioned persons to be legally recognisable – whilst we cannot fully reconstruct the legal systems of this period, the existence of a legal system against which these documents could be tested is inherent to the purpose of their creation. Church art of officials and rulers, meanwhile, was an act of public communication, requiring the onlooker's ability to recognise the claims of power and authority implicitly or explicitly made in front of them.

This tendency towards constructing a viewpoint that correlates with the worldview of the intended readers of a text (or more widely the intended audience of a source) means that, essentially, it is worth critically utilising those narratives – that is, we should evaluate carefully their approach, assumptions, and world views, but we can assume that they form a picture sufficiently analogous to people's lived and understood reality to be useful in analysing the mechanics of that society in the absence of specific evidence to the contrary.

Having accepted the thesis that we can at least tentatively approach the source material with the working assumption that it reflects some level of commonly understood reality, we can consider our core questions and approaches to looking at the society of the medieval Caucasus in particular. We will from here onward be specifically looking at the narrower focus of socio-political history.

Discussing 'socio-political' history is here is a useful conflation, allowing us to look across the boundaries between social circles, status, and identity, and political power and decision making. More than that, though, it is an utterly necessary conflation. It removes an essentially arbitrary separation that, whether or not it makes arguable sense for any point in history, makes none for the medieval Caucasus. The idea of a "political sphere" from which personal identities could be insulated has no reason to be presupposed for past historical periods, and the expectation for systems of government with significant aristocratic and monarchical elements should be that the social connections and status of the individuals involved is likely to matter and affect the loci of power and their durability within this framework.

Our ability to analyse the wider governmental and social structures of this period is limited by the lack of formal documentation thereof. Most high medieval Georgian chancery documents and similar have not survived, and nor have formalised codes governing various aspects of governance, be that criminal or civil law or the operation of the various ministry-like structures. The most important document that survives from the Georgian medieval period is the 'Regulations of the Royal Court' probably compiled in the reign of Giorgi V.⁴⁴ This, surviving in incomplete form in an early modern manuscript, contains important evidence on the function and relative precedence of key offices of state in the Bagrationid courts. However, assuming the traditional assignment to Giorgi V's reign is correct it is a fourteenth century text situated well after the Mongol conquests, and whilst it is the opinion of Surguladze and other Georgian

⁴⁴ Rayfield, D. *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London, 2012), 142.

scholars that the information in it is compiled from earlier texts, making it an accurate reflection of the twelfth century material, it is unclear on what basis this identification is made.⁴⁵

It is also true that even where such documents exist, or where we can make limited backward extrapolations from later documentation, the difference between the theory and practice of governance is flexible in all historical time periods. Even if we fully admit the Regulations as an accurate to the letter depiction of how Georgian governance was intended to function, the relative localities of power among the polity's elites inevitably would tend to shift over time. At court, some office-holders and nobles would work together more or less well, or be more or less adept at gaining and holding royal favour. Outside it, nobles' holding of land and fortresses and their power bases in particular localities could be of critical importance in situations of internal conflict. The type of model that the Regulations presents, therefore, will tend to be a limited and idealised snapshot of the reality.

To answer these challenges, an alternative way to describe the decision-making processes and outcomes is to produce a model that is descriptive first, seeking to discuss a changing society and its loci of power through an analysis of events and person data in the period, rather than to produce a static model, based upon documentation, of where power theoretically rested. Such a model needs to be networked and actor-focused: that is, it needs to consider different individuals or collective bodies of individuals as being within a wider web of other such actors, with each actor's goals and decisions contributing to the movement of wider entities.

To give a practical example, a decision to go to war as occurs frequently in the chronicle material is not something solely done by one person: whilst the locus of power to make a final decision may technically be understood as being exclusively with the ruler of the time, networks of advisors, generals, city leaders, allied potentates, and family members might all have a significant impact on the outcome. In the Georgian Chronicles, vignettes of generals or nobles

⁴⁵ Surguladze M. (ed.) et al, *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში* (Tbilisi, 2017), 67. The English text in Surguladze's work states unreferenced a thirteenth rather than fourteenth century date for the *Regulations*, but this appears from personal communications to be an error either in proofing or translation.

coming to the ruler with a proposition to undertake a campaign appear in the twelfth century parts of the narrative, underlining the importance of power networks, not just individuals as loci of power, in producing political action as outcomes.⁴⁶

Elite networks could therefore influence power decisions. They could also create, or at least attempt to create, new loci of power, or destroy old ones. This is most noticeable when it happens in the form of rebellions, of which there are several that will be discussed later in this thesis. Nobles who felt they had inadequate access to power, who felt threatened by growing rival power bases and networks, or whose attachments within a network became contradictory, could resort to force among a number of options for trying to remove people or break up clusters of people who posed those threats. It could in theory also be the case that nobles or royals worked to oppose the empowerment of strong elite networks that could pose a threat to them and to instead invest power in poorly socially networked individuals, as these people had more limited scope for social interaction and thus political action.

The third thing to note here is that elite social identities could have an important role in mediating relations within or external to the groups of people we are considering in this project. This is especially important for considering relations outside the Caucasus elites, where the status, identity, and perceived legitimacy of a particular figure could impact on relations with areas and people under their nominal rule or control.

The basis of this project is, then, to answer questions about the socio-political networks and relationships that constituted, mediated, and created locations and uses of power in various forms in Georgia in our period. To do so, the project's core element will be to construct an actor-centric model of the period from which analyses can be completed that will support these investigations. We can now move to looking at prosopography as a method for accomplishing these aims.

⁴⁶ KT, 271; 272. jg II, 101; 103.

PROSOPOGRAPHY AS A METHOD

Prosopography has its origins as a methodology in the classics, with work on Roman prosopography based largely on the epigraphic cataloguing work of Theodor Mommsen being an early undertaking in the field.⁴⁷ The aim of historians like Mommsen in pioneering this method was to collect the references and to some extent the connections of particular figures in a systematised way, with the PIR (*Prosopographia Imperii Romani*) being the first such flagship project, with later Roman and Byzantine projects being inaugurated by the mid-twentieth century. Nominally, these works were dictionaries of *officials*, primarily – though here we come already to one of the many methodological problems for prosopographers, for in many cases writers and intellectuals were included in such catalogues despite being outside their apparent scope.

Smaller prosopographical investigations became increasingly common across a range of historical fields in the early twentieth century. This came with a new focus on power being mediated and constructed by networks, factions, and balancing a range of interests, as opposed to looking at political power as representing simply grand ideological sweeps over the course of history.⁴⁸ Lawrence Stone, writing in 1971, noted Charles Beard's work on the economic interests of the authors of the American constitution as being a seminal study in this regard.⁴⁹

Moving far beyond PIR in the laborious production of major prosopographical dictionaries was really only achieved in the post-war era, with the Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, for example, being begun in the 1950s. Writing in earnest on the methodology of prosopography began to take more shape in the 1970s, with the discipline having grown to the point where questions of subdivision and the fundamental limits and possibilities of the prosopographical method could be explored from a reasonably wide basis of collective experience. Lawrence

⁴⁷ Keats-Rohan, K. 'Chameleon or Chimera? Understanding Prosopography' in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook* (Oxford, 2007), 4.

⁴⁸ Stone, L., 'Prosopography', *Daedalus* 100 No. 1 (1971), 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Stone's aforementioned 1971 paper noted a number of common problems, primarily in incorrect extrapolation (such as assuming the known prosopographical sample is typical of people with a single shared characteristic in the wider society, when in fact recorded figures are very likely to be recorded precisely because of their atypicality) or false analytical assumptions (for example, erroneously assuming that kinship equated social connection or could imply shared ideological or faction position).

One subdivision that should be noted here, if only to explain why it is not further mentioned, is what Stone and his successors termed the disciplines of "mass prosopography" versus "elite prosopography".⁵⁰ The concept of mass prosopography, as the name implies, is effectively the use of more consistently recorded data on a wider scale to discuss broader echelons of society. Methodologically, this approach has elements more in common with the social sciences, and may tend to focus more on areas such as material wellbeing or patterns of occupation and settlement, more than looking at people's networks and actions, as the data sets available from historical sources that cover wider population groups are better suited to answer these sorts of questions. This option is not one that is open to scholars of medieval Georgia given the low levels of written evidence available on figures outside the upper echelons of society. T.F. Carney's observation that mass prosopography is "mostly pretentiousness" when attempted with many ancient and medieval cultures and their limited surviving source material is a sad truth but one prosopographers must appreciate when understanding their own limitations.⁵¹

Digitisation of prosopographical dictionaries was initially done from the 1990s onwards, simply by providing what was in essence a digital copy of what would otherwise have been a multi-volume paper book. Even this basic form of digitisation opens up a range of possibilities not available to readers of a physical volume, most notably basic text search functions which make finding particular entries of interest in a multi-volume work significantly easier. The ability to find and connect information in novel ways that involve making connections outside the logical

⁵⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁵¹ Carney, T.F., 'Prosopography: Payoffs and Pitfalls', *Phoenix*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1973), pp. 156-179.

order of an original text is central to the utility of prosopography, and digitisation greatly accelerated such efforts.

More ‘advanced’ forms of digital prosopography involved moving from digitised PDFs to a database format. This presents significant advantages: a database allows individual data points to be searched, compared, and manipulated far more effectively than a text sheet, and can allow data to be handled below or separately to the individual record entries. This can for example mean storing secondary entity types such as places separately to allow easier connections, and more widely increasing the extent to which the data can be stored as smaller, separable chunks that can be manipulated. Digital prosopography has, however, brought notable new challenges along with it. In particular, the potential for separation of data and metadata and the more flexible nature of digital data can lead to new questions around provenance and reuse. In more granular systems, singular person entries are no longer necessarily the work of a single author, which can produce new questions regarding curation of the data and responsibility for particular assertions. Third parties who may be better able to analyse collected data without collating it themselves from the source material can provide potential analytical power but also potential risks, for the understanding of the data’s meaning and compilation process is central to the effectiveness of such efforts.

The most common technical model for digital database prosopographies in recent years has been the factoid model, proposed and detailed by John Bradley and Michele Pasin.⁵² It has been used in projects including the Prosopography of the Byzantine World, the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England, and the People of Medieval Scotland database. The key features of this method are that the database’s fundamental units are the eponymous factoids, with a factoid here defined as *a claim about what a source says about a person*.⁵³ Factoid databases are structured collections of such claims linked to their appropriate person objects. This creates

⁵² Bradley, J., Pasin, M., ‘Factoid-based prosopography and computer ontologies: towards an integrated approach’, *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (2015).

⁵³ *Ibid*, 89.

some unique properties for the model: firstly, the fact that it solely contains source-linked claims means that it excludes information implied but not explicitly written in its source material. Linked to this, the fact that it solely seeks to represent formalised claims of what the source says means that it does not, in fact, model a past based on that information in a meaningful way. A factoid database by design makes no claim whatsoever about the factual nature or otherwise of its factoids, which provides it with a simplicity and ease of construction, and a great deal of power for some approaches to individual sources, at the expense of being able to treat it as any sort of model of the past, as opposed to a model of the sources' treatment of their characters as more flexible, contradictory literary objects.

As the field of prosopography has grown and new opportunities have arisen through digitisation, new questions have begun to emerge regarding its underlying purpose. We can for present purposes present a distinction between two major areas for which a prosopographical database might be used, specifically *secondary* and *indexing* databases. An indexing database, such as the Prosopography of the Byzantine world, aims to provide a catalogued resource that collects references to people across a particular set of documents. This is the task for which the factoid model discussed above was designed. A secondary database meanwhile seeks to provide a model of past people and their interactions as the basis for further analyses. It is, in effect, a curated reading of the sources as opposed to a prosopographical guide to them, and it offers the possibilities of, given a single particular reading of the data, examining the implications of that reading in a systematic way.

Finally, it should be noted that whilst the focus of this discussion has been largely on the underlying technical infrastructure of databases, the presentation of that information can be in and of itself of considerable academic importance. Consider the example of two databases along the lines we discuss above: both have named person entities, both have them connected to births, deaths, family members, and source materials to back up those claims. One, however, has a factoid-style core claim of "this is what the sources say", and the other has the secondary core

claim of “as the author of this database, I believe this information to be true”. To the end user they may appear to be formatted almost identically, but the implication of the data that underpins each differs utterly fundamentally, and has immense repercussions for any further use of the data and information presented. For example, a tool to look at lifespans might pick out every birth date record, find an associated death date record, and compare them. The factoid database, however, might count people multiple times this way if the same person had multiple birth or death dates recorded in the sources: the factoid data do not assume that the *prosopton* is a representation of real person and are not presented in a way to conform to the necessary expectations of one, and analyses that assume it does work that way may therefore be fundamentally flawed.

We can thus summarise several key challenges faced by prosopography through its development as follows. Firstly, there are questions of *scope* – the precise rules for what counts as a person and who is, and is not, included. This includes questions of time and geography, as well as questions of anonymity, such as whether in the phrase “the emperor was stabbed to death in front of the palace”, the implied unnamed stabber counts as a *prosopton*, or whether the definitionally existent but unnamed parents of a particular historical figure should be included. It also includes questions of what corpus of sources are admissible: all prosopographies tend to be limited in their full corpus, tending to exclude the further out and stranger notes made on the period they discuss (medieval Alexander romances would be unlikely to feature in a prosopography covering the Hellenistic world). Narrowing by language group or other features of the material is also possible, and especially so when it comes to indexing databases.

The second key challenge is *exposure of logic*. Unlike in social science datasets which they may superficially resemble, the construction of a prosopographical dataset must be conceived of as a process of historical source analysis, with all the problems of conflicting sources, the differing viewpoints of different historical authors, and variable data types which that implies. As a result, one of the core challenges of constructing a system of this kind is to be able to clearly

show the historical logic behind the presentation of the information. This is a problem that increases the more datasets are disambiguated and curated, leading to more complex chains of historical reasoning – although less disambiguated datasets perhaps run a greater risk of entirely failing to engage with the problem for this reason. A significant element of this problem is also interface related: finding ways to express the underlying structure and historical logic of a database is a problem that has received deeply inadequate levels of attention from scholars.

Related to exposure of logic is the question of *granularity* in sourcing. A highly granular dataset would be one that allowed the effective isolation of pieces of information and their associated argumentation. An example would be, for the claim that person X died in year Y, whether one has to extract the whole person record to find the source reference for the assertion, or whether the source reference is closely attached to the assertion which may exist as a separate item in the dataset in its own right.

The final key question, and one that has received surprisingly little historiographical attention traditionally, is the *data claim* of the dataset – that is, what it means to provide a record in the database in relation to what the researcher is treating as truth. It should be stressed that the use of the term “truth” here is not about suggesting whether an assertion is per se “objectively true”. Rather, it is a question of the relationship between that assertion and the model or framework into which it is being placed, whether it is treated as representing reality within the terms of that model, and what the model used by a historian implies by the act of including a data element. A dataset that claims to be a simple record of what a set of sources say, as for an index database, is not logically comparable to a dataset that claims to be a curated representation of the facts of the period. Both datasets have their uses: indexes allow easy compilation of high granularity work with close accessibility to source data, whereas more heavily curated datasets allow greater potential for further historical analysis. Comparative work that involves longevities, or geographical data, for example, cannot be done sensibly on a dataset that allows for a prosopon being present in multiple places or having multiple death dates if one or more

sources contain conflicting information: these conflicts must be resolved for comparisons to be possible.

GEORGIAN PROSOPOGRAPHY AND MODEL DECISIONS

We therefore arrive at the current project. From a methodological standpoint, the aim of this project is to provide a secondary-type database with a curated dataset suitable for spatial and other analyses. The aim of the database as a resource for looking at socio-political history naturally points towards this database type: the analysis and discussion of the court and its loci of power are only possible, as per the above discussion, if a secondary-type database is adopted. We may now, then, consider in more detail what that looks like, in the context of previous prosopographical research that has been done on Georgia in the period under discussion.

This is the first attempt to provide any sort of systematic prosopography for Georgia in this period. There have been numerous works that have provided some underpinnings for such an endeavour, including a number of papers on genealogical topics, especially those written by Byzantinists considering Bagrationid relations to the Komnenoi and their Trapezuntine descendants.⁵⁴ These, and traditional works of history such as Javakhishvili's *History of the Georgian Nation*, tend not however to expand their prosopographical focus far beyond royal and imperial families. Even in Soviet-era historiography, the royal house tended to be over-privileged, likely as a result of the high level of focus on the "state" and "state structures" that is somewhat typical of that historiographical period, and the conflation of those with the interests of the royal house.

In recent years notable wider research has been conducted, with a renewed focus on areas like epigraphy allowing more holistic assessments. The 2017 book *Central and Local Official Order in*

⁵⁴ See for example Toumanoff, 'On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Tamar'.

Medieval Georgia, edited by Mzia Surguladze, is a very significant contribution in this regard.⁵⁵ The book takes the older view of the Georgian “medieval” as stretching across most of the Early Modern period as well as what western scholars would term medieval, and it is arranged by office and then chronologically within each office. As a written prosopographical work, it conforms to the format of short referenced articles on each individual. It also significantly maintains a strong focus only on the holders of official titles themselves without the scope to consider the wider power networks in which they operated. It therefore naturally lends itself to discussion of the formalised pre-set models of governance laid out in documents like the *Regulations of the Royal Court*, and perhaps away from explanations that focus on less articulate forms of power (in particular women’s power and patronage, which did not operate via the systems of formal office and titulature). The networked context of the figures was in any case not the aim of Surguladze and her co-authors’ work, which nonetheless forms an important new stepping-stone toward such a consideration.

The specific types of analysis and data done within the project will be explored further in chapters three and four, but at this juncture we should consider the wider criteria for deciding whether particular analyses are appropriate. The first thing to note is that the data collected for this database are not, for the most part, particularly amenable to most sorts of more advanced statistical testing, such as robustly mathematically testing correlations or presenting predictive numerical distributions. The datasets are too small, and the underlying processes too varied and individual, for such test-driven analyses to be useful. Instead, the presence of the dataset as a whole allows us to produce visualisations and comparisons. This in turn can highlight points of interest in the data and allow us to produce or suggest links to particular theories about the underlying systems and interactions involved.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to the research questions for this project discussed earlier in this chapter that such limited analyses as our material allows can be completed: our interest for the

⁵⁵ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*.

purposes of this thesis is in modelling past actions, which necessitates discussion of the database's prosopons as people. This is the primary reason for attempting to produce a secondary, rather than an indexing, database. It might reasonably be objected to this decision that a proper prosopographical indexing of the Georgian material would be an important precursor to allow the most efficient tackling of a secondary database. This argument is not without merit, and the present project does not reduce the serious potential future utility of such an index were one to be constructed. However, such a project would be best done alongside scholars whose primary specialisms were more in Georgian textual scholarship than my own, and equally importantly alongside a project for digital editions of the Georgian texts which would maximise the utility of such a work. Practical considerations also needed to be taken into account, and the additional time needed to effectively create two databases using different models would have significantly restricted the time available for analytical work during this project.

Our research questions thus lead us to settle question of data claim discussed above: the database's claim is that the information contained within it is a model or representation created to explore and discuss the lived reality of the 12th century individuals under discussion. The database therefore requires resolutions to internal conflicts in the data and a full attempt at disambiguating persons and places, producing a final data set that could stand as a single coherent modelled representation of the period.

The scope of the project was already largely covered in the first chapter of this thesis. Its primary interaction with the modelling decisions here is the extent to which the scope is spatially and chronologically defined, rather than based on a particular body of source material. The questions of society, person, and place drive this necessity: to attempt to model the society that existed among Caucasus elites in our period, we are concerned with all the source material that covers the time and space in which they operated. This further contributes to the need for a secondary prosopography: whilst building a dataset that meaningfully crosses the numerous

language groups and forms contained in the spatial area would be possible with either a secondary or indexing prosopography, the need to synthesise those sources of information into a useful picture and enrich them with points more to the work needed for a secondary prosopographical resource.

The granularity of the database, meanwhile, was a trickier challenge to decide upon. High granularity – that is, modelling each particular *claim* as a specific alterable or comparable unit in the database - has a lot of advantages. It allows more flexibility when testing different options, and is an especially good feature in a database for re-use where future users may want to select or compare different viewpoints and possibilities. However, modelling argumentation at high granularity also presents some difficult challenges. One of these is simply the larger span of time needed for data entry, including of views with which a given study's author disagrees: this may be useful for historiographical discussion, but also represents time spent that could otherwise have been used for expanding the data in other areas. Additionally, there are questions around effective modelling of provenance and authority in such a model, which are now seeing increased interest from digital humanities scholars but where no generally accepted solution existed as of 2017-18 when the present project was developed.⁵⁶ For these reasons, a low granularity model where data was attached directly to entities rather than via data units representing particular claims was adopted.

We therefore come to the *person-prosopon* model, so named because each *prosopon* is treated as a representation of a singular person, with a set of structured data built for each entity within the dataset.⁵⁷ Essentially, in this model, every person contains – or is linked to – the data concepts that describe them, as a data object. This differs from models in which the fundamental objects are individual granular claims (as in a *factoid* model). Such low granularity necessitates

⁵⁶ For recent work see Andrews, T, Baillie, J, Knox, D, Romanov, M, Vargha, M. 'Modelling Historical Information with Structured Assertion Records', *Digital History Berlin Blog* (2021), available at <https://dhistory.hypotheses.org/518>.

⁵⁷ For a more full discussion of person-prosopon modelling see Baillie, J. 'Alternative Database Structures for Prosopographical Research', *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 15 (1-2), 117-132.

a very high exposure of logic compared to other models, to provide explanation as to why particular decisions in the structured data have been made: in the person-prosopon model this is provided in the form of written argumentation notes that discuss why particular linkages and data have been added.

PROSOPOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

Prosopography involves the systematisation of information about people – and in the person-prosopon model, it involves the modelling of that information. Identity, as a broad super-category of types of information, tends to stand out as both particularly difficult to capture effectively through prosopographical structured data, and as particularly important to shaping social constructs and human interactions across societies. The methods used to capture identity data in this project are discussed in detail in the next chapter, but for now the general principles for approaching identity used in this study are needed, to frame the discussions offered throughout the rest of this thesis.

Identities can be thought of as a range of socially constructed attributes formed through the interaction between a person's performance and presentation of themselves to the society around them, and that society's reading of their characteristics and imposition of boundaries and labels on different groups of people. Identities tend to be mutable (they may change during a person's lifetime), subjective (different people may assign different identities to the same person), and situational (different identities will be more prominent in different circumstances). Examples of identities might include, but not be limited to, social class, gender, faith, ethnicity, and race.

As well as their fluidity in lived reality, the markers used for identities as observed by our sources are not necessarily consistent. Language could perhaps have been the largest, but it is not heavily commented upon in chronicles. We may presume that the Georgian monarchs, or at least their chanceries, had a range of languages accessible, and it seems very likely most of them

were multilingual with Greek, Arabic, Persian and Armenian all likely to have featured at the Georgian courts. Heredity was not an absolute marker, meanwhile: it is never suggested that Giorgi IV and Rusudan I having an Ossetian father made them in any sense Ossetian to contemporaries. Dress style and culture no doubt had some role, though we may have lost some of its nuances: the presence of an “Iberian hat” in a contemporary Byzantine work, Eustathios’ *Capture of Thessalonike*, might suggest a known and distinct Georgian style of dress at this time, but we have little idea what this might have been and whether Byzantines would really have differentiated much between different dress styles of the Caucasus.⁵⁸ Georgian visual and literary culture, whilst having some distinctive features, also contained significant and consciously used external influences which at an elite level may have blurred boundaries. We should in other words reject the idea that we can reach a “true” consensus about people’s identities. Instead, the aim in this project was to record the broadest possible range of information and provide the maximum range of categories into which someone could be reasonably placed.

Histories of gender in medieval Georgia are limited, as discussed further in chapter six, where some discussion of 12th century ideas of masculinity and femininity is given. Gender in Georgian-language materials is taken primarily from name types as a result of the lack of pronouns in Georgian. This character of the language makes it harder to entirely clearly determine gender, but there were no cases found where the names used did not clearly imply a binary gender identity, and Georgia does not appear from our source material to have had any significant and mentioned accepted social categories that stood outside binary gender identities at this time. Related to this topic, it should be noted that sexuality was not presented as a category in the dataset on grounds of insufficient information. It should nonetheless be understood that this database very likely understates the potential for work in the areas of gender and sexuality and the exploration of issues around it. This is due to both the relative lack of published source material dealing explicitly with sexual and gender nonconformity and the

⁵⁸ Eustathios of Thessalonike trans. Melville-Jones, J., *The Capture of Thessalonike* (Sydney, 2006), 83.

lack of modern work on relevant terminology. There are no extant studies that properly cover the language used to describe variations in sexuality and gender in Georgian in this period, and this would be a very useful area in which future work could take place.

Ethnic and polity-driven identities are more immediately problematic concepts for the high medieval period in the Caucasus. What we are describing when we see an identity reported in our material is actually a constellation of personal and social performances of particular behaviours possible within their material constraints, via the individual's social understanding of what those meant. These would then be externally appraised in ways that allowed the individual to be categorised, possibly but by no means necessarily a categorisation which they themselves would have intended. We often have few good ideas from our sources of exactly which markers were treated as being the important signifiers of a particular identity, and the balance between the action of the individual in presenting their identities and those around them in assigning identities based on that presentation is often difficult to unravel.

The question of when to use the terms *ethnicity* and *race* is also a complex one and not significantly hitherto discussed in studies of this period of Caucasus history. Firstly, we should avoid the distinction made in some older texts that conceptualises the former as based on bodily, and the latter on cultural, differences: such a division does not in general bear the weight of relevant evidence or fit alongside the general usage of the terms.⁵⁹ Rather, following Heng, here racialisation is treated as being a systematisation of people across a variety of traits, treated as essentialised and immutable, for the management of human difference.⁶⁰ Definitions of ethnicity are often more complex, but sometimes focus on the internally defined rather than externally imposed nature of ethnicity as group identity. This, however, can be a difficult framing to use in areas of deep cultural mixing such as the Caucasus: frequently, differences are composed more or less consciously by both sides of a particular divide, and disentangling which

⁵⁹ Gunew, S., 'Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism: Between Race and Ethnicity', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 27, *The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism* (1997), 29-30.

⁶⁰ Heng, G., *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 2018), 3.

came first, the chicken of race or the egg of ethnicity, is unlikely to be either possible or fruitful given our source materials. Rather, it is the qualities of absolute essentialism and inherent relationship to power that best divide race from ethnicity for our purposes.⁶¹

The extent to which difference between peoples was imagined as *inherent* by 12th century Caucasians is not wholly clear in works from the Caucasus. Whilst the Georgian materials do define certain peoples to some extent in a manner akin to Herodotean ethnography, these are only rarely granted specific and permanent identifying traits: we may learn that the Georgians or Svans or Turks did a particular thing, but rarely which things were deemed stereotypical of any given people and it is extremely rare that an individual's actions are treated as being explicable by a person's background in this regard. Exceptions to this include a point where certain peoples were especially explicitly singled out as not having committed theft in Tamar's reign, suggesting a stereotype to the opposite effect, which is discussed in chapter eight.⁶² We get hints therefore of ingrained perceptions on such a basis: it is simply notable for our purposes that they are not a primary concern of our chronicle materials.

The theme of religion-as-race is one that comes up frequently in scholarship on the European Middle Ages: again, in Georgian materials there may be occasionally hints of this but there is little sense of inherent character being attached to religion for the most part. The Mkhargrdzelis are not treated as experiencing some difference in their nature in Ivane's conversion narrative: when explicitly Muslim characters appear at a certain point in Rustaveli's work they are identified by a chosen action, that of not drinking alcohol, not an inherent trait.⁶³ It has been suggested by Chkhartishvili that Orthodoxy was an essentially constitutive part of Georgian identity formation in the eleventh century, citing the construction of a homogenous cultural space in which strictly dogmatic Orthodoxy was an ethnic marker for Georgians separable from

⁶¹ Takezawa, Y., 'Rethinking 'race' from Asian perspectives', in Pelican, M., Manke, A., et al. (Eds), *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualizations across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods* (Bielefeld, 2015), 75-76.

⁶² KT, 203; ქს I, 369.

⁶³ Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 229.

not only Armenian monophysitism but the supposedly more schism-prone Byzantines.⁶⁴ This thesis, however, is not wholly borne out in the twelfth century evidence, as we shall see in chapter six: the cultural space the Georgian polity occupied was very far from a state of homogeneity, and the precise boundaries and markers of Georgian identity were probably more complex and situational than a strict delineation by language and faith allows for.

Of especial interest when it comes to the interplay of race and religion are the ethnic categorisations assigned to Muslims through the Georgian chronicle texts. These are varied, and it is unclear whether they encode any meaningful distinctions in the Georgians' understanding of the people in question. Classicising terms are part of this, like a tendency to vaguely refer to areas south of Georgia as "Persia": for example, Guzan T'aosk'areli is reported as having fled to Persia after a rebellion, but other parts of the chronicles reveal that this refers to his joining the ruler of Khlat.⁶⁵ This is mixed with loose use of ethnonyms like "Turk", and in many cases Muslim leaders are not referred to with an ethnic identity category separate to their faith: Nukardin (Rukn ad-Din Suleiman Shah), the Anatolian Seljuk sultan at the time of the battle of Basiani, was from a Turkic dynasty in Anatolia but describes himself in the Georgian chronicle as avenging the 'house of the Persians' and 'Islamic people' more widely.⁶⁶ Polity based identities are especially notably lacking in Georgian descriptions of Muslim enemies and allies alike, suggesting at least a literary conceptualisation of Muslim polities as being indistinct parts of a whole, even where reported political action shows a clear awareness of the political nuances of neighbouring Muslim polities on the Georgians' part. One can therefore argue for Islam being semi-ethnically treated by the region's Christian writers. However, their ruling classes who were most of interest to our chroniclers did have a lot of cultural commonalities, being largely Turkic in origin and operating within a highly interconnected Islamic political world: the sense of Muslim political cohesion and the lack of a sense of boundaries within the

⁶⁴ Chkhartishvili, M., 'On Georgian Identity Religious Marker', *Studies in Medieval History of Georgia* IX (2008), 225.

⁶⁵ KT, 203; 251; ქს I, 368; ქს II, 55-56.

⁶⁶ KT, 297; ქს II, 133-134.

Muslim political world from Georgian writers only goes part way to implying a full sense of racialisation.

In documents that spend so much time discussing individuals and their actions, and in an area where contact was constant and the balance of power uneven, some of the prerequisites for a more heavily ingrained sense of religion-as-race may be missing. The power dynamics at least between Muslims and Christians were complex and frequently inverted, areas could have an immediate Muslim ruler owing eventual fealty to a Christian or vice versa (Shirvan being an example of the former, whereas the lands the Orbelis held as vassals of the Eldiguzids would be an example of the latter case). The ties between faith and ethnicity, in any case, were clearly deeply rooted but each should not be treated as sufficient or sole signifiers of the other.

This complexity did not prevent religious or ethnic units being identified and utilised by those with political power. As we shall see in chapter seven, Tbilisi at least had divided taxation according to ethno-religious groupings. A number of identities, such as Jewish or Armenian people, are complex to think of as purely ethnic units as faith and ethnicity correlated so strongly: we do not, unfortunately, know how inevitable cases of individuals who did not easily fit such a categorisation would have been handled from a taxation perspective. There is also the case of the Kipchaks brought into Georgia by David IV in exchange for a set of particular familial obligations per family: again, the ethnic and cultural category was directly utilised by the polity's power structures for management of people. These are examples of racialisation, where the ethnic categorisation was reified in order to assign and enforce social roles and functions. Such mechanisation was, however, localised and haphazard by necessity across the region and it is difficult to know how fluid some of these distinctions were: we have few views of restrictions imposed on elites on an identity basis, and little knowledge of the effects on lower orders.

In general, the terms used through the rest of this thesis are ethnic and ethnicity, rather than racial and race: that is not to say that certain of these categories could not or should not be considered races and were not utilised as mechanisms of power – they were, and whilst a full

critical analysis of them in that framework is not within the scope of this thesis it should be a strong desideratum for the field. Rather, the terminology used here is a reflection of two points – first, that our understanding of this system is still limited, and requires greater attention by scholars of such dynamics. Second, that by an initial focus upon race and its implied imposition in a setting where such systems were, whilst very real, less starkly defined than those of the powerful colonial and post-colonial states we are used to in the present day, one can risk understating the self-attribution of ethnicity and the lateral interactions of ethnic groups beyond the vertical pressure of power dynamics. Perhaps precisely because the category of ethnicity provides a greater degree of ambiguity about the system it describes, it is appropriate for the discussions offered here.⁶⁷

Social class is the remaining form of identity that is dealt with significantly in this thesis: it is signified by a range of category terms such as *glekhi* (broadly, a peasant), *aznauri* (a lord) and *didebuli* (a great or high lord): these are discussed somewhat further in the discussion of social status in chapter six, where the extent to which at least the elite social categories were rigid and legal or fluid and descriptive is also considered in light of the prosopographical evidence. Certainly social class was not fully disentangled from other forms of identity and barriers of language – it is often difficult to tell how well social class terms crossed these lines, and for example whether and when lords in non-Georgian speaking regions might have been thought of as *aznauris* or *didebulis*.

Prosopography cannot help but intersect with these theoretical methods, terminologies, and discussions of social structure. Indeed it relies upon them: prosopography's analytical power in being able to produce collective biographical studies relies on similarities of career path but also of identity to underpin the utility of those categories and comparisons. As we shall see in the next chapter, some of these features and ideas about identity must through necessity be locked into the structured data approach behind the PHMG, which in turn therefore has these ideas

⁶⁷ Pohl, W., 'Ethnonyms and Early Medieval Ethnicity', *The Hungarian Historical Review* 7, No. 1 (2018), 10-12.

about the layering and mutability of identity, and the appropriate methods for its categorisation, encoded at a fundamental level into its data structures.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter brings together the underlying philosophy and methodological background that underpins the Prosopography of High Medieval Georgia's database system. Through tracing the methodological background of prosopographical research, we can identify core problems and questions arising from its use and the progressive shift towards digital data and analytical possibilities over recent decades. Four of these are especially notable here: granularity, exposure of logic, project scope, and the data claim that covers the proposed relationship between the collected data and the experiential human past.

These challenges are answered in the case of the PHMG via a proposed separation between secondary and indexing databases as core subdivisions of prosopographical method: the research questions of this project are better answered with a more modelling-driven secondary database approach. Using a high exposure of logic and relatively low granularity allows this work to be done in a way that is time-efficient whilst ensuring sufficient clarity and preservation of the decisions made.

In the next chapter, we can move on to considering the details of the data structures and entity types that form the database system, and how the data entry and storage systems were designed to support the research questions and project design we have covered in the preceding two chapters.

3. DATA STRUCTURES

The database that underpins the PHMG is a graph database: that is to say, rather than the table-based format of a traditional relational database, it comprises entities stored as *nodes* (also known as a vertex, and analogous to a table row in a relational database) of various *types*, each of which can have *attributes* (a single data item, such as a name or a number or a block of text without subdivisions). The graph database also includes *relationships* (also known as edges, or links) between these nodes, which can themselves have types and attributes. It is also important to note here that relationships are *directed* – they always go from one node and to another, rather than simply being a “neutral” link between the two.

For prosopographical use, graph databases are advantageous in that they allow easy conceptualisation of the relationships between data types, without the use of additional tables to make sense of the linkages. Whilst the database has underlying index numbers to allow for database operations, all database nodes were given a separate index number specific to their node type for the purposes of database coding. This made referencing nodes, and thereby working with them during coding and data entry, significantly easier: knowing that Person #X is a particular figure is a much more intelligible reference than simply having a purely numerical reference across all data types, in which other nearby numbers might be assigned to other types of node entirely. As will become apparent in the remainder of this chapter, the design of the database was done in such a way as to favour using relationships between nodes as a way of storing data – for example, by making categories nodes in their own right to which relationships could be formed – rather than storing such information via categorised attributes on nodes, where possible.

There are significant pre-existing attempts to describe specific data structures for historical research, most importantly the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CIDOC-CRM).⁶⁸ Designed

⁶⁸ CIDOC CRM Special Interest Group, *Definition of the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model Version 7.1.1* (2021).

initially for museum work, CIDOC-CRM provides an extremely extensive language for describing historical objects and entities. The structures of the PHMG are, however, not strictly CIDOC-CRM compatible, for reasons related to the differences between indexing and modelling databases discussed in the previous chapter. CIDOC-CRM, as a result of its background in museum use, follows a principle of monotonicity. As the CIDOC-CRM manual explains, 'Monotonicity requires that adding new classes and properties to the model or adding new statements to a knowledge base does not invalidate already modelled structures and existing statements.'⁶⁹ The PHMG is intentionally not monotonic: new statements added can conflict with existing ones in the database and require subjectively read revisions of existing nodes, with validity decisions and syntheses being made at the level of the model. Nonetheless, through the following section on node types, comparisons have been made and similarities and dissimilarities noted with the CIDOC-CRM model, using it to provide an established baseline with which to compare the PHMG's handling of particular concepts.

The remainder of this chapter discusses the specifics of data collection largely as a logical order of processes involved, starting with what types of node were used and then moving on to discuss inclusion criteria, disambiguation, and then particular challenges in producing data based on titlature, geography, and personal identity. The development of this system was not as linear as this structure may imply – it was in practice very much an iterative process, where earlier aspects of the design were revisited during data collection to better account for the specificities of the collected information. Presenting it in the format given here, however, provides a clearer overall outline of the process than a more strictly chronological approach to the discussion would have given.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 29-31.

NODE TYPES & INFORMATION COLLECTED

The most fundamental initial node type, given the prosopographical focus of the data, was the *Person* node – which as the name implies contains a range of data about an individual, and serves as a point from which they can be connected to events, places, identities, and other individuals in the database. The Person node bears similarities to CIDOC-CRM’s E21 Person class, but without the stipulation that multiple instances of a person may be used where there is confusion about the identification: a PHMG person is always treated as disambiguated, with notes available on where this has taken place, and this process is discussed further below.⁷⁰ The PHMG also allows for a number of links from the Person node handled more directly than the CIDOC-CRM schema if used in full, though CIDOC-CRM does likewise allow for this sort of ‘shortcut’ edge format: marriage in PHMG is for example handled more simply as a direct connection between two Person nodes rather than the marriage being a separate group entity (CIDOC-CRM’s E74) to which the Person nodes must be joined via a joining event (E85).⁷¹

Relatively little structured data was stored directly as attributes of the Person node, as opposed to storage via connections from it: storage via connections was optimal for most possible uses of the dataset, to allow for maximum use of the connectivity of data. The notes section included in every person node was however a core part of the database’s information system, providing explanation and context for the connections and structured data attached to the node. Initial versions of the database stored considerably more data in the Person node than eventually ended up being the case, with the main data items within the node itself being largely, as noted, reduced to names and a catch-all notes section. The two major areas that changed were regarding people’s identities, which became separate nodes in their own right, and chronological items like birth and death dates, because recording all dated items as *Event* nodes ultimately formed a more consistent approach.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 71-72.

⁷¹ Ibid, 105.

How to store identities was a central early question within the project, as these were some of the first categorisations to be implemented. Initial designs, before the decision to use graph database structures, included storage of identities as a simple categorisation for each individual. This rapidly proved inadequate thanks to the layering of identities in areas like ethnicity (for example, the Mkhargrdzelis whose identities had Armenian and Georgian elements), and so a “flag” based system allowing individuals to be “tagged” with multiple identities was used. This still has significant drawbacks as a descriptive method when it comes to identities, as it lacks any capacity to discuss which identities were more or less strongly expressed and in which circumstances they might have been, but those are discussion where the best answers we can look for will lie more in close readings of the text than in prosopographical categorisation.

To avoid a central lookup table or complex documentation of numerical flags, the *Identity* node was created as a way to store these tags. The identities stored were given broad subtypes, which are discussed in detail in the identities section later in this chapter. Making identities a type of node, as opposed to a piece of information attached to a person node, allowed pathfinding through graph queries to easily find all of the people with a particular identity in the database, including as part of more complex operations. The closest CIDOC-CRM concept is E74, a Group, but the stipulation that a CIDOC-CRM group should ‘act collectively or in a similar way due to any form of unifying relationship’ sits uneasily with identities that may at times be projected externally due to a perception of collective similarity rather than its actuality.⁷²

One of the central aims of this database project was to better store links between people and events, and as such the *Event* node was a key part of the data structures after the Identity and Person nodes had been constructed. *Event* was created with a very wide range of functions in mind: as well as recording direct events noted in sources, it could be used to record any other event that took place at a specific time, at a specific place, or where two or more people met – for example, investiture of offices, births, and deaths, even where not explicitly stated, could be

⁷² Ibid, 99-100.

logged as events. In this respect the Event node was very similar to the CIDOC-CRM definition for its equivalent E5 event node.⁷³ Events were the key area via which the data were placed in a spatial framework as well. Events could be tagged with a link to a specific place, which were stored in the Place node type.

The *Place* node was, as noted, used for links to Event nodes, but also for direct ‘ownership and leadership’ connections that assigned places to people. The idea was not necessarily to create a complete gazetteer from the sources, but to focus on places that could be linked to individuals. All places had a point location, and where appropriate could be given a string of coordinates to form a polygon. These could also be left blank: where a place was explicitly referred to but could not be located, the point location was left at 0,0. Despite these features for exact description, a place in the PHMG is probably closer in nature to CIDOC-CRM’s E27 Site than E53 Place, though the precise distinction CIDOC-CRM makes is somewhat elided here: they are descriptions of geographic locations, not of any possible relative unit of space.⁷⁴ As well as links to events, or directly to people (see below), places could be linked to each other to form a containment hierarchy. This could in theory have been produced dynamically from comparing polygons, but avoiding overuse of polygons was a strong desideratum for this part of the project.

Polygon-driven mapping has significant issues when applied to Medieval Georgia, in which “bordered” ideas of landscape with linear boundaries between zones of control may well have made little sense to contemporary people. There were in some places accepted natural borders between different regions or political entities, such as the Likhi ridge dividing the eastern and western parts of Georgia, but in many cases such features cannot be identified and control of settlements or fortresses as points with relatively fluid border areas may have been more usual at least in some areas. Individual settlements and loosely defined lands could be transferred between members of the nobility, which may have led to overlaps in what was considered to be in whose particular control. Ultimately we lack good descriptions of medieval Caucasian

⁷³ Ibid, 61.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 77; 87.

borderlands, and their nature and governance will be discussed more later on in this thesis: from a data perspective, though, it will suffice to say at this stage that we cannot reasonably assume that a consistent, precise, polygonal view of mapping would work well for this period, and that point based maps and considerations of zones of influence which could at times overlap may well be a more realistic way of approaching these questions.

In some cases, the text indicated a relationship between a person and a place without explicitly placing one at the other. This was almost always done when discussing leadership roles, which could be inherent to a title (e.g. Ch'q'ondideli, the bishop of Ch'q'ondidi) or could be a particular statement of ownership (e.g. 'She gave Lori to Sargis Mkhargrdzeli'). Individuals could therefore be tagged with "leadership locations" separately to the event tagging system.

At this point it is worth considering a few things that the data structures do not include, and why they were excluded if so. The first and perhaps most major of these is the lack of an institutional structure model of any kind. That is to say that any formalised relationships between different institutional bodies on the one hand and places, events or people on the other are not represented in the data. The relationship, for example, between the *amirsp'asalar* and the *mepe* is reasonably well understood – the former was the most senior army commander for, and reported to, the latter. Similarly, the church hierarchy is fairly well documented. As such, it might be argued that the relationships between specific offices could be usefully incorporated into a prosopographical model of this kind. However, this project is focused on modelling social and political position and power primarily as a descriptive rather than prescriptive model: that is to say that relying on a projection of the hypothetical structure between offices and institutions could lead to inadequate attention being paid to shifts in their practical function which need not always have come with technical reorganisations of the structure. For example, a particular vizier (*ukhutsesi*) might have a particular place in the ceremonial pecking order, but if the role was held by someone of particular talent or in particular favour then that person might well end up with more power or responsibilities than someone nominally more senior – a

situation which might revert as new holders of the offices emerged, or might ultimately be encoded into a reformulation of the offices themselves. Our initial thesis, then, is that whilst much of value may certainly be gleaned from looking at office-holding, our discussion of the institutional structures and relative power of offices should proceed from and contextualise rather than precede and be presupposed by the prosopographical approach made here.

Linked to the lack of representation of institutional structures is the lack of representation of group entities, such as armies, or the people of a particular town or region, except where these could be included as identities linked to individuals. The inclusion of these would arguably have allowed for a significantly more complete depiction in the events section of the model, as the current representation is forced to leave out military campaigns where no individual participant is made explicit, thus reducing its utility for analysing policy decisions. The exclusion of these data was on two grounds. Methodologically, the difficulty of assessing the inclusion of group entities was paramount. What defines an “army” as a collective body, let alone far more vague references to e.g. “the Meskhis” imagined as a collective populace making decisions in a conflict situation, is a question fraught with difficulties. Practically, dealing with this question would have been a significant scope extension of the project that went well beyond what was feasible in the available time.

There are therefore three “fundamental” node types – the central *Person* node, and the *Event* and *Place* nodes that provide connected data, plus the descriptive node type *Identity*, and the reference node type, *Biblio*. Together, and with the appropriate linkages and attributes, this relatively simple set of structures allows for a complex prosopographical model that permits a wide range of analyses.

DATA INCLUSION CRITERIA

Considering data inclusion means looking at two main areas. First, we will consider the macro level, the inclusion of entire source documents and the general approaches to them, and then

move on to discuss the specific inclusion criteria for the core node types *Person*, *Place*, and *Event*. Inclusion of *Identity* nodes will be discussed later in this chapter in a dedicated section.

Some overall principles should be included first. As discussed in the previous chapter, the aim of this project was not to provide a prosopographical index. One of the earliest decisions, therefore, was that there would consequently not be an attempt to include every mention of every individual involved, unless that mention contributed to the structured information. Largely this meant not referencing sections with extended panegyric functions, although also there were sections unmentioned because none of the persons in them were novel and they failed to fit the criteria for event inclusion as discussed below, especially those which talked generically about the habits of a particular individual (usually a monarch).

The first source to be used for data input was the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, working with both the 1959 Q'aughchishvili edition and the 2013 English translation. Sections to be approached were first sorted by chronology and then by source, with the understanding that supplementary sources would be added later. The “time period” for the project was thus more specifically set during the data entry process by the scope of its source sections. From these, data were processed either from a source as a whole or, in some cases, from a clearly defined and demarcated sub-unit within a source.

The order of source sections and their inclusion was as follows.

- Of Giorgi Lasha And His Time (Subsection: Tamar)
- The Life of Tamar, Mepe Mepisa
- The History and Eulogy of Monarchs (Subsection: Tamar)
- The History and Eulogy of Monarchs (Subsection: Giorgi III)
- Of Giorgi Lasha And His Time (Subsections: Giorgi III, Demet're)
- The History of the State of Sisakan (Subsections covering the C12 to early C13)
- Vardan Areweltsi's Compilation of History (Subsections covering the C12 to early C13)

- Mkhitar Gosh's Colophon or The Aghuanian Chronicle (Subsections covering the C12 to early C13)
- Ibn Al-Athir's Chronicle (Subsections covering the C12 to early C13 where relevant to the Caucasus)

Secondary source material was included and referenced in the database as needed for the notes sections of particular persons, events and places. It was usually only referenced where specifically necessary: the aim of its use was not, for example, simply to generally contextualise the readings given. Rather, it was to cite positions on specific points relating to the structured data, for example noting Brosset or Toumanoff's positions on questions of Byzantine genealogy; to provide evidence unavailable in the text, for example Japaridze's numismatic approach to deducing the death year of Queen Tamar; or to provide specific information on figures of wider importance that extends well outside the core sphere of the project's investigations, for example for assistance disambiguating particular Caliphs or Sultans and their family lines.⁷⁵ The *Biblio* node was flexible enough to allow for a range of works to be properly cited, with a system that provided variable input fields depending on the options selected in others (so for example the reference type could be set to a journal article, which would provide options for volume and issue not available if the entry was for a primary source or book).

Having considered which source material was included, we can now discuss the set of criteria through which the material was filtered into the database. The initial criteria for when to include a person were comparatively simple, in that every individual mentioned by name in the Kartlis Tskhovreba or other contemporary sources used for the database as having lived in the spatiotemporal area in this time period was included. There was, however, one major issue, namely the inclusion of people who were mentioned in the material but were outside the spatiotemporal area of the project. These fitted into two major categories.

⁷⁵ Brosset, M, *Histoire de la Georgie* (St. Petersburg, 1849); Japaridze, G., 'თამარ მეფის გარდაცვალების თარიღის წესებზე', საისტორიო კრებული 2 (2012); Toumanoff, "On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Tamar".

Firstly, there were people, real or fictional, who were mentioned via references to literary or historical events. Where this appeared to be the case, these people were considered out of scope and ignored for the purposes of the project. In some cases, literary or historical characters were clearly used as pseudonym terms for actors within the spatiotemporal frame - for example, referring to Giorgi III as 'Constantine' as a way of linking his achievements to those of the famous Emperor.⁷⁶ In these cases the reference was just treated as being to the actor contemporary with the project's time period.

Second, there were people who were chronologically within the frame of the project, but geographically outside its scope. For these, the rule was a "one connection" rule. That is, there must be a singular logical point of connection from that person to a person or event within the scope area. This was in the vast majority of cases, though not all, through an event. For example, Alexios III of Byzantium is included for being directly implicated in appropriating funds that Tamar attempted to send to Mount Athos. Family members connected to him, however, would not be included even if they were mentioned in the Georgian source material. Another example is that travels to or from Georgia included the external end-point, so Iuri Bogolybusky's exile to Constantinople was sufficient to justify the inclusion of an event and place node at that city.

It should be noted that in the one connection rule, the link did *not* have to correspond directly to an edge in the database. Being mentioned within the synopsis or discussion of an event would be sufficient for a person to be included. An example of this is Caliph Al-Mustanjid, who does not appear within the scope at any point, but is noted simply by title in the sources as a causal factor for an event that does, as one of three figures who are said to have summoned a Muslim army to attack Georgia during Giorgi III's reign.⁷⁷ He is therefore included.

For events, a more complex set of criteria were necessary for inclusion. The criteria were that:

⁷⁶ KT, 231; ქს II, 10.

⁷⁷ KT, 232; ქს II, 11.

- The event needed at least one known and named person who could be treated as being present at it. Battles or sieges where no known figures were present according to the text were thus excluded, for example. This was central to maintaining the prosopographical focus of the database: a more extended model that could treat armies or group entities as actors was beyond the scope of the project.

One edge case with this criterion was deaths: people were treated as being present at their own burial if this otherwise fitted the criteria, as this permitted these events to be registered and allowed more of an overview of how senior and royal figures interacted with the religious geography of the region. This was the only circumstance in which people were treated as present at events after their own deaths.

- The event had to be treatable as a specific, discrete entity at which a person can be located or did an action. A statement like “Tamar gave donations to the monastery at Mount Athos” is for example excluded – as it is unclear whether this is a discrete event or a description of regular or recurrent behaviour. Similarly “the banishment of Iuri Bogolyubsky” would not be treated as a singular event as it lacks implied clarity of location, but “the arrival of Iuri Bogolyubsky in Constantinople” would fulfil this criterion.
- The event had *either* a specific location *or* multiple known and named people involved (or both). A statement that, for example, Tamar met with the Shirvan-shah, even absent a location, is a valuable data point for looking at connections between individuals; a statement that Tamar went to Dvin, regardless of the lack of other people present, is a valuable data point for considering the movements of the Georgian court. Statements that lacked location and only included a single person were left out, even if they passed the first two criteria. A hypothetical example would be the statement “Tamar went to a

castle and stayed there for some time” – this is a specific discrete event with one known and named person, but as we cannot know which castle is being discussed and it includes just one person then it fails this third test.

The inclusion of the possibility of multiple people being involved but no location existing also meant that communications that may not have taken place directly could be included as events. For example, sending a letter might have in theory been modelled as multiple events, as a journey could be at least modelled as one or two events at its start and end points. In practice, however, we rarely get locations or routes of messengers: in such cases the letter could be treated as an interaction between the sender and recipient, and thus a singular event.

The primary reason for including this test was that an event that failed it was an event that was unlikely to be able to be positively identified again even if other source material mentioned it, due to the lack of positive identifying features. An exception was made in the case of certain births and deaths where useful for chronologies or discussed explicitly in the texts, as these are sufficiently specific and singular and with plausible likelihood of reoccurrence in other material that they make useful points to record.

- The event had to satisfy the one connection test as included for persons. The arrival of Iuri Bogolyubsky in Constantinople after his banishment, for example, satisfies this rule. Any further actions he took in Constantinople would not satisfy this rule, had they hypothetically been reported – they would be treated as beyond the scope, unless they themselves related directly back to events that were in scope (so if he sent a message from his exile to a supporter in western Georgia, that would again be an in-scope event).

A further finer detail of how the rule was applied to events was that the “one

connection” could extend to a multi-part event that had been conducted or ordered from a point within the scope. So for the purposes of the connection rule, the entire campaign of the Mkhargrdzelis into Iran late in Tamar’s reign is treated as counting for these purposes, and not just their first known stop outside the borders of the database’s main research area. The presence of additional data that allows a campaign or journey to be subdivided across several event nodes, in short, does not fall foul of the rule – the test is applied to the last point in the narrative thread.

There were, additionally, some specific data issues that came up regarding events that needed some overall guidelines. One among these was how to adjudicate events that may or may not have happened within the bounds of the period. This was a particular problem when dealing with non-Georgian sources that were less strictly arranged around the particular monarchs whose reigns formed the anchor points for the Kartlis Tskhovreba, but even for the Georgian material the dates of, for example, the death of Tamar are seriously contested and some readings move certain events in or out of scope. For example, an Armenian capture of the fortress of Hrasek is stated to be ‘in the time of the Atabeg Ivane’ by Stepannos Orbelian.⁷⁸ If we take this to mean that it occurred between Ivane Mkhargrdzeli gaining that title and his death, this means it may have happened before Tamar’s death but more likely occurred within Giorgi IV’s reign. These events were assessed case by case but usually included rather than excluded, on the grounds that having them in place made re-identification more likely if other information on the same events, people, or places came to light that would have allowed for a more secure assessment of the criteria at a later point.

Another issue that cropped up on multiple occasions was the “campaign problem” – that is, whether figures present at a specific point within a larger wider event should be assumed as also present at other points. An example would be that Zakaria Gageli was reportedly unhorsed at Basiani – it is therefore highly probable that he was present at the gathering of the army and

⁷⁸ Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 84.

at Vardzia when Tamar prayed for the army, even if he is not specifically attested at either point.⁷⁹ This was dealt with by allowing people's presence at events to be marked as "assumed", implying its non-attestation in a source. This was used only in cases where the individual was mentioned in a closely related event, such as another battle on the same campaign. No link was created or used for cases where someone might be purely guessed to be at an event (for example, the likelihood of unmentioned family members being present at someone's funeral or coronation: in many cases we can certainly say that it seems extremely probable that certain figures were present at certain court events, but the complete lack of information means such information would be excessively speculative).

A final issue, and one that as mentioned forms something of a loophole in the above rules, is where events needed to be included for the chronological data they offered even if they did not otherwise fit the guidelines. For example, the death of the Turco-Persian ruler Eldiguz, as presented in most of our sources, does not fit the guidelines: it is not addressed explicitly, and happens without mention of place or other individuals present. As we shall see later, however, the presence or absence of Eldiguz at particular events is vitally important to establishing the turbulent chronology of the 1170s, and thus inputting an event to help provide chronological bounds for other events he took part in was a necessity for establishing and checking the period's chronology.

For places, the first thing to note is that places and regions were both stored with the *Place* node type. This meant there would be a hierarchy of places, sometimes several layers deep. The most specific place types could be down to the level of an individual building, whereas the least specific could be a large country-sized region. Sometimes places in this hierarchy did not themselves have locations, but via the nesting process could be approximately regionally located: for example, a village called Xardzay was not locatable from available information when

⁷⁹ KT, 298; 269; յԹ II, 138; 96.

it was input, but the fact that it was stated to be in the Vayots' Dzor region meant that it had an approximate location due to its connection to the place node for Vayots' Dzor.

Any place was added that could be linked to an event, or to a person directly as a leadership or ownership location. Leadership and ownership were not distinguished at the data level in person-place connections, in large part because attributions in the chronicles were unlikely to permit the distinction: in a formula like "person X gave place Y to person Z", whether this means a governance position, personal ownership of land, or both may not always be clear or consistent. Leadership was also therefore permitted to overlap, on the understanding that different types of leadership may have existed and not always fitted a consistent and strict model. In general, places that could neither be given as the place of an event or as being a tagged location for a specific person were *not* initially included, though a small number of exceptions to this rule were made where for example it made sense to include a block category of places (for example, certain traditional regions of Georgia).

IDENTIFICATION AND DISAMBIGUATION OF DATA

The second part of data collection after selecting what should be included was identification: that is, connecting specific instances of a name or word in a text to the conceptual item they referred to within the data structures. In addition to this, one of the core methodological aims of the project, as discussed earlier, was to create a single, logically consistent dataset. One of the major necessities for achieving this is disambiguation of data – the selection of a single reading of the collective body of texts.

In the large majority of cases, the core data were easily identifiable. This is not to say that they were *complete* in any sense, but rather that there was no disagreement between surviving sources on the information that was available. This is partly simply a result of the relatively low overlap between sources: much of the material involved was unique to its particular source and must simply stand as the best knowledge available given the lack of other voices. Single sources

covering a topic do not necessarily lack disambiguation problems, however: for example, dealing with identifications between particular names and people is still a problem in such texts.

This problem of names and people is one of the largest issues of person disambiguation. This may be considered the “Rusudan question” – that is, how to deal with instances where an individual is only given a first name and it is unclear to which of the possible holders of the name it is referring.⁸⁰ Rusudan is one of the most common names to have the problem with, given the prevalence of the name among the Bagrationids, who are rarely given surnames, and who used a somewhat limited pool of names for their daughters. This problem fortunately does not otherwise arise often in Georgian material thanks to the wide use of surnames and epithets by twelfth century Georgians. When such a problem did arise, in general a reading was selected on plausibility grounds: which of the name’s holders appeared most often elsewhere in the text, and which was more senior or better connected to the topic at hand, could all be factors.

The second important difficulty when disambiguating people were cases where it was unclear whether to attempt to reconcile two possible prosopons into a single person about whom the information was confused, or whether to posit that they were in fact separate people. This was mostly a difficulty for judgements made about relatively minor figures that nonetheless appeared in multiple sources: it is quite plausible that names may occasionally have been transposed or muddled. Indeed, we can observe a definite example of this in some of the Georgian discussion of Byzantine ruling families in the later twelfth century, which is clearly erroneous and muddles details about the Angeloi emperors quite severely.⁸¹ In general, unless there was a reasonably definite reasoning in the nomenclature in favour of reconciliation, it was not attempted here. For example, the Georgian material and the Orbelian history both discuss one person called Kavtar in relation to the Orbeli rebellion: one Kavtar is explicitly identified as “son of Ivane” and mejinibetukhutsesi, while the other is equally explicitly referred to as Ivane

⁸⁰ This is known to most prosopographers dealing with medieval material, with the problem renamed according to which name causes the issues in their time period – Baldwin, Alexios, Robert, etc.

⁸¹ KT, 300-301; jᄁ II, 142.

Orbeli's youngest brother. The Georgian tradition has been to reconcile these references into a single 'Kavtar Orbeli', whereas the PHMG approach has been to assume, given their differences of both fate and family role, that they should be treated as separate, a shared personal name not being in and of itself sufficient to identify them with one another.⁸²

Events proved one of the largest problems for identification and disambiguation in the methodology. This was because multiple events that could be described in the same way frequently appeared in the material – for example, discussion of a siege of Ani in one source, occurring at some point in Tamar's reign, could refer to one of multiple sieges of Ani mentioned in other material on her reign. Fortunately, shorter notes of this sort often did not add substantive information to the longer-form versions of the events they may have been referencing, and it is improbable that they referred to an additional siege not mentioned in the longer sources. This meant that certain particular references could essentially be passed over: whilst it would be of interest to know which was being mentioned, it would not add prosopographical data per se. At other times, contextual information, event prominence in other sources, or the order of events in texts, could be used to make an approximate judgement.

Disambiguation of places was rarely an issue: few names of places are repeated. Identification, meanwhile, was a very significant problem. Identification ideally, for a place, involved identifying a place in the medieval texts with a modern settlement or location in order to allow georeferencing. In many cases this was a very simple process, but for less commonly discussed locations, and especially those where the modern place names are Turkish, Azerbaijani or Armenian rather than Georgian, it could prove a notable challenge. Identification was not achievable in all cases. Places that lacked georeferences were given 0,0 as nominal coordinates: as this point (the crossover between the prime meridian and the equator) lies well outside the area under discussion, it allowed for any analyses or mapping tools to be given a simple code instruction to skip points with those values associated.

⁸² Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 201; KT, 236; jᄁ II, 19.

DATA AND IDENTITIES

Having discussed how the inclusion or exclusion of certain prosopons and related objects from the database was handled, we can now discuss some of the methodology and theory for storing and dealing with particular areas – firstly turning to identity classification as one of the largest and most difficult problems to handle.

Identities are an important category to consider from a data modelling perspective in that they hold the properties of mutability, subjectivity and situationality discussed in chapter two, giving them a fluidity that is less amenable to the rigidity of a structured data approach. The same person can have a wide array of changing, interacting identities which are considered more or less prominent depending on the situation and the observer. Other information, such as death dates, do not have this flexibility in our model: all of the people in this dataset are dead, and whilst the sources may not agree on when that happened, or give use the information on it, we can plausibly model things with the assumption that they died precisely once and at a single point in time. Despite this core difficulty in modelling identity, this information has too much value for the core questions of prosopographical research to simply avoid handling it: both effective adaptation of the model and an effective appreciation of its limits in the interpretation were therefore necessary. Different identity categories required subtly different approaches to achieve this.

The simplest of these to cover in methodological terms was gender assignation, which as noted earlier could be modelled with male and female being the only represented category options: whilst additional categories could have been added if necessary, there were no cases in the source information where a two category approach was inadequate to capture the data.

Conversely, by far the most complex area came when considering categories like religion and “ethnic” identity. These were especially layered, fluid categories and unamenable to the sort of strict categorisation that is ideal for data work. Identity markers, as noted in the previous chapter, were probably not consistent and vary in our work between self-definitions by

members of particular ethnic groups and terms they projected onto the peoples around them.

This meant finding ways of handling a number of complexities between chronicle and data.

It was clearly possible for people to hold multiple ethno-political identities, which had differing but not necessarily contradictory markers. Iuri, Tamar's first husband, is referred to as the Mepe of the Abkhazians, but also repeatedly as a Russian.⁸³ In this case, it may appear that a separation can be made between a pseudo "national" affiliation and a separate "ethnic" one – but this too would be misleading. The Mkhargrdzelis and other elite families with well documented Armenian roots, for example, should not be treated as merely Georgian by dint of allegiance: by the late 12th century, they had been fully assimilated into Georgian elite culture for generations and denying that in favour of treating their Georgian identity as merely political would be to risk essentialising ethnic status to a matter of ancestry, whereas it was clearly more complex in reality. It is also important to avoid erasing the reality of local identity, which we see as a significant factor in this period. Imeretians, for example, were by and large clearly 'Georgian', being in one of the kingdom's core regions. Their Imeretian identity was usually entirely at ease with their Georgian identity – although civil wars could for example fall along east-west subdivisions within the country as discussed in subsequent chapters. Cases of regional identity recognisable in individuals in the sources are few, especially as it was not taken as an assumption in the PHMG that the rulers of provinces necessarily had those regions' provincial identities. Nonetheless these ethnic categories are used in the source material, and are a clear example of the sorts of overlap that meant that identities of similar type needed to be layered in the data model.

As modern historians and observers, we may have our own additions to make to the chroniclers' explicit adjectival identity-claims, too, by noting where identity is implicitly discussed or assigning categorisation based on recorded action. This is an area where the nature of the PHMG database as a model, rather than an index, allows for much more flexibility:

⁸³ KT, 243-244; jG II, 36-38.

identity links could be tagged as ‘assumed’ – that is to say, not directly attested by the sources but considered to be high likelihood. Whilst any sort of measure of certainty or uncertainty in this case would have provided only a false sense of scientism, this tag did allow a data-level differentiation between those claims that had a very direct source basis and those that, for example, were based on a mixture of expectations and recorded action. This meant that views of the data could be produced that did not over-represent identities outside the ‘default’ where Georgian and Orthodox identities, in the Georgian sources, are often assumed and thus rarely made explicit. Implementing this assumed/attested distinction was not always clear-cut – for example, whether particular forms of religious activity were sufficient to have someone attested as being of a particular faith was a complex area. Usually we can expect that people tended for example to make donations to churches of their own faith, but we have clear records of Georgian monarchs patronising Gregorian-Armenian and even Muslim religious institutions so this may not be as reliable a marker as it might initially appear.

Religion, whilst not neatly separating from ethno-political matters and indeed forming a major component part of for example Armenian and Georgian identities, did separate sufficiently that it could be treated as a separate categorisation. The particular utility of doing so was in being able to record cases of conversion, of which we have a number of records through our period, and which is not seen as necessarily positing any sort of ethnic change upon its occurrence.

The solution – or, perhaps, least worst option – used here for the problem of handling religion, ethnicity, and politics, was therefore to create two data categories, “religious” and “ethnopolitical” identities. The latter category in particular is broad-brush, and can include anything from my own assertion of allegiance-based identity (“this person was a ranking official in the Georgian court and can thus be considered Georgian”), to indicating specifically ethnic or polity-based terminologies. This is not to say that these things could be conflated in practice. The precise reasons why an individual could be assigned, or would self-assign, a particular identity mattered, and defined when such an identity would be placed at the forefront either by

that person, by those around them, or by external onlookers. To run a clear distinction between identities created by, for example, court roles and allegiance, and those constructed by ties of ancestry or language, would create a false impression of those things being fundamentally distinct to all observers, however. To the northern Iranians who stood in the path of the Mkhargrdzelis' raiding army late in Tamar's reign, the ethnic distinctions that meant that, to some, the army's commander might not have counted as wholly "Georgian" probably would not have seemed particularly relevant.

The systems and situationalities of shifting and layered identities are too complex to capture effectively in a database system of this kind. Attempts to gauge whether someone was "more" one thing or another would be ahistorical and provide false impressions of certainty, as would trying to model the situationality of particular identities from a handful of chronicle appearances of by-definition atypical (because of their elite status) figures. The conflation used in the database, in combination with the use of multiple identity tags per individual, allow this information to be recorded and examined to some extent without providing a level of false precision, hence the very broad nature of the categories used. Even if the categorisation used is blunt and lacks a full description of the situationality of identity, however, it is frequently still an advance on the tendency for rules of thumb to be applied to individuals from this period, using just as blunt a categorisation if not more so and doing so in a less explicit manner. The analytical importance of using data categorisation to challenge such assumptions is discussed further in the next chapter.

TITULATURE AS DATA

In large part, titulature tagging worked similarly to identities: a title was a tag that was permanently attached to any person who had at some point had that title. The relative fluidity between specific posts and more general ideas of rank tended to suggest this approach. For example, the number of *didebulis* or *aznauris*, categories of social class identity, was not fixed:

but nor, necessarily, was the number of sp'asalars (generals), at least to any number evident in the sources. Whilst some roles, the various specific eristavis (governors), ukhutsesis (viziers), and the amirsp'asalar, were almost certainly only held by one person at once, it seemed prudent to use a data model that could handle exceptions, for example in the event of multiple claimants to a title or shared office-holding.

As mentioned earlier, there was no more advanced system in place for applying chronologies to titlature. Whilst we do have a number of events or instances recorded of titlature changes taking place, these are sufficiently inconsistent and few in number that it was unlikely a more detailed recording system would provide any meaningful additions to pattern finding and recognition. In general, few figures significantly changed their titlature during their main period of activity: for the most part, the time between their first appearance in the chronicles and their last appearance is, if not precisely the same as the period in which they hold all their major known titles, generally a close approximation. We hear, for example, of Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli before he becomes amirsp'asalar, but the significant majority of events included about him appear after that point.

In general, too, category titles were more often used and more important than specific roles at the data level. The holders of an office such as that of amirsp'asalar are few enough that, whilst they will be discussed in some detail later, finding them all in the database is no large task and they can be easily discussed on an individual basis. Pulling out all the holders of the senior vizier-rank roles, however, or all the holders of the ducal eristavi rank, can give a slightly more robust number of individuals who have a clear connection to one another and can be then examined as a group, one of the key methodological benefits of prosopographical work.

DATA COLLECTION OF EVENTS AND PLACES

Events formed as large a block of the data collection work as people did through the database as a whole. They provided a large element of the networked connectivity of individuals, and also of

their geolocation through places. Places, in turn, were an important part of the modelling approach, as they permitted a number of the analyses discussed in the following chapter. Places tended to be the most time-consuming data type per node, largely because of the data enrichment process of geolocating them.

The largest difficulty with events was judging whether they satisfied the data inclusion criteria discussed earlier in this chapter: the specific implications of particular wordings were often somewhat ambiguous, as language naturally leaves certain information as contextual. Working out in some cases whether figures were present at something that could be treated as a distinct event could be difficult – for example, was “X’s army marched on Y” *necessarily* a statement that X (the person node) could be placed in an event at Y? No, at least *prima facie*: X need not have been with their army, and the army need not have arrived. But if we have a specific statement later that X was with their army at a point beyond Y, we can infer back that X probably was with their army at Y. Such links often were included and treated as being implied by the text.

Preparing data to look effectively at chronologies was also a matter of some difficulty. The precise model ended up being in part derived from a planned analytical approach for testing the model’s chronological consistency, which is discussed in the next chapter. The key challenge in this area is that the sources have few, and contested, explicit dates but on the other hand contain significant quantities of implied data. The addition of some of this data was a relatively late part of the data collection process as a result of developing the approach alongside the necessary data, and the data here were more complex than in many areas: events could have set dates, but linkages between events were an important part of the chronological modelling as well. These links were of an ordering form, for example, from event X to event Y to show that event Y happened subsequent to event X. They could also, however, hold minimum and maximum chronological spans.

Deciding how to order events provided two initial difficulties. First, the event order was not always consistent between chronicles, and whilst in most cases chronicles are written in

chronological order, this is not necessarily always the case. This meant that deciding when an event was treated as succeeding another was often a matter of reading and context. Second, in theory an event could have had vastly more chronological links than most of them were provided with: if for example we know that an event happened after the coronation of Tamar, it also could in theory have been given a chronological link to every event that happened before the coronation of Tamar. This was avoided, and the aim was to avoid statements about time spans that were redundant. For analytical purposes, the fact that this created a directed and acyclic graph, in which all events happened before or after other events (directed) and an event could not be both before and after another event (acyclic) meant that further chronological ordering could be extrapolated from existing links – this is discussed more in the next chapter.

For example, if the text notes a figure's presence at a location, and then suggests a meeting event occurring shortly thereafter, we clearly have at least an event of the figure being at the location, but whether or not the second event was treated as being implicitly still at the location might be unclear and in some cases might affect the inclusion criteria. In general, tagging locations tended to take quite close and specific notes of location in the texts: we know that Georgian monarchs were mobile, even between palaces and fortresses in the small area around Tbilisi, such that in a matter of days it is very plausible that a monarch might have moved locations. This may lead to under-recording of how often monarchs are implicitly placed in Tbilisi, because generic court scenes throughout the text were not given place links for this reason.

With places, geolocating them was a significant difficulty. The places in the sources range from locations still extremely well known (for example, Tbilisi) through to a range of villages, monasteries, or battlefields the precise location of which has long since been lost. A number of sources were used to attempt to derive coordinates for places: this included usage of online mapping tools, a wide range of online resources especially in Georgian and Armenian to try and discern where settlements had been renamed over time, old maps and historical atlases where available, and significant quantities of personal communications. Often, the resulting

derivations of coordinates for locations were therefore either sufficiently clear that no discussion was felt necessary, or alternatively were not derived entirely from easily referenced materials. Consequently, discussions of their locations are abbreviated or minimal in the data. The focus of the project on producing a prosopography, rather than a gazetteer, necessitated this approach. A gazetteer of this region in this period is still a strong desideratum for scholarship, and it may be hoped that the data gathered during this project could assist in producing one at some future stage.

CONCLUSIONS

The detail of the data collection methods for a database like the Prosopography of High Medieval Georgia can seem an excessively particular process imposed upon chronicle materials that were very far from being written for such a purpose. Producing and understanding this methodology, however, is an important part of understanding how the documents can be used in a structured data format to answer historical questions. Without such explicit inclusion criteria, for example, it would be far easier to make interpretative errors based on a misjudgement of the totality of what the data should be taken to represent. Effective analysis requires an effective understanding of the material present, and doubly so when that material has undergone significant additional processing.

Building a prosopographical methodology is an iterative process, in which the documents themselves need to play a significant part in determining where rules need to be clarified to best take account of the available material. There are many different possible ways of building the sorts of data structures described above: the interaction between the project's research questions and its source material produced this particular format. Other projects might, for example, have preferred a different mechanism for codifying identity markers, or preferred not to do so at all. The complexity with which different pieces of data are stored can lead to trade-offs between capacity for data access and construction, which is potentially more difficult in

more granular and complex cases, and the effectiveness of the model as a description of the period.

The imposition of a series of formal rules onto data derived from documents that had no such systematic intent in mind is thus always fraught with difficulties and necessary exceptions. The process of doing so, as the next chapter discusses, nonetheless has its own key value in that it exposes exactly those difficulties and exceptions which are often left implicit in a less systematised method. Whilst this has been, therefore, nominally a chapter about data collection, it has also been a chapter about much of the analytical processing of the source material – a topic onto which we can now turn a more direct light.

4. ANALYSES, TOOLS, AND VISUALISATION

Creating the PHMG dataset using the model set out in the two preceding chapters was in large part done to maximise the analytical utility of the dataset for modelling the socio-political situation in 12th century Georgia. To utilise the data structures effectively for analysis, a range of visualisations and tools were then needed.

As discussed earlier, the analysis of a dataset of the size and type of the PHMG is not something that can be done through statistical tests (for example, to find numerical values of correlation or the shaped distributions of certain values). The data are too few in most cases to make this sort of analysis meaningful. The people in the database only number in the hundreds, and frequently do not share sufficient characteristics to allow for meaningful comparison across the full set. Large proportions of the people found appear in no more than one event and have minimal quantities of information attached to them.

In addition, the data are constructed from a range of imperfect source material which deprives them of the consistency that is ideal for such methods. The data come from sources which themselves were highly selective rather than attempting to create or use an unbiased or statistically representative sample in any sense, and in general statistical methods tend to assume an appropriate unbiased sampling method for the input data. Whilst a more strictly numerical-statistical approach could prove interesting in looking at areas like the relative prominence of different narrative units or concerns in the chronicles, the way the PHMG was constructed is not designed for effective narratological analysis on a single source, but rather for analysis of a particular model of the past constructed from multiple sources.

There are two key ways to utilise this sort of data. One of these, discussed further below, is to exploit the systematisation process itself as an alternate framework through which to read the sources. This does not make use of the data *set* so much as the creation of the data *point* and the

overall ontological framework into which it fits, using these to challenge and examine our implicit and explicit views on how we think about the people discussed in our source material.

The other important thing that we can do to make use of the consistency and nature of the wider dataset is to visualise and sort it in various ways. A primary advantage of prosopography for analysis is that it re-centres the information onto people, so being able to make use of that to get different views of the information according to different organisational principles and visualisations is important to realise the full potential of the database system. This approach can show patterns that may provide the basis for argumentation or flag up possible areas for further investigation. Such systemic approaches to the data can be pursued by various means, including tabulation, mapping, and algorithmic sorting, all discussed further below.

DIGITAL CLOSE READING AND DISTANT READING

Much work on digital humanities approaches to texts has tended to focus on the potential of distant reading methods: that is, ways of analysing texts zoomed out, finding patterns that would be unavailable to the naked eye. Distant reading in particular allows wide scale analyses of whole corpora of texts, searching algorithmically for particular frequencies of terms or topical sections based on a set of pre-defined rules. In some cases where texts are presented in very particular formats (such as for example Arabic biographical dictionaries) a distant reading approach can effectively systematise the texts for categorisation and analysis.

Close reading stands conversely as the assumed traditional methodology of history. It is the art of specific, human, contextual readings of texts, providing comparisons of topics and ideas through human intuition in ways that may be difficult for any computer to match. The close reader needs to be an expert in the material that they read, using knowledge of historical context, textual similarities, or both to better interpret the meanings of particular texts. Their role is to appreciate subtexts and what a text may be hinting at, not saying, or saying in different words, as well as what it says directly and how those meanings connect together.

One thing that unifies both close and distant readings is that they tend to operate in a manner specific to particular corpora or textual traditions. Distant reading approaches can often struggle to operate, or become nonsensical, across corpora including multiple languages, where it may be difficult to properly align terms or model topics in a coherent way given the different approaches particular cultures had to the ideas or entities under consideration. Close reading, meanwhile, gains much of its power from the reader's knowledge and understanding of the literary and historical context of the text under discussion. Why a text is ordered or structured in a certain way, from which other texts its topoi are derived, and what we can therefore infer about its subtexts are vital weapons in the close reader's arsenal.

The explicit aim of this prosopographical project, however, is to work *across* multiple written traditions. What this sacrifices in terms of source specialism, it gains in the power of effective synthesis of different sources and viewpoints. Furthermore, the database's status as a model of the period necessitates systematisation and disambiguation of the modelled data, which therefore cannot be produced directly from chronicle materials through a distant reading method. To achieve this, we must to some extent redefine the methodological split mentioned above, and consider the digital structured data element of the approach as separate from the proposed scale and distance of the project. We come, then, to a third approach: digital close reading.

The concept of digital close reading is twofold: first, the sort of data collected for a database like the PHMG allows easier cross-referencing and comparison to get a more holistic set of close readings on a particular topic, and second, the process of sorting, categorising and disambiguating the data can lead to new insights that would not necessarily have been gained by other methodologies. The former is closer to what Hayles refers to as hyper-reading, but here it is heavily connected to the latter process of encoding and categorisation.⁸⁴ An encoding process is a necessary component of digital distant reading, as a computer requires a model of

⁸⁴ Hayles, N. K., *How We Think : Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago, 2012), 61-62.

some kind in order to output modelled concepts or data. Connecting it instead to close reading, however, places the focus more heavily on the categorisations themselves as part of the output that can be tested, case by case, against the data, whereas in a distant reading the machine must have its input or training data and categories set out before it begins.

Data production can, therefore, be in and of itself a core part of the historical method in a digital close reading approach. The act of manually working through the source material and determining when events and identities meet certain criteria forces a completeness of approach to the society, rather than the text, that traditional close reading does not necessarily demand. It requires us to make explicit both where the gaps and tensions in historical knowledge are, and how we implicitly resolve them and fill them in. That we do implicitly fill in such gaps is incontrovertible. The nature of historical source material is often such that we use relatively small, contextual, and fragmentary pieces of evidence to imply a wider historical picture: a history solely based upon things completely explicitly stated in texts would, at least for this period, be very limited and also frequently end up accepting ideas explicitly stated in the source material that are unlikely to actually have reflected the experiences of the time. Making clear, on a person by person basis, how issues of disambiguation and assignation of identity have been dealt with helps strengthen and challenge the rigour of these assertions by requiring an explicit explanation of why each decision has been made, such that it can then be revisited or better synthesised with any additional evidence that may be available.

Traditional close reading approaches do not in any sense avoid categorisation or systematisation of information about historical figures and their identities and allegiances – but they generally make those readings in an implicit and situational rather than explicit and systematic way. These situational discussions, certainly, have a vital place in historical study, and a number will be found further on in this thesis. As discussed above, people's performance of identities is inherently situational: over-systematising it can create a simplified, rigid view of these categories which is alien to how they are actually expressed and used in human societies.

However, relying solely on the situational and anecdotal, especially when discussing the impact of those identities in a wider context, can mean obfuscating the criteria used for broader categorisation and failing to question either the source material's assignment of ethnonyms or indeed our own assumptions as historians. Whilst natural language discussions are good for allowing nuance in such a discussion, they can also at times make it optional when and whether to confront particular issues in the material.

For many purposes, too, there is utility as well as problem in permanently tagging a flexible, complex category marker to an entity. The fact that an identity, category or allegiance is *situational* does not mean that it only appears in those situations where we have good explicit evidence to discuss its performance. A situation can be far broader than a specific moment, and perceptions of someone's identity follow that person and have continuous impacts on their life that intersect with other roles and identities they hold in that society. Approaches that follow people through those intersecting identities and consider them as part of a wider data set in relation to a general population are therefore necessary to fully understand the impacts of those facets of someone's life. For example, knowing that someone held multiple identities recorded elsewhere, especially ones that might be implicitly in tension, could change the context through which an event is viewed.

Beyond identities, structured data provides a mechanism for testing assumptions or suggesting patterns that are otherwise either difficult to visualise or show from anecdotal collections. One example of this would be that geolocating references to Bagrationid activity in the Georgian chronicles and then mapping them reveals an interesting cluster of points around Tbilisi, as opposed to simply regular references to the capital itself or to a more even spread of recorded activity across the polity. This sort of pattern would not be easy to find without access to a properly geolocated list of events and thus the sort of structured data approach being undertaken here. Comparisons between membership of certain groups (for example members of a rebellion, or members of the clergy) and their connections or location links can similarly be

made. Such an approach ‘proves’ nothing on its own, but it adds powerful additional options for suggesting patterns which may then be explained and supported (or not) by closer reference to what particular actors were reported doing as doing, or by any literary or socio-political features of the texts that may have caused such a pattern to emerge.

Digital close reading that creates systematised data can, therefore, be an important step towards solving the problem of how to handle multiple source traditions whilst also providing a single reading against which assumptions can be tested. The preparation of data discussed in the previous chapter is, in this method, not just a method of preparing and formatting data in order that it can be analysed systematically, but is in and of itself part of the historical process. The alternative to making the act of categorisation an integral, granular part of the historical method is, all too often, making it an implicit, unchallenged assumption within historical research. Digital close reading is potentially a powerful tool to challenge such assumptions.

In addition to the close reading methods involved in the analysis of this material, some methods may be used thereafter that have more in common with certain distant reading approaches, such as mapping, working with lists of identified entities, and considering frequencies of connections. However, these approaches were taken as an approach to the PHMG database, not to the original sources consulted to create it: they are analyses of the collated and curated data rather than distant readings of any specific text.

Having discussed this overall approach to handling the material, we can now move on to discuss the ways in which it could be accessed.

RECORD DISPLAY AND TABULATION

The most basic function of a database like the PHMG is the ability to look at individual records – corresponding to a single node in the database. The presentation of such records was important for being able to efficiently access the stored data. In particular, a key desideratum was the

ability to easily examine connections between individuals, events, and identities when looking at particular figures or chronicle passages and trying to fit them into a wider picture.

Providing a long-form written text piece for every record was one of the most time consuming elements of the database production, although many were only 1-2 sentences and could be largely copied from other entries. This was nonetheless a key part of ensuring that the database was useable. The connections between different database entity types were, as has been explained, not subject to individual attestations. This lower granularity of referencing used in the PHMG as compared to factoid prosopographies – source references are given at the level of a person, rather than a single factoid of information about the person – meant that the reasoning for those links had to be made explicit in the relevant entries. This was the primary function of the text display: it provided the referenced argumentation, with both primary and secondary available sources, for the individual entity's linkages. Disambiguation information and arguments were also provided in this space.

Most major types of node had available notes sections, though the *person* and *event* nodes tended to have the most detail by some margin: a number of places, especially those where there were no disambiguation or identification issues, were deemed to be sufficiently self-explanatory that no long-form text was needed.

Beyond this, most of the parts of any given entry were displayed in the form of hyperlinks, organised by different types of connection. These could be automatically generated from the database, and provided a great deal of the practical and logical utility of the system: with the variety of ways mentioned in the previous chapter that people could be linked together, it was possible to see from an individual record how well recorded and connected a particular individual was in the data set. As a result of the low number of total records and highly socially stratified sample of individuals in the data set, the distribution of links per recorded tended to be something of an exponential curve with a large number of poorly connected nodes and a small top end where a few individuals had vastly more connections than the average.

External hyperlinks were of limited importance for enriching the records, in particular as a result of key secondary works being unavailable in online form, and of few entries for specific figures overlapping with other major resources such as the Prosopography of the Byzantine World. Links to, for example, Wikipedia were nonetheless produced, though separately to the main data system: instead, they were logged into the Hypothesis web annotation system, with a piece of code used to read the tag from the system and present it on the page.

The individual record displays could be accessed either by the search and mapping features discussed below, or via a simple list interface which provided alphabetically ordered event, person, and place lists. The event list could additionally be sorted by an event ordering categorisation (see the section on chronological sorting below for how this was generated).

SEARCHING

Beyond being able to check through the catalogue of records, the most basic analytical tool is the ability to search the database in various ways. A simple tabulated search was one of the first features implemented in this regard.

There were two primary features in the search: the first was an inclusion filter, the second a sorting filter. The inclusion filter, as its name implied, selected only prosopons from the database that matched the category selected (those available for selection being primarily identity categories). If multiple categories were selected then only results that filled all categories were. For example, searching and using the inclusion filter with “Georgian” and “Armenian” as selected ethnic categories would only pull up those persons who were tagged as both Georgian and Armenian.

The sorting filter could likewise have multiple categories selected: search results were placed into a table that could be sorted by features selected on that filter, with the first column giving the result links and subsequent sortable columns for each sorting type. This both allowed easier finding of particular results, and easier searches for people linked by characteristics.

The importance of the tabulated search cannot be overstated. Two key applications of it – the ability to pull out all people in a specific category, and the ability to sort them according to particular criteria – made it significantly easier to discern categories of people connected in particular ways and observe which groups shared connections or correlations with other identities and features, to the extent that our collected material preserves these features. This is the sort of process for which to manually produce each table from the source material might have taken a day or two, but having the underlying data and its assumptions available allows many such tables to be produced as needed. In turn, this opened the possibility, unfeasible through non-digital conventional methods, of testing a range of theories to see which best fit the existing material at a glance and are therefore the most likely to be fruitful for further research.

MAPPING

Mapping was one of the most productive areas for tool development and for providing additional useful insights from the information available. This was partly because the addition of spatial data to places, coupled with their connection through the graph system to events and persons, was one of the most significant additional connections in the data that are not provided in any way in the original narrative sources that comprised the bulk of the raw material.

For the most part, the mapping was done by using point-maps. This was simple to provide, by using the Leaflet mapping tool and dropping points onto it via some customised PHP and JavaScript code.⁸⁵ For most purposes this was the most sensible approach: the sparse data did not meaningfully support approaches like heat-mapping that would have given measures of relative density of results. Given the nature of chronicle sources – their tendency to highlight individual events of interest to the chronicler, rather than attempt a complete time-series of any individual's activity – what is reported is necessarily exceptional, and therefore the prominence of what is reported in the material will be exaggerated in our location data.

⁸⁵ <https://leafletjs.com/>

Relative density mapping would, in short, not necessarily have provided much by way of meaningful results about human action as opposed to narrative portrayal. A large number of events, especially for example figures meeting at court, are not given geographic locations in chronicles, providing a mapping version of the typical problem of assumed places and identities being left out (though given that the court did in fact move, this is a less severe example of that issue than some identity issues where there are onomastic or similar reasons to assume a certain placeholder identity). We can only use events from chronicles, for the most part, as exemplars or specific points in a chain: we can for example give hunting in Abkhazia as an example of where Giorgi III was at some point, but we cannot meaningfully say on how many occasions he went there or how long he spent. Military campaigns are often recorded in more detail – but the balance towards military campaigns in the sources should be seen as recording their perceived political and narrative importance, not as recording that monarchs spent more time on them than on other activities related to rulership.

The lack of quantification available did not, however, make geographical analyses meaningless – far from it. Point maps can still be used to answer relative questions of where the collected source material portrays individuals or groups as having been, and can show interesting lacunae or highlight particular geographies, as will be seen in later chapters. When we take into account the issues, there are still important findings that can be made – for example, it is still improbable that many of our most-mentioned elites led major wars without them getting any chronicle mention at all, so we can fairly conclude that a lacuna in such a leader's activities on a particular part of the edge of their polity may have some meaning regarding where they focused their military efforts. Similarly, by accepting in part the chronicle's logic that it reports key events relating to power and leaders, we can consider some of the reported locations as elements in a geography of how and from where power was handled.

Some place elements in the database, as mentioned earlier, correspond to regions rather than to point locations. Indeed, on a technical level no location is an absolute singular point, and any

one could technically be divisible. In most cases a settlement is the lowest level of point location on the PHMG map, likely nested into province or region level identities above it. However, individual buildings could in theory have provided a lower level of division if for example the fortress of a city was mentioned separately from the city itself and this could be identified: certainly a number of particular fortresses in the vicinity of major cities, like T'abakhmela, are place nodes in their own right in the dataset. There could also be mid-level areas between settlement and region, for example a particular valley like the valley of Tbilisi could include Tbilisi and other settlements like Didube. This created some issues in visualisation as points could overlap at different scales: in general this problem was limited as a result of the relatively low quantity of the data.

CHRONOLOGICAL SORTING

The presence of an event model as part of the prosopography's systems allows for some more detailed discussion of chronology than might otherwise be the case. This includes a chronological sorting model, which allows the production, from a set of constraints provided by the data, of *terminus ante quem*, *terminus post quem*, and estimated dates for all events in the database.

Chronologies do, of course, already exist for this period, and have had considerable attention in the Georgian literature. Some of this work is referenced in the database for specific anchoring points, and a more complete discussion of the chronology and how we should view it is given in the next chapter. Chronologies typically, however, are written for the production of modern narrative histories and therefore try to either provide point-estimates for concision or avoid coming to a strict conclusion. As with other types of prosopographical and chronicle data in our model, producing data that shows the bounds of possibilities or comes to specific conclusions tends to make more sense to improve on this than attempting to deal with probabilities: the probability distributions of contested event dates may be highly erratic, as frequently there will

be a range of specific candidates, and determining a probabilistic model from the very limited data points, varied source material, and complete lack of effective comparison dataset is an endeavour likely to obscure more than it reveals.

The problem of chronological sorting is created by the diverse nature of chronological data, as discussed briefly in the previous chapter's section on event methodology. Historians with highly detailed records from a particular period that include annals or similar rarely struggle to provide, at least to the nearest year, dating for major events. For a period like ours in which the data are primarily narrative chronicles, however, with relatively few dates given and year-organised annals only being available from external perspectives that skip many of the events discussed, the problem of dating becomes more complex. Narrative sources can have date information presented either as date points – that is, a certain thing being mentioned as happening in a certain year – or as spans of time. A span, for our purposes essentially being a constraint on the chronological length between two events, can in turn be of three forms: a fixed span, a minimum span, or a maximum span. So for example “a year after X, it happened that Y” would be a fixed span where the span can be set as precisely one, whereas “after the babe had grown to manhood” provides a very vague minimum span where the span is at absolute minimum fourteen years or so but could equally be sixteen, eighteen or twenty. Information on spans can be produced by deduction too, so for example a maximum span could be provided by the death event of a person involved – so any event with Tamar present cannot by definition have happened after the death of Tamar.

This information should all be logically sortable into a series of bounds as discussed above, unless the input information is in conflict in some way. The method can be described as follows for the terminus post quem (the terminus ante quem method being its reverse). Firstly, we add an arbitrary start and end node to the graph, positioned before and after all the events respectively - the start node was dated at 1100 and the end at 1250 in the code, but these numbers are arbitrary so long as they are outside the scope of any actual dates being dealt with.

We then have a graph of event nodes with directed edges. Assuming correct information input, the graph should by definition be acyclic – no event can happen after itself, so any path through it from start to end will not allow reversing direction and will always lead directly towards the end node by some path or other.

The edge date information essentially provides a series of edge weights, which are the second necessary element to provide the basis for calculations. For the moment we can ignore maximum spans, which will be discussed below. Minimum spans and exact spans can be treated as being essentially the same for our initial purposes, because we only wish for the terminus post quem to know the latest point at which the event could have started: the paths through the graph therefore all represent minimum spans for our purposes. Exact dates can be incorporated by transforming them into edge weights. This can be done by adding new edges to the graph from every dated node to the arbitrary start and end nodes. The longest path – that is, the largest total edge weight - from the start node to any given node forms its terminus post quem: if each edge is at its absolute minimum, then the longest collection of those minima forms an overall minimum. Any other minima are irrelevant for our purposes, because all minima are treated as valid and the largest available is therefore the “real” minimum. Because the graph is directed and acyclic, this calculation can be achieved with a shortest-path algorithm calculation using the negative of the graph edges.

Conflicts can appear on two occasions. Firstly, a calculated terminus post quem can appear after (in the graph) a later set date. Second, a limitation given by a maximum path length rule can be breached, if the minimum calculated is greater than a set maximum. Both of these can be checked algorithmically quite simply, after the main calculation has completed. When a conflict occurs, it either means that the collected previous paths are too great in total length, or that the set date is incorrect, or that the order of events is wrong. A conflict in one place will very likely cause a wide range of further conflicts as the ordering and edge weights are all dependent on earlier nodes throughout the graph, so for practical purposes, whilst a large range of errors may

appear, it will at any time only be the earliest error point flagged through the process that is likely to be of immediate interest to the historian. Once all conflicts are dealt with, what remains forms a working hypothesis for the date ranges.

It should be emphasised that fixing or solving these conflict problems to create an overall working is not the aim of the program, or a feature of the algorithm. They are issues in the input data, and should be solved by editing that input data appropriately – that is, deciding at the input data level which set dates or chronological items to retain and which to discard, based on the proper context of the source material upon which they are based. Second, it is also important to note that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, not all of the source chronicle data will be represented at the data level at any one time to begin with. In the person-prosopon model used for the PHMG, the model is predicated on the data forming a plausible, consistent reading of the sources, so for example a given event can only happen at one time, not on multiple occasions.

Chronology is important for our assessment of certain aspects of the period, as will be discussed in the next chapter, and being able to take account of all the possible varied chronological data available to us is fraught with difficulty. Using tools to assist in cross-checking fragmentary chronological information can therefore help us to consider and at times re-evaluate the social and political landscapes that unfold in our chronicle material.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND SENTIMENT

Having discussed the range of analytical tools available, a brief mention is necessary here of some of the aspects of the analytical chapters that do not draw directly on the database. In particular, prosopography does not tend to capture the morals or ideals expressed in the sources, which can be important for discussing why social structures evolved in a certain way. These discussions set the background against which we can view – or, at times, set a background that can be challenged from – a prosopographical perspective. They can be valuable

either for context or to show where a source's views or statements on ideal action differ notably from the recorded action of individuals across different sources and languages.

This is an area where literary sources as well as chronicles and charters can come into their own. This requires some caution, for literary sources are usually fantastical. The presentations of societies in them may at times serve purposes that are either unclear to modern audiences, or are intentionally subversions of or twists on the cultures in which they were written. The lead characters of surviving Georgian literary texts were Persian (Ramin), Arab (Avtandil, Amiran Darejanisdze), or Indian (Tariel) rather than Georgian which gave their authors potential scope to have their heroes act in ways not in accordance with contemporary Georgian culture.

However, these works were for the elite audiences of our period and we can use them when considering some of the things that those elites valued: heroes may not have acted in the exact styles their audiences would have, but their heroism was clearly predicated on their adopting some forms of idealised behaviour. When it comes to areas like relationships between elites, or when considering the preoccupations of the court elites for whom these texts were written, it makes sense to take these literary perspectives into account.

These discussions are less advanced than the core prosopographical work in the database, and in many cases topics around values and the history of emotions and ideals could greatly benefit from additional work by specialists better grounded in both the detail of the literary texts and in current theoretical and literary approaches. The basic discussions offered here are nonetheless necessary to properly contextualise the wider prosopographical work: whilst using prosopography to describe the social structures of the period more effectively adds much to our analyses, explanation of the observed features does require consideration of the ideological and cultural traits that surrounded those people. Prosopography without an appreciation of these elements can tend to fall back on an assumed *realpolitik* in its discussions, focusing as it does on connections and career-lines, but social-political connections could and did shape and transmit ideas as well.

CONCLUSIONS

The range of analytical methods presented here are largely assistive to, as opposed to replacing, more typical forms of writing history. For tabulations, searches, and algorithmic checking of the model, these tools help produce a greater level of consistency in what is being presented. This comes via the potential for utilising a wider range of exemplification and an increased capacity for pattern-finding, and for being able to test and model ideas to check their consistency within a complete system.

For the study of high medieval Georgia, methods of these sorts are particularly important. The nature of the source material, in varying traditions of primarily narrative chronicles, creates a high potential for inconsistencies in treatment of that material. When trying to produce and synthesise our own event narratives as modern historians, it is easy to introduce or replicate inconsistencies in our view without necessarily appreciating it, or fail to take into account pieces of information that are important but implicit or unclear in how they connect together in the flow of the original narratives. By being able to query, visualise, and assess a set of collected statements about the high medieval Caucasus, it becomes far easier to assess the prosopography according to themes or organising principles that are less locked into the narrative structure of any one core sequence of chronicle material.

In the following chapters, we will see the results of these methods – though their presence is as often implicit as explicit, permitting more easily discussions that take themes or groups of persons and make use of the possibility of accessing all the structured-data examples of the topic. One of their most immediate effects, however, is permitting a more holistic reassessment of the period's chronology, and it is to this that we turn in the next chapter.

5. CHRONOLOGY AND NARRATIVE

Before we continue onward to assessing various features of the medieval Caucasus with regard to the prosopography, it is necessary that first we consider in some detail the chronology of the period to provide an overview of the general flow of events. Whilst a number of narrative histories already cover this topic, a re-examination is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the conventional narrative histories do not always incorporate all of the most recent scholarly papers, or necessarily tackle in depth some of the trickier chronological problems. Secondly, and just as importantly, here we will attempt an approach that differs somewhat from the standard narratives by attempting to segment events on a decade by decade basis. The chronological assessments below incorporate all the sources incorporated in the PHMG database as mentioned in chapter three, with additional material consulted mostly from the Armenian histories of Kirakos Ganjakets'i and Smbat Sparapet, and from the Seljuq chronicles.⁸⁶

This second part of the approach has its issues, both in the lack of security in some dates and the fact that, of necessity, the chronological work here is still more episodic than would be preferable. This is an unavoidable reflection of source material that tended to frame things in narrative units rather than as annals. Nonetheless, it is important that here we observe the chronology by decade rather than by ruler, and where possible consider shifts within decades, in an effort to trace shifts of faction, personnel and policy at the rates that they occurred rather than fully reflecting the tendency to skim over 'uneventful' periods which exists in our source material. The narratives through which we – and indeed through which later medieval Georgians – experienced the high medieval past create, in other words, an essentially different experience of time to that of the individuals who were making decisions about, forming networks around, and living through the events that the documents narrate.

⁸⁶ Smbat Sparapet trans. Bedrosian, R., *Smbat Sparapet's Chronicle*, (Long Branch, 2005); Kirakos Ganjakets'i trans. Bedrosian, *History of the Armenians*; Bosworth, C. E. (trans.), *The History of the Seljuq State: A translation with commentary of the Akhbār al-dawla al-saljūqiyya* (Abingdon, 2011); Luther, K.A. (trans.), *The History of the Seljuq Turks from The Jāmi' ai-Tawārīkh* (Richmond, 2001).

A further important reason for discussing chronology here is that there are some narrative episodes and chronological points for which the prosopographical research contained in the PHMG database provides useful additional data. It may seem at first that chronology and prosopography are not necessarily immanently connected areas, and that while chronology may be important for understanding the temporal frameworks into which characters fitted, prosopography might not have as much to say in return. This, however, would be to underestimate the importance of prosopographical detail in shaping and informing our chronologies. Most of the fixed dates we are given in sources tend to be of prosopographical interest, including births, deaths, and career-line points such as coronations. By considering who was present and a rough model of age structures, prosopography can also supplement plausible readings of chronological issues.

The reverse is also true: chronology is important for how we view prosopography and the surrounding socio-political landscape. In attempting to understand the reasons for recorded actions, and the sort of expectations that contemporaries might have had of the world around them, we need to understand that world at the pace at which they lived it. A single event or a crisis dominant in our material might have been a short-term conflagration and exception to the rule, or might alternatively have been an ongoing issue stretching over many years. Previous movements of cities in and out of certain polities and control could also affect both people's ideological understandings of 'baseline' states of control, and their expectations of the likely stability of control in such places. Understanding at what frequency and duration particular issues happened can therefore tell us a great deal about actors' likely expectations when they engaged in various social and political activities.

A narrative overview that fits events to a more spread out chronology rather than comprising a narrative jumping from one major event to another is therefore a useful piece of background for further discussions of people and events, and this is what is attempted below.

NARRATIVE OVERVIEW BY DECADE

1120s

The earlier part of the 1120s will not be covered in this thesis: we open with the death of David IV Aghmashenebeli (“the builder” or perhaps “the renewer”), which is conventionally treated as having happened in 1125 with no major disagreements in any of the available source material. In the preceding years, he had captured Tbilisi, defeated a Muslim-led coalition at the battle of Didgori, and ended up invading Shirvan and parts of Armenia in the last years of his life. He was succeeded by his son Demet’re.

At some point early in Demet’re’s reign, the Shirvan-shahs were restored to the Shirvani throne. Exactly when this happened is unclear from any of our material.

Ani also appears to have fallen out of its being temporarily in Georgian hands around this time, as Abulet, the Georgian (or perhaps Armenian) noble David the Builder had left ruling there, handed it over to Fadlun, a Muslim ruler whose family had previously owned the city.⁸⁷ As Vardan Areweltsi says this was in part motivated by Abulet wishing to save his son Ivane from a potential war, he clearly implies this happened before Ivane’s plot against Demet’re which he places in 1130.

1130s

The 1130s and 1140s make up the majority of the reign of Demet’re, David IV’s son and heir. Unlike David IV, Giorgi III, and Tamar, Demet’re has no dedicated chronicler: the *Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time* covers his reign, but it is a short, sparse document with only one or two dates, and its chronology for areas we do have comparisons for frequently disagrees with that of other sources.

⁸⁷ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 69.

The *Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time* tells us that Demet're captured Kaladzori in 1130.⁸⁸ Lordkipanidze suggests that around 1130 Demet're's brother Vakhtang, along with Ivane Abuletisdze (that is, the son of Abulet already mentioned) plotted his murder.⁸⁹ This must be based on Vardan Areweltsi's account, which has Ivane blinded by Demet're and then killed in 1132.⁹⁰

Vardan Areweltsi mentions that Eldiguz, later the Seljuk atabeg and a powerful rival to Giorgi III in the 1160s, came into conflict with another Muslim ruler, the Shah-Armen (Sökmen II) who ruled from Khlat, in the 1130s. This is well before Eldiguz is mentioned in many other sources and attests to him already beginning to secure power in the Nakhchivan region some time before he became a major figure on the regional stage.⁹¹

The end of the 1130s saw a major earthquake hit the city of Ganja in the Arran region, east of Georgia proper. Ibn al-Athir places this in 1139, as does Vardan Areweltsi.⁹² This was, according to Mkhitar Gosh who gives the same year, shortly followed by a brutal Georgian raid on the city.⁹³

1140s

Like the 1130s, the 1140s are an under-recorded decade. The ruler of Ganja and Azerbaijan, Qara-Sonqur, died in around 1140; he was replaced by Emir Jawuli al-Tughrili, who Ibn al-Athir mentions as being considered less threatening to the Sultan.⁹⁴ The 1140 death date also appears in Mkhitar Gosh's *Chronicle*, and he reports a leader called Xuhtught ruling Ganja from 1140-

⁸⁸ KT, 201; յԶ I, 366.

⁸⁹ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 129.

⁹⁰ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 71.

⁹¹ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 72.

⁹² Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 1, 354; Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 71.

⁹³ Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 4.

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 1, 356-7.

1142, before a “Ch’awli” (likely the aforementioned Emir Jawuli) arrived and took the city in 1143.⁹⁵

Qara-Sonqur’s death is the only mention of the Caucasus for the decade in Ibn al-Athir’s work: nor does Areweltsi record any dates during this decade, and there is similarly little attention paid to it in the Kartlis Tskhovreba.

We have a little more information on events in Arran courtesy of Mkhitar Gosh’s Chronicle: Jawuli seems to have died in 1146, succeeded by Fakhr al-Din (died 1147), and thereafter a succession of undated leaders and turmoil in Ganja likely extending into the 1150s before Eldiguz extended his authority into the region. Demet’re seems to have intervened in one case on behalf of the Ganjans to remove an unwanted claimant to the city.⁹⁶

1150s

A Georgian conflict with the Saltukids, rulers of Erzurum, broke out, an event which Ibn al-Athir places in 1153. The Saltukid ruler was captured but later released.⁹⁷

We get a brief glimpse of more detail on the later part of Demet’re’s reign from Ibn al-Azraq’s account of his time serving the Georgian monarch, which dates from around 1153.⁹⁸

The mid 1150s was a period of much greater recorded activity, with the deaths of both Demet’re and his elder son and heir David V, followed by the ascension of Demet’re’s younger son Giorgi to the throne as Giorgi III. The chronology here is, however, decidedly confusing. Our material gives very varied indications as to the order of the deaths, and very varied ideas and allegations as to how the succession took place, especially regarding the role of the Orbeli family who subsequently dominated senior court positions for much of Giorgi III’s reign. This, and possible

⁹⁵ Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 4.

⁹⁶ Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 6.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 66.

⁹⁸ Minorsky, V. ‘Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13, No. 1 (1949), 34.

preceding events in tensions between David V, Giorgi III, and Demet're, are discussed further below.

David V's infant son Demet're, more commonly known in the sources by the shortened form of Demna, was taken in by the Orbelis at some point in the middle of the decade upon his father's death. All of the sources are clear that Demna was an infant at this time, so he was probably born in 1154 or 1155.

1160s

The middle part of Giorgi's reign is better recorded than that of his father, though it is more difficult than in Tamar's reign to ascertain with any sort of reliability much of what was going on below the level of a few specific, mostly military, engagements.

The Eldiguzids come into focus in this decade: Ibn al-Athir largely introduces Eldiguz himself and explains his family background in his 1161 entry, though he had clearly ruled Arran and Azerbaijan for some time prior to that.⁹⁹ In modern Georgian scholarship, Met'reveli suggests that the war with Eldiguz, and therefore Rusudan's negotiations with Eldiguz, were around the middle of the decade, though without any greater precision.¹⁰⁰ He gives 1161 as the date for Giorgi's capture of Ani, and 1162 for his raid on Dvin and the subsequent conflict with the Eldiguzids.¹⁰¹ Both of these dates appear to be from the history of Ibn al-Athir.¹⁰² Among other contemporary sources, the Georgian Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time puts Giorgi's capture of Ani in 1160.¹⁰³ Vardan Areweltsi puts the raid on Dvin as 1163.¹⁰⁴ It is notable that Ibn al-Athir's commentary on the Eldiguzid conflict is restricted to a single year, two if one counts the capture of Ani as a precursor. This suggests that in fact the conflict might have been over by the middle of the decade and relatively restricted to the early part of the 1160s.

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 121-22.

¹⁰⁰ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 129.

¹⁰¹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 117-118.

¹⁰² Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 121-22.

¹⁰³ KT, 202; jg I, 367.

¹⁰⁴ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 74.

Ibn al-Athir says that the Georgians raided Ganja in 1165.¹⁰⁵ This may further indicate a restriction on the time-frame of the Eldiguzid conflict, as the commitment to such an expedition may imply both lowered expectations of conflict to the south and a redirection of energies elsewhere. In the south, Vardan Areweltsi suggests that the issue of Ani remained unresolved for some years, with it being passed back to Ts'vriz-Aslan, an emir from the Shaddadid dynasty who had previously owned it, after four years i.e. in 1167 or perhaps 1168.¹⁰⁶

A Shirvan-Derbent war in which the Georgians intervened probably happened around the later end of the decade, though the chronology is unclear. Hasan, writing in the late 1920s, used earlier work by Dorn and Kunik to place it in the first half of the 1170s, based on some presumed dating of Andronikos Komnenos' movements around the Caucasus and Anatolia.¹⁰⁷ Met'reveli meanwhile dates the war to 1167.¹⁰⁸

1170s

The key event and problem of the mid 1170s in Georgia is the so-called Orbeli rebellion, in which Demna and the Orbeli family rose up in support of Demna's claim to the throne, ultimately being defeated and leading to the death and exile of Demna and most prominent members of the Orbeli family. We will revisit this event multiple times in subsequent chapters, and its chronology is discussed in more detail in the "specific chronological issues" section later in this chapter. The conventional date for the rising is 1177, which appears both in Georgian and Armenian material. Modern scholars have tended to agree with this dating: however, this requires other events in the sources to be misidentified or misplaced.¹⁰⁹

Late in the 1170s, Giorgi III had Tamar crowned alongside himself: this practice was almost certainly intended to help pre-emptively embed Tamar's legitimacy as his successor.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 162.

¹⁰⁶ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 74.

¹⁰⁷ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 121.

¹⁰⁹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 124; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 132.

Lordkipanidze puts this in 1178, Met'reveli in 1179: neither date appears in the Georgian texts, and both may be derived simply from the assumption that they shortly post-date the 1177 rebellion.¹¹⁰

1180s

Tamar's accession is generally accepted as having been in 1184.¹¹¹ This date is given by Vardan Areweltsi.¹¹² The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time implicitly agrees by stating that Giorgi III ruled 28 years, which would likewise be the time span from 1155-6 to 1183-4.¹¹³

How long the period between Tamar's accession and her marriage to her first husband, the Russian prince Iuri Bogolyubsky, lasted should probably affect how we view this early part of her reign. Met'reveli supposes that the marriage to Iuri must have taken place within about a year, putting it in 1185 and Iuri's exile consequently in 1187-88. These dates do not appear in the Georgian chronicles, and are probably based on an assumed chronology resulting from the order of events.

This period additionally included Q'utlu-Arslan's rebellion, a palace coup which likely occurred within the first year of Tamar's sole reign. Q'utlu-Arslan was a senior court official who appears to have attempted to create a new noble council who would have decision-making control, leaving Tamar as a figurehead.¹¹⁴ Tamar successfully faced down the attempt, though many aspects including exactly who was involved remain unclear from the History and Eulogy of Monarchs, the only source that covers the coup attempt.

Met'reveli asserts that Tamar and her second husband, the Ossetian David Soslan, married in 1189.¹¹⁵ It is unclear exactly what the source basis here is, as the wedding is not given a date in

¹¹⁰ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 130; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 134.

¹¹¹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 130; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 107.

¹¹² Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 78.

¹¹³ KT, 202; ჯგ I, 367.

¹¹⁴ KT, 241; ჯგ II, 30-32.

¹¹⁵ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 149.

any of our material. Certainly at least a year passing between Iuri's exile and Tamar's second marriage seems likely if only because of the numerous suitors' expeditions that we have discussed in the sources. Whether there is any strong evidence for the year being 1189 rather than slightly later (or even slightly earlier, if Iuri's exile was in 1187) is less clear, however.

1190s

The Georgian chronicles' often frustrating lack of chronology is certainly apparent in the 1190s, an eventful decade as Tamar finished securing her position on the throne, started a family, and Georgian actions shifted towards more interventionist and assertive stances after the internal turbulence of the previous decade.

As for the standard chronology, Met'reveli asserts that Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, whose family were coming to hold a similar dominance of offices to that which the Orbelis had held a couple of decades earlier, became amirsp'asalar (the most senior military command role in the Georgian court) in 1191.¹¹⁶ A rebellion by supporters of Tamar's first husband Iuri is also recorded in our sources: the date of Zakaria's appointment as amirsp'asalar would place this in the 1189-1191 period, as the appointment happened on the death of Zakaria's predecessor, Gamrek'eli, who fought against the rebels. Tamar's first child, Giorgi Lasha, is then suggested by Met'reveli to have been in 1192.¹¹⁷ The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time, however, puts the birth in 1193.¹¹⁸ The Life of Tamar tells us that Tamar's daughter, the future queen Rusudan, was born a year later, thus around 1193 or 1194.¹¹⁹

Later in the decade, the Eldiguzid civil war between Eldiguz's grandsons Amir-Miran and Abu-Bakr, and thus the battle of Shamkhor in which Georgia intervened in that conflict, are placed in 1195 by Met'reveli.¹²⁰ Ibn al-Athir puts Q'izil-Arslan's death, which triggered the conflict, in

¹¹⁶ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 151.

¹¹⁷ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 152.

¹¹⁸ KT, 204; jg I, 369.

¹¹⁹ KT, 292; jg II, 124.

¹²⁰ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 153.

1191-92, so 1195 is perhaps a somewhat late date but not implausible.¹²¹ The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time puts 1188 as a date for the “atabag of Gandza” being routed, which must refer to this: this fits considerably less well with our other material.¹²²

This is also the period when the Mkhargrdzeli family’s conquests in Armenia, which are discussed further in Chapter Eight, begin. Most of our dates for these come from Vardan Areweltsi, who mentions the conquests of Shirak in 1191, Amberd in 1196, and Ani in 1199.¹²³ Met’reveli’s modern account concurs with these dates.¹²⁴

1200s

The decade from 1200 onwards seems to have been a comparatively secure one for the Bagrationid elite, who were able to engage in a considerable quantity of military adventuring, including significant expansion of the Mkhargrdzelis’ Armenian sub-polity and the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond by two Byzantine royal relatives of Mepe Tamar. The later part of the decade, however, saw the deaths of a number of senior figures and moved into a period when Bagrationid politics as we have it recorded was once again somewhat dominated by succession issues.

Met’reveli places the capture of Bijnisi by the Mkhargrdzelis in 1201.¹²⁵ This date is, again, from Vardan Areweltsi.¹²⁶

The capture of Dvin, which Ibn al-Athir puts in 1202-3, removed it from Eldiguzid hands.¹²⁷

Vardan Areweltsi gives the same date.¹²⁸ The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time puts the

¹²¹ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 394-95.

¹²² KT, 203; jg I, 368.

¹²³ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82.

¹²⁴ Met’reveli, *The Golden Age*, 153.

¹²⁵ Met’reveli, *The Golden Age*, 153.

¹²⁶ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82.

¹²⁷ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 3, 70.

¹²⁸ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82.

capture of Dvin in 1193, in conflict with the other sources.¹²⁹ Contextually, the later date makes far more sense: both of Tamar's chroniclers put the capture of Dvin shortly preceding Basiani in their narratives.¹³⁰ Numismatic evidence supports the later dating as well: Vardanian notes that coins of Tamar's that appear in Dvin are solely from after 1200.¹³¹

The battle of Basiani, which Met'reveli puts in 1203, is the most remembered event of this decade in conventional Georgian historiography, seen as an important confirmation of Georgian power through the defeat of an invading Muslim army.¹³² Basiani was very different to David IV's victory at Didgori, happening far further from 'core' Bagrationid territory and indeed actually including a primary opponent who had not hitherto been heavily involved in Georgian affairs in the form of the Seljuks of Rum. The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time puts the battle in 1215, which is implausible considering the weight of other source material – including the Chronicle's own evidence – that major political players and participants had died by that point.¹³³ Ibn al-Athir gives 1204 as the year of Rukn ad-Din's death, giving a later end date for possibilities, and Smbat Sparapet concurs and gives Rukn ad-Din's capture of Erzurum as 1201.¹³⁴

One aspect of the 1200s where we have some recourse to chronologies from other traditions is the Megakomnenian capture of Trebizond and much of the Pontus in 1204 (on which more is said in chapter eight of this thesis). The way this element is presented in the Georgian chronicles, however, does not particularly allow for this to be used effectively in dating any other elements: no other known and named Georgian figures took part in the campaign.

¹²⁹ KT, 203; յԸ I, 368.

¹³⁰ KT, 260-268; 296-299; յԸ II, 77-96; 130-140.

¹³¹ Vardanian, A.R., 'Some Peculiarities of Coinage in Dvin in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *The Numismatic Chronicle* 161 (2001), 205.

¹³² Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 154

¹³³ KT, 203; յԸ I, 368.

¹³⁴ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol. 3, 80; Smbat Sparapet trans. Bedrosian, *Chronicle*, 98.

Ibn al-Athir gives 1206 as the date of the Georgian capture of K'ari: Vardan Areweltsi gives the same year.¹³⁵

David Soslan's death was probably late in this decade, as by all accounts it pre-dated Tamar's. Met'reveli puts it in 1207, but it is unclear on exactly what grounds.¹³⁶ It was one of a number of deaths of senior figures of that generation that happened in the 1205-1215 period, which are discussed more in below, and the only one where no scholars or sources seriously contest that it happened before 1210.

1210s

The problem of the late 1200s and the 1210s chronologically is that of the date of the death of Tamar. The written sources disagree, with several placing it in 1207 but also narrating a range of other events that this dating clashes with: this is discussed further among the specific chronological issues below. It appears that David Soslan died before Tamar: Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli's death is also placed before hers in the Georgian material, but some of the Armenian material suggests otherwise. Ivane Mkhargrdzeli meanwhile survived to be one of the most senior figures through the reign of Mepe Giorgi IV Lasha.

A large Mkhargrdzeli campaign into Persia is placed in 1210 by Met'reveli.¹³⁷ This is, like most other campaign dates from this period, based (probably solely) on Vardan Areweltsi's account.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol. 3, 123-124; Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82.

¹³⁶ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 155.

¹³⁷ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 155.

¹³⁸ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 83.

Events early in Demet're's reign

There are two notable events early in Demet're's reign where the dating might make a considerable difference to our reading of the period. First, there is the threat from plotters against him, and second, there are the losses or renegotiations of certain areas of territory, especially Ani and Shirvan.

The former issue affects how we should see the early parts of Demet're's reign and his capacity for action in other areas. A longer chronology of destabilisation after David IV's death may suggest that either the destabilisation was more significant as a factor in preventing Demet're completing other objectives if it was continuous, or that it was triggered by some event other than Demet're's ascension to the throne, whereas a shorter time frame would indicate that the succession itself was the core trigger point.

The chronology of the return of Shirvan affects some similar considerations around Demet're's capacity to action as well as important questions about Georgian monarchs' strategic intent. A rapid return of Shirvan suggests both lower capacity to hold Shirvan and more pressure elsewhere that made it useful to reinstate the Shirvan-shah Manuchihr on the throne, or might simply suggest that this was a continued policy objective which David IV might have completed anyway had he lived. A slow return would lend credence to the idea that there was a genuine attempt to integrate Shirvan into Georgia in the 1120s which eventually failed.

The point we have the best chronology for is the loss of Ani and Ivane Abuletisdze's plot against Demet're, with the former happening before the latter and the latter dated to 1130-32 by Areweltsi.¹³⁹ When Ivane was killed is less clear – the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time puts it in the 20th year of Demet're's reign, in the 1140s, whilst Vardan Areweltsi puts it in 1132-

¹³⁹ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 71.

33. In any case, if Vardan's chronology for the rising is correct, it seems likely that there is a connection between the loss of Ani and Ivane Abuletisdze's rebellion, which seems to have been aimed at replacing Demet're with his brother (this is almost certainly the only known brother of Demet're from the chronicle of David the Builder, Vakhtang, though the texts about Ivane Abuletisdze do not give the name directly). Vardan gives Abulet's wish to avoid involving Ivane in a war as a reason for his giving up Ani, but it is possible that Ivane and others may have seen the loss as the result of overly cautious policies and retrenchment on Demet're's part.

Our near complete lack of dated events in our sources makes the issues around Shirvan far less clear. The extent and rapidity with which it disappears from our source material may in and of itself indicate a "rapid return" scenario. Nonetheless, our reading of events in Shirvan will likely largely depend on surrounding factors and assumptions about Georgian-Shirvani relations, which are discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

The Deaths of Demet're and David V

A key chronological difficulty of the 1150s is that of the deaths of Demet're and David V. There had clearly been some internal pressures and conflict in Georgia through the early to mid 1150s, although piecing together a single reading from our material is exceptionally difficult. Firstly, according to Lordkipanidze, David took part in a rising against Demet're in around 1150, which was successfully suppressed but a few years later David succeeded in pressuring Demet're into a monastery.¹⁴⁰ This reading requires a fairly specific interpretation of some passages in the source material that are quite loosely written. No direct account of this apparent rebellion exists in the Kartlis Tskhovreba, nor in Mkhitar Gosh, Vardan Areweltsi, or Stepannos Orbelian's chronicles, all of which cover this period. What we do have are two suggestions in the History and Eulogy of Monarchs' accounts of Giorgi III's accession and the Orbeli rebellion. The first suggests that Giorgi was his father's favourite, and that David's death pre-dated Demet're's. The second passage meanwhile says that Demna's betrayal of Giorgi was like David V's betrayal of

¹⁴⁰ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 129.

Demet're, without further specificity. The reading of a rebellion relies on the second of these passages literally meaning a full-scale rebellion happened that was not recorded elsewhere. This is, at best, speculative: it seems improbable that David V could have had a failed rebellion to his name and had later chroniclers with their explicitly pro-Giorgi leanings fail to mention it in any detail. Additionally, there were clearly some internal ructions around the accession of David V among the nobility, which could provide a full explanation for this passage without the need to add in an entire unsourced rebellion to the chronology.

David V's brief reign began, according to the Georgian materials, when Demet're retired to monastic life: whether David had contributed to pressuring Demet're off the throne is unclear, and our stance largely depends on whether we believe the Georgian Chronicles' suggestion that there was tension or betrayal between Demet're and David. There may be some evidence for this in the chronicle of Vardan Areweltsi who notes that one of David V's acts was to free and give the role of amirsp'asalar to T'irk'ash, the son of Ivane Abultesidze who had at some point fled to the Shah-Armen, the Muslim ruler of Khlat to Georgia's south. We should not necessarily take this, as for example Lordkipanidze has done, as implying that there was an easy continuation from the pro-Vakhtang faction of Ivane to the pro-David position we can assume for his son. However, it does suggest that by the 1150s the choices Demet're had made as mepe may have caused tensions with potential supporters of his elder son. This may well be sufficient to explain the Georgian Chronicle's discussion of David's 'betrayal' of Demet're and the damage it did to the didebulis of Georgia, with both Mkhitar Gosh and Vardan Areweltsi's accounts alleging that the Orbelis, treating David V's choices as a threat to their power, murdered David.

As to the dating of these events, Demet're took monastic vows some time – according to the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time, the only Georgian source to deal with the chronologies, one year – before his death. At this point, David V succeeded him on the throne. David himself did not live long, dying after a reign of (again, according to the same source) six months or so. The History and Eulogy of Monarchs, whilst it does not give any dating, additionally tells us that

David died before Demet're, providing further support for these points.¹⁴¹ The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time has both Giorgi's ascension and Demet're's death in 1155.¹⁴² If this was the case, David V must have ascended the throne and Demet're taken vows in 1154. Vardan Areweltsi meanwhile shortens David V's reign to a single month, says that Demet're reigned for 32 years, that he died before David V ruled, and that Giorgi was crowned in 1156. Unless this is dating Demet're's reign from a co-coronation this would put Demet're's reign as ending in 1157, so the statements are not fully consistent (this is not a problem in the text *prima facie* as Areweltsi gives no date for David IV's death, but it makes Areweltsi's statements harder to reconcile with our other material). Stepannos Orbelian puts Demet're's death in 1158, which is the furthest from agreement among our sources, but not impossible if Giorgi took the throne after David V's death and Demet're spent more time in monastic life before his own passing.¹⁴³

Unlike in some other problems of royal chronology, numismatics unfortunately does not appear to aid us much. Coins in the time of David V were marked with the regnal years of Sultans for easier circulation, and without a specific year of striking: a coin of Demet're has been attributed by Japaridze to within the reign of Muhammad ibn Mahmud, but this spanned from 1153 to 1159 and thus does not narrow down our possibilities.¹⁴⁴ Among modern scholars, Met'reveli suggests that Demet're regained the throne after David V's death and then made Giorgi *mepe* in 1156.¹⁴⁵ This may be based on a reading of Areweltsi that accepts his numeric accounts (32 years and 1156 for Giorgi's ascension), putting Demet're's death in 1157.

From this discussion, we can pull out a few salient points. First, that the political crisis around David V's reign cannot be reliably dated earlier than the mid-1150s: whilst we cannot rule out longer lasting factionalism and tensions, we lack evidence sufficient to support any assumption that they must have existed. There is some evidence that there were tensions of personnel and

¹⁴¹ KT, 228; ქს II, 3.

¹⁴² KT, 201-202; ქს I, 366-367.

¹⁴³ *History of the State of Sisakan* trans. Bedrosian, 197.

¹⁴⁴ Dundua, T. et al, 'Issues of Giorgi III with Asomtavruli letter', *Online English-Georgian Catalogue of Georgian Numismatics* <http://geonumismatics.tsu.ge/public/en/catalogue/types?type=65>

¹⁴⁵ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 117.

policy between those figures in place at the end of Demet're's reign and those who David V promoted, with the former group largely reasserting themselves under Giorgi III.

The Orbeli Rebellion

The Orbeli rebellion is both the key event – or perhaps, as we shall see, event sequence – of the 1170s, and presents its primary dating problem. Our narratives of it rely on two sources: the Georgian History and Eulogy of Monarchs, and Stepannos Orbelian's History of Siunik. Both are in agreement that at some point in the 1170s, Liparit', the brother of the rebellion's leader Ivane, fled to the Eldiguzid court in Persia. However, the narratives place this along with the rebellion in 1177, whereas Eldiguz, clearly mentioned as Liparit's host in the Orbelian history, is thought to have died some years earlier: Persian and Arabic sources place it in 1175.¹⁴⁶ Ibn al-Athir places his death even earlier in 568, that is to say 1172-3.¹⁴⁷ There is thus clearly a discrepancy in the dates for the Orbeli rebellion. This problem has been given cursory prior examination by Minorsky, who concluded that it was obvious that Liparit' must have actually fled Georgia very considerably earlier, several years before the rebellion.¹⁴⁸

Minorsky's solution is not out of the question, but it presents both certain additional problems and considerable additional implications. If Minorsky is right, then our narrative of the 1170s must account for the brother of the amirsp'asalar, himself the *eristavi* of Kartli and thus one of Giorgi's most senior officials, to have had to effectively seek asylum with a rival power - but for the crisis to only to have come to a head nearly half a decade later. A picture unfolds of a sort of cat and mouse proxy conflict, with the crisis already clearly in existence but dragging on for years before Ivane made his misjudged move. Who was *eristavi* of Kartli for that time, no small position, goes unmentioned in our sources if Minorsky is right. Finally and perhaps most crucially, there is also the rather direct problem with Minorsky's thesis that it requires both our

¹⁴⁶ Bosworth, C.E. (trans.), *The History of the Seljuq State*, 111-112; Luther, K.A. (trans.), *The History of the Seljuq Turks from The Jāmi' ai-Tawārīkh*, 150.

¹⁴⁷ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol. 2, 211.

¹⁴⁸ Minorsky, V., 'Caucasica II', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol.13, No. 4, 1951, 875-877.

largest extant narratives about the conflict, which very clearly place Liparit's departure *during* the rebellion, to be wrong about that fact.

A further alternative was raised in 2009 by Sergio La Porta, on the basis of a colophon written by Dawit' Kobayrec'i, an Armenian exegete and theologian.¹⁴⁹ The colophon, probably written in 1179, gives Q'izil Arslan rather than Eldiguz as the person who Liparit' approached when fleeing Georgia. This raises the possibility that it is the identity of Eldiguz in Stepannos Orbelian's work that is mistaken. This would need Stepannos to be wrong on a number of occasions, as his work includes numerous vignettes that include Eldiguz set after Liparit's flight to the Eldiguzid court.¹⁵⁰ La Porta's suggestion that this implies multiple flights to the Eldiguzid court creates further conflicts with the available source material, which all suggests Liparit' going with his sons.¹⁵¹ However, Dawit's colophon is probably far closer to the time of the rebellion than Stepannos, and may therefore have greater accuracy in its dating than the works and family histories Stepannos had access to a generation or two later.

A number of other alternatives are possible. The conventional dating of Eldiguz' death, or at least a full analysis of all the relevant material, is largely beyond the scope of our discussions here, and as noted above not all sources from the Islamic world are in full agreement. In general, though, the 1175 date seems to be accepted in recent histories of the Seljuks such as that by Bařan.¹⁵² This makes a noticeable difference when we compare it to Vardan Areweltsi's suggestion that Ivane Orbeli was behind the capture of Ani in 1174 because he hoped to add it to his own domains.¹⁵³ We therefore have a time window that can be placed after Ivane's last known non-rebellion activity – one that notably could have caused significant additional tensions between the Orbelis and Giorgi III – but before Eldiguz' death.

¹⁴⁹ La Porta, S., 'Lineage, Legitimacy and Loyalty in Post-Seljuk Armenia: A Reassessment of the Sources of the Failed Orbelean Revolt Against King Giorgi III of Georgia', *Revue des études arméniennes* 31 (2008-9), 127-65.

¹⁵⁰ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 202-204.

¹⁵¹ La Porta, 'Lineage, Legitimacy and Loyalty', 127-65.

¹⁵² Bařan, A., *The Great Seljuqs: A History* (Abingdon, 2010), 139.

¹⁵³ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 76.

We finally should also take into account a possibility that is very interesting to consider – the possibility that the Orbeli rebellion did not actually take place in 1177, or at least that parts of it did not.¹⁵⁴ The 1177 date is agreed upon by a number of sources: the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time on the Georgian side, and the Orbelian history in Armenian. The History and Eulogy of Monarchs, containing the main Georgian narrative of the rebellion, gives no date. What it may be worth considering is whether the deaths and purging of the rebel Orbelis are actually the source of the date, and might have come some while after the rebellion itself, with the Orbelis and Demna imprisoned in the meantime. It is commonly accepted that Tamar's coronation was in the late 1170s: Giorgi's decision to make her the next ruler could have provided sufficient motive to properly destroy enemies he had already defeated and imprisoned. In this thesis, the rebellion itself may have happened as early as 1174, but the date that was especially recorded and remembered was the execution of its leaders in 1177.

There is another supplementary prosopographical point which would also correlate well with this view: David V died, with Demna still an infant, in the mid 1150s, so Demna must have been born around 1154 or 1155. Stepannos Orbelian notes Demna having reached the age of majority as part of a trigger point for the rebellion occurring. This points to it being in the earlier 1170s when he would have been between less than twenty: by 1177 he was probably 22 or older, and had been an adult for some time, which would mean that the trigger was certainly not Demna's reaching the age of majority.

This new thesis is not unassailable: like in the case of Minorsky's thesis, it requires something in the sources to be at best a conflation of what happened. The colophon of Dawit brought up by La Porta, too, gives a relatively stronger testimony to the 1177 date than the more 'major' Georgian or Armenian sources. This conflict, though, is true of any thesis on this problem: when the source material is not logically consistent, a proposal to reconcile it must of necessity be a suggestion of one or more points where our reading of the source material is misleading. What

¹⁵⁴ A standalone version of the argument presented here may be found in Baillie, J., 'The Dating and Significance of the Orbeli Rebellion: A Reassessment', *Chronos* 3 (2022), 12-23.

this 'early rebellion' theory does provide is an explanation for where the 1177 date came from that fits with the clear statements that Liparit' fled during the rebellion itself, with Eldiguz still being alive at that time, and with the age of Demna.

The Death of Tamar

The death of Tamar, with a conventional but often contested dating of 1213, has long posed a significant chronological problem, with significant divergence in the source material. Two key figures from Tamar's reign died towards or just after the end of her reign, too – Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli and her husband, David Soslan. Their deaths matter in particular as events with some date information that may impact how we see events in the late 1200s and early 1210s. After Tamar's death, as with her predecessors, we should expect a certain degree of instability, so decisions made in that period should be seen in that light. Conventional narratives of the period place both events before Tamar's death: Met'reveli puts Soslan's death in 1207, and Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli's in 1212.¹⁵⁵

Among the Georgian sources for Tamar's death, the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time gives the year 1207, and the Life of Tamar gives her reign as 23 years, that is 1184-1207 likewise.¹⁵⁶ Most of the sources concur with the death being in 1207 or 1208. Vardan Areweltsi gives 1208, and Ibn al-Athir's discussion of Tamar's death is connected to that of the Georgian capture of K'ari in 1206 which would appear to agree.¹⁵⁷ Smbat Sparapet, too, notes Tamar's death as being before that of Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, which he reports as being in 1211.¹⁵⁸ The primary (though not the sole) problem with a 1207-8 dating for Tamar's death comes from the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs*, one of the most detailed of the Georgian sources, which discusses Tamar's presence at a number of events inconsistent with the 1207 date.

¹⁵⁵ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 155; 168.

¹⁵⁶ KT, 204; 305; ქს I, 369; ქს II, 150.

¹⁵⁷ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82; Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol. 3, 123-124.

¹⁵⁸ Smbat Sparapet trans. Bedrosian, *Chronicle*, 101.

Met'reveli, following Javakhishvili and Zhordania, gives January 27, 1213, as the date.¹⁵⁹ A recent assessment by Japaridze meanwhile suggests that 1210 is the correct date.¹⁶⁰ He notes that this date is found in the Armenian chronicle of Smbat Sparapet and an inscription, also Armenian, at Haghat monastery refers to Giorgi Lasha's coronation as being at this time. He also cites the numismatic evidence in support of this view, suggesting that the last of Tamar's coinage appears in 1210. Japaridze's case is also backed up by at the start of the Hundred Years' Chronicle, part of the Kartlis Tskhovreba, which suggests that Giorgi Lasha was co-crowned aged thirteen and sole ruler from the age of eighteen – given his birth is generally placed in 1192 or 1193, this would make his sole rulership start in 1210 or 1211. However, this theory leaves the issue of the atabegate unexplained: the History and Eulogy clearly both says that Ivane became atabeg on his brother's death and that Tamar conferred the title upon him, which cannot have happened if Tamar had already passed away at the time of Zakaria's death.¹⁶¹

Unlike for David Soslan, who we know of mostly from the Georgian Chronicles, we have some additional evidence regarding Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli from the Armenian materials. In particular, Stepannos Orbelian copies (or at least purportedly copies) a deed for a village which Zakaria wrote, transferring it to a particular monastery – the copied text is dated to 1211.¹⁶² This poses a problem for the earlier death dates for Tamar if we accept the Georgian Chronicles' assertion that Tamar made Ivane Mkhargrdzeli the first Atabeg of Georgia upon his brother's death, something she could hardly have done post-mortem. Smbat Sparapet appears to indicate that Tamar died before Zakaria, and puts Zakaria's date of death in 1211.¹⁶³ If this is correct, and Tamar's death pre-dated that of Zakaria, it might imply that Giorgi Lasha rather than Tamar made Ivane the atabeg – an act that has very different import if we imagine it done by a new ruler seeking to solidify his position, rather than a very well established one in the form of Tamar.

¹⁵⁹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 205.

¹⁶⁰ Japaridze. G., 'თამარ მეფის გარდაცვალების თარიღის წესაზებ', *საისტორიო კრებული* 2 (2012).

¹⁶¹ KT, 275; ქც II, 110.

¹⁶² Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 189.

¹⁶³ Smbat Sparapet trans. Bedrosian, *Chronicle*, 101.

More work is undoubtedly needed on this issue, not so much to establish the date on which much ink has been spilt already but rather to discuss what other implications there might be for the later sections of the Georgian chronicles. This particularly applies to for example the recorded revolt of the peoples of the North Caucasus which nominally happened late in Tamar's reign but might, especially in versions of the chronology that have Tamar dying before 1211 and assume Ivane's atabegate occurred after Tamar's death, have happened early in that of Giorgi Lasha. If so, then the North Caucasus rebellion and Ivane's significantly increased status might be better attributed to the period of instability that tended to happen at the start of new reigns in high medieval Georgia: the conventional date of 1213 avoids these issues, but at the expense of sitting somewhat at odds with most of the chronicle and numismatic evidence that we have available.

CONCLUSIONS

This assessment of major narrative events and how they fit into a chronology provides the basis for a more full discussion of the prosopography throughout the remainder of the thesis: people exist in a temporal framework, and understanding their actions within such a frame and with relative timings established undoubtedly matters. Whilst most of the utility of this discussion is in providing context for later chapters, there are some general points we can consider from the above discussion at this stage.

Perhaps the most critical point to note from our assessment is the large extent to which the chronicle material focuses on a small number of high-prominence events, and equally, the extent to which some patches of time have few events of this sort. Under-recording is partly a matter of chance: it is unfortunate that we have no Georgian chronicle for Demet're's reign. It is also, however, often a result of the fact that major political and military upheavals were not a constant of life in this period. If there had been a lot of major changes of city ownership or sizeable and politically regionally consequential wars in, for example, the 1140s, these would

have been discussed in the non-Georgian source material which, if it covers Georgia more patchily, nonetheless has more chronological consistency. Our material may be insufficient to say with much certainty what was happening in these periods, but it is sufficient to have some idea of the scale of major events that are *unlikely* to have happened.

How we mentally fill in lacunae is important for our perception of Georgia across the period, and they cannot simply be ignored. Typically, the tendency is to ignore them as much as possible and talk about what is recorded – but this tends to implicitly extrapolate the better recorded periods as if they were the normal, when the likelihood is that they were recorded precisely for the opposite reason. A traditional Georgian historiographical viewpoint that speaks for example of ‘bitter and protracted’ struggle being a defining feature in Giorgi III and Demet’re’s reigns must be questioned on these grounds: whilst military actions were not uncommon throughout our period and raiding was probably endemic, most wars were short-run campaigns or raids with defined objectives and years could easily go by without major military action.¹⁶⁴ The idea of continuous, protracted struggle over-privileges the chronicles’ focus on major war and fails to set these events in their proper chronological spacing.

This, in turn, should be a factor in how we assess the political lives of Georgian elites, and in the extent to which relations within and beyond Georgia were defined by conflict and crisis. Rather than being a matter of continual and protracted tensions, we should perhaps see crisis points as breaks that could expose and reshape a range of underlying systems of power, influence, and identity. How those identities helped to dictate individuals’ role in the high medieval Bagrationid courtly system, and how that system developed over time, will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁶⁴ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 118.

6. IDENTITY, FACTION, AND FUNCTION IN THE BAGRATIONID COURT

In this first of the core analytical chapters of this thesis, we will consider the links between identity aspects of particular actors in the Georgian court and their roles and functions, before moving on to look at regional structures and then diplomacy in subsequent chapters.

Court politics – here meaning not just the formal structures of the court, but also somewhat more widely the central apparatuses of power around the monarch and their officials and nobles – was both literally and figuratively central to the development and exercise of Bagrationid power. This group of people were the collective framework within which decisions of taxation, war, peace and justice were all made, and through which those were made more or less practically effective in their implementations. Whilst there is much to be said of politics beyond the court – and we shall come to that in later chapters – understanding the socio-political operation of particular localities is helped by first discussing the centre of the overarching power structure that drew them together into a polity.

Typical views on the Georgian nobility have tended to portray the Bagrationids themselves in a somewhat protagonist role, diametrically opposed to the nobility and to a lesser extent the church whose defined interests were against extensions of royal power.¹⁶⁵ This can be seen against the backdrop of modern Georgian historical studies being largely a state-focused endeavour, as this position comes with an underlying assumption of the proto-state as an effective actor in its own right with a tendency towards centralisation as a positive outcome. It also, problematically, tends to see the nobility as a singular bloc, or at least divided only into those who were indebted or loyal enough to seek extensions of Bagrationid power versus those whose aim was to increase their own power at the expense of royal authority.

¹⁶⁵ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 54-55; 133-141.

There is also a particular theory of power as zero-sum implied in this logic. To see the nobility as permanently contesting power with the crown, or doing so opportunistically whenever opportunities arose, suggests that the nobility's sole route of gaining power was via removing it from the crown, and vice versa. It also requires, as a theory, a consistent policy preference on the part of the nobility for expanding their capacity to make political judgement calls or gain resources in the form of land or rights. It is not at all clear that this was consistently the case: other resources such as social ties and capital also mattered; incentives and aims could be towards stability of power or expansion of it through means that also expanded royal power; and personal and ideological commitments to other objectives could form alternative sets of aims.

These points are not made to deny that there were power contests between parts of the nobility and certain Bagrationid monarchs: there absolutely were. Rather, it is to suggest that discussions should neither pre-emptively assume that expanded political authority was necessarily a core goal for members of the nobility as a general rule, nor that such power contests necessarily resulted solely from such zero sum calculations around resource control.

Moving forward from this oppositional logic requires looking at wider ranges of actors, the identities, connections and incentives that helped to shape their actions, and what their actions may imply about their aims and perceptions of the world. Much of the remainder of this chapter looks at some of the identity groups and connections that created criss-crossing lines through the body of people around the court – though first, we must turn to examine what we know of how the court worked.

COURT FUNCTION AND STRUCTURE

The court was, broadly speaking, the central location of Bagrationid governance. Georgian scholarship has already given significant attention to aspects of how it operated, though often largely in terms of describing sets of formal offices and their nominal connections.

Most recently, Surguladze gives a very good breakdown of the formal structure, though largely based upon back-forming the later medieval Regulations of the Royal Court into the 12th century. It is the view of a number of Georgian scholars that much of the text of the Regulations of the Royal Court significantly pre-dates its compilation under Giorgi ‘The Brilliant’.¹⁶⁶ It is unclear however on what basis this earlier chronological identification is made, and more work may be needed on this area: we should, for the present, treat the Regulations tentatively, as a fair guide to what some specific terms might mean, but not necessarily as a perfect and unchanged record of twelfth century realities. This is both because the post-Mongol context in which the Regulations were put together was noticeably different to the world of the twelfth century, and because the practical operation of offices and their theoretical roles may not always have fully aligned.

To give a brief overview of the structure, the key vizier positions were the mts’ignobartukhutsesi, mandat’urtukhutsesi, mech’urch’letukhutsesi, msakhurtukhutsesi, amirsp’asalar, and, somewhat arguably at the end of our period, the atabeg. Surguladze portrays these as forming a savaziro, a small cabinet-like council of ministers, though as with the darbazi discussed below the formal nature or not of the savaziro is entirely unclear.

The first of these, the office of mts’ignobartukhutsesi, was throughout our period combined with that of the Bishopric of Ch’q’ondidi. This created a powerful combined role referred to as the ch’q’ondidel-mts’ignobartukhutsesi. The mts’ignobartukhutsesi was probably primarily responsible for the chancery and the drafting and handling of documents (hence the root being related to mts’ignobari, a scribe, and ts’igni, a book: “vizier of the scribes” would be a fair direct translation). The combination of the role with Ch’q’ondidi specifically seems to have been contingent on David IV’s reign and the specific holders of the roles at the time, though earlier

¹⁶⁶ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 67.

holders of the title were also clerics.¹⁶⁷ The use of a senior clergy role in such a position may well have offered benefits to both the monarch and clergy – these are discussed further in the section on faith below.

As to the other vizier roles, the functions of the mandat'urtukhutsesi are less clear, and theories have ranged from a sort of police chief (though the functions of such police or guards are rarely properly discussed) in the work of Met'reveli and Lordkipanidze, to dealing with postal services and court functions as some sort of 'interior minister', a theory Surguladze attributes to Ivane Javakhishvili.¹⁶⁸ The role was often combined with that of the amirsp'asalar. The mech'urch'letukhutsesi meanwhile seems to have more clearly been a role focused on treasury and revenues, whilst the msakhurtukhutsesi, roughly Vizier of the Servants, seems to have had a palace management function. When these arise in the chronicles it is usually in the context of appointments to those roles.

The amirsp'asalar meanwhile was the primary military command role. Whilst most Georgian monarchs (excepting Tamar) personally led their armies during our period, the amirsp'asalar was likely responsible for the administration and raising of forces and would have been in an influential position regarding military strategy as well. Late in Tamar's reign, on the death of amirsp'asalar Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, his brother Ivane was given the position of atabeg: here things become less clear. Ivane was very clearly the first holder of the officer of atabeg, whilst another family member replaced him as msakhurtukhutsesi.¹⁶⁹ The text of the chronicle, however, suggests that the atabeg's title was deliberately not that of amirsp'asalar, which as far as we know remained vacant, while the role of mandat'urtukhutsesi goes unmentioned. The atabeg is shortly thereafter found putting down the rebellion of the North Caucasus mountain

¹⁶⁷ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 63-64.

¹⁶⁸ Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 168-169; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 161; Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ KT, 275-276; ქც II, 110.

peoples, suggesting that he did retain the amirsp'asalar's functions, but not the title.¹⁷⁰ In its initial incarnation, then, the role of atabeg perhaps formed a renaming or replacement for the amirsp'asalar's role: this runs slightly contra to Surguladze who suggests it represented Ivane seizing both of Zakaria's positions, whereas it seems it might be truer to say that the older positions fell into at least temporary disuse. This fluidity in titulature suggests one of the issues with an excessively formal attempt to model these offices, in that they appear to have been subject to significant variations in practical usage.

These roles are defined only broadly here, but as we have seen with the problem of the atabeg this is a situation where breadth gives a better idea than specificity: the precise roles and functions are not always fully clearly defined, and even where they are there were practical fluctuations in what certain roles entailed. Surguladze notes numerous cases of offices possibly being merged or split, such as dual holding of the mandat'urtukhutsesi and amirsp'asalar positions as happened under Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli.¹⁷¹ Some Georgian scholars have theorised that certain offices were in inherent tension, in particular the amirsp'asalar and the mts'ignobartukhutsesi, both of which were relatively powerful roles that might have theoretically striven for maximal control over a monarch's affairs.¹⁷² This seems however to be extrapolated from the theory that the holders of each office would continually be attempting to maximise power of that kind, and that therefore the extension of one office or reduction of another in scale over time must *prima facie* represent victories and struggles for royal access and power. We do not, however, see much evidence of this 'hidden fight', as Surguladze terms it, in practice.¹⁷³ The tendency to merge functions at times suggests that there may not have been deeply embedded institutional functions or resources behind some of these roles such that they

¹⁷⁰ KT, 276; ქც II, 111-112.

¹⁷¹ KT, 204; ქც I, 370.

¹⁷² Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 63-66.

¹⁷³ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 66.

had firmly constituted positions that were sufficient to permit this sort of institutional-territorial conflict to emerge.

A final key institutional question is the existence and formalisation of a main royal council, the so-called *darbazi*. Typical Georgian narratives, with their heavily formal institutional leanings, tend to prefer a reading in which the *darbazi* was a constituted body with formal membership. In this viewpoint, represented recently for example in Met'reveli's *The Golden Age*, membership of this specifically constituted body was a vital route to decision-making power.¹⁷⁴ This view, however, has been challenged within Georgian scholarship, most recently by Mikheil Bakhtadze.¹⁷⁵ The references to the *darbazi* in twelfth century chronicles and other material give no indication that there was any sort of formal membership, and the mere presence of a concept of *darbazi* should not lead us to assume a formal institution.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the court's structure is something that should certainly be factored into discussions of role, but should not be an endpoint of them. For one thing, we should be aware that the precise responsibilities of particular officials were not recorded on a regular basis: our ideas of the formal structure are largely from later medieval documents, not from regular records in the period under discussion. Second, we should expect that significant aspects of the way power was maintained, generated, and exercised were not necessarily tied to formal, institutional structures. Office-holders and those exercising formal power existed, necessarily, within networks of people which facilitated movement of information, access to different figures, and wider climates of support. Appointments to specific roles could also be made on informal and ad-hoc terms: for example, when Queen Rusudan, sister of Giorgi III, was the primary negotiator in a peace treaty with Eldiguz, she did so as a result of her particular personal suitability for the task as a former Sultan's widow, not as a result of a titled position

¹⁷⁴ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 165-166.

¹⁷⁵ Bakhtadze, M. 'Towards Issue of Existence of Darbazi in Georgia in 11th-14th Centuries', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University Institute of Georgian History* 12 (2017), 154-155.

within a bureaucratic structure.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, when Tamar's courtier Abulasan suggested Iuri Bogolyubsky as a candidate to become Tamar's first husband, it was the 'great merchant' (didvach'ari) Zankan Zorbabel who was sent to fetch him, and not some member of a formally constituted diplomatic ministry or chancery structure.¹⁷⁷

We should, therefore, think of the Georgian court in rather looser terms than formal descriptions of the institutional structures of ceremony and court practice. This is both because those structures had considerable potential fluidity in the medium term, and because power could be wielded within the court in ways that did not strictly conform to any particular formalised model. Politics was an active, reiterated process of governance and continual presentation and reaffirmation of legitimacy and personal relationships, a point recently made by Latham-Sprinkle who notes the emphasis on actions as demonstrations of sovereignty in the Georgian high medieval sources.¹⁷⁸ A productive approach may therefore be to consider a wider array of functions of the court: what it offered to whom and therefore how different sorts of people interacted with it.

For the monarchs, the court was a necessary locus for both exercising and presenting power. We have few descriptive scenes of court life, but some broad outlines emerge. We get little in the way of detailed descriptions: we must note that the mobility of the court, as discussed later, would have placed certain restrictions on the extent to which a single ceremonial location could be built up. The physical trappings of power, however, must have played a significant role both in the experiential impact of approaching the monarchs and in emphasising the material resources at their disposal. Petitioners certainly presented themselves before the enthroned monarch or monarchs, with orders of seating and comfort according to rank.¹⁷⁹ Court ceremony involved a soundscape as much as a visual impression, too: we note that in the *Life of Tamar*, her coronation scene involves explicit mention of the blowing of horns along with praises of the

¹⁷⁶ KT, 234; *ქს* II, 15.

¹⁷⁷ KT, 243; *ქს* II, 37.

¹⁷⁸ Latham-Sprinkle, J, 'Treason and Sovereignty in the Medieval Caucasus', *Chronos* 3 (2022), 52.

¹⁷⁹ KT, 256; *ქს* II, 66.

new Queen.¹⁸⁰ We also have mention of elements such as Tamar's keeping of a tame lion, which the chronicle explicitly notes was given to her by Aghsartan of Shirvan.¹⁸¹ This showed both an idea that the natural as well as human world had some deference to her, but also more practically showed the Bagrationids' ability to make and gain tribute from their connections across the Caucasus. Gifts and tribute, whether or not their immediate material value could be realised, helped display the extent to which the court was a nexus for a web of personal connections that were also vital for Bagrationid power.

The court was not just the monarch, however. Beyond them and the ministers and generals, and of course a much wider body of servants and staff, we also often see *eristavis*, provincial dukes, present at the side of the monarch, and an array of other functionaries. Courts attract other people too, from petitioners to artisans to representatives of foreign dignitaries. Among these were many of the people from whom we gain most of our knowledge about the period: the anonymous authors of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the epic poet Shota Rustaveli in Tamar's reign, and Ibn al-Azraq in that of Demet're. The prominence of feasting is noted in Phiphia and Tsimintia's work: their study focuses on the events for which feasts were held, but perhaps more important may have been the opportunities of social connectivity within the court that they offered.¹⁸² Where the Bagrationids showcased their lateral connections and wielded their status at court, for many of their subjects this was a place to forge such connections.

The Georgian court was frequently mobile throughout our period. Hunting trips, visits to neighbouring monarchs, and military campaigns all feature in the chronicle material. So, too, do simple movements of where the monarch was and where court was being held, such as Tamar travelling at one point to Dvin.¹⁸³ This suggests the importance of being able to personally confirm ties in different areas of the realm: hunting trips in for example Abkhazia would have

¹⁸⁰ KT, 288; *ქს* II, 116.

¹⁸¹ KT, 254; *ქს* II, 61-62.

¹⁸² Phiphia, N., and Tsimintia, K., 'Commensality in the age of David Agmashenebeli and Queen Tamar', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 17 (2021), 354-356.

¹⁸³ KT, 261; *ქს* II, 77.

helped build ties between the court as mobile centre and the regional nobility who would otherwise have lacked easy court access. This movement also likely helped spread the economic burden of supporting the court at times: this may however have been less of a factor than in some European countries that adopted mobile courts, as a result of Tbilisi's size as a trading centre and the effective wealth of the Georgian monarchy. Whilst we do not know the extent to which court mobility might have helped with the administration of royal justice in other regions, monarchs clearly did have considerable leeway in personally administering justice as we see from numerous accounts of Georgian monarchs taking or being praised for actions in this area.¹⁸⁴

This focus on court mobility should not, however, necessarily be taken to mean that everything and everyone moved, or that such movements were entirely fluid as per the situation. For one thing, hosting a monarch and their court was a significant logistical enterprise, meaning that the locations of suitable palaces and infrastructures must have mattered in helping dictate such movements. Also, we know that some functions such as keeping treasure could be assigned to static locations: the Orbelis certainly had a static treasury, at Shamshoylte', and it seems likely that the Bagrationids did likewise.¹⁸⁵ It seems likely that certain other functions, such as perhaps a royal chancery, were not fully mobile, further increasing the importance of particular centres.

We can observe some patterns in our prosopographical data that further underline the above. In the map below, we have a point-map of locations visited by Tamar and Giorgi III according to their respective chronicle information. One or two points deserve mention – firstly, that exceptions will be over-recorded on these maps as so often with chronicles. A place a monarch visited once or fought a battle is given as much weight as 'hunting in Abkhazia' which may well have been a regular or repeat event. Second, the precision of points varies: some may be a city or even represent the centre-point of a region, and there is no variation between the points

¹⁸⁴ KT, 300; 262; 201; ქს II, 141; 81; ქს I, 366.

¹⁸⁵Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 199.

according to the number of events in an area. However, we do get from this process a broad sense of the kinds of places that leaders are shown as being, typically those linked to power and its exercise whether through court or war, and thus perhaps how they relate to one another.

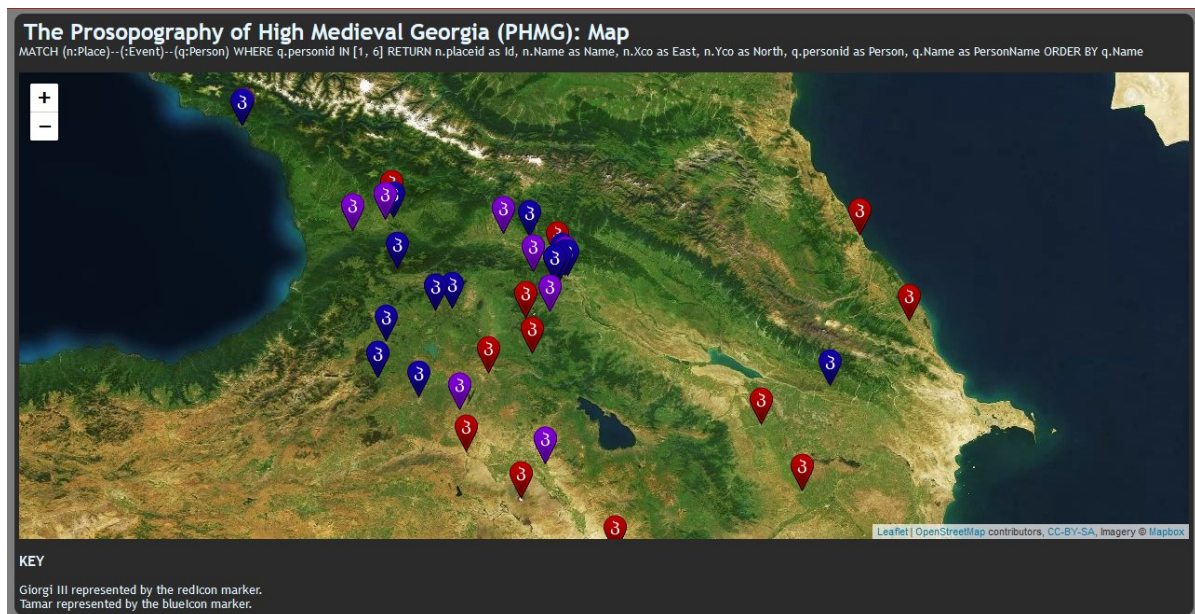


Figure 2: Royal event locations in the later 12th Century, as mapped from the PHMG Database

What emerges is a mapped geography of power from the prosopographical data available, about which we can make some tentative suggestions. The Tbilisi valley, perhaps more than the city of Tbilisi itself, formed the heart of this geography, with a range of royal sites around it.

Maintaining a number of sites around the valley may have reduced the Bagrationids' capacity to centralise court operations, but there could have been a number of alternative advantages.

Multiple fortified sites may have been felt necessary for stability, especially in the 1120s when Tbilisi was newly recaptured and there might have been more fears both of raids and of population unrest in the city, but also potentially in reducing the risk of palace coups. Different sites also allowed variations in function and the balance between convenience in getting to Tbilisi itself or to Mtskheta, between security and accessibility, and possibly between the best locations for utilisation of other places such as hunting grounds.

Major hunting trips, however, took the monarchs well outside the Tbilisi valley.¹⁸⁶ This is just one example of the fact that the remaining mobility was far from being confined to military campaigns, as we see from clusters of points in for example western Georgia, and from the fact that Tamar, very few of whose travels were explicitly for military purposes, was recorded visiting a range of areas. This tends to suggest that there was a significant importance in having the monarch present regularly in different areas of Georgia, and indeed we see discussions of monarchs moving around at different times of year in our sources.¹⁸⁷ Whilst the leisure aspects of hunting trips may be emphasised in our sources, there can be little doubt that these were events of significant political importance, allowing closer connections between a ruler and local leaders in an area. The tendency to movement, and the variety of locations visited, may therefore suggest that it was important for the court and monarch to retain connections with localities around the kingdom, emphasising the role of personal and direct connections to the mobile centre in the exercise of power.

From this discussion of the court, we can draw a few conclusions. First, that there was a significant, centralised administrative core in the Bagrationid polity: this was not merely government by household, but a court that appointed ministers with significant areas of oversight. Second, that the administrative core was nonetheless far more fluid in its operation than a modern administrative bureaucracy, with roles varyingly defined and exercised according to their holders and with specific functions perhaps resting on perceived skills and connections as needed more than pre-set offices and appointments. Third, this structure involved mobility and numerous sites, which implies that the personal presence and connections of a monarch were important for the court's functions and perhaps for connecting the court to the rest of the realm with maximum efficacy.

¹⁸⁶ KT, 234; 244. *ძგ* II, 15; 39.

¹⁸⁷ KT, 276; *ძგ* II, 111.

SOCIAL CLASS

The social class system among Georgian elites was, in this period, broadly divided into two: the upper, *didebuli*, class, and the lower *aznauri*. It is important to remember that this division was among the *nobility*, and that *aznauris* can therefore be considered gentry rather than in any sense 'lower orders'. For these the term *glekhi*, or peasant, is used in charters from the period, but the number of charters we have is too small to give much more detail on twelfth century *glekhis* and the work of translating and prosopographically analysing the charter material was not possible in the course of this project. There was also clearly a merchant class present across the region in this period, who are discussed more below. When any of these social terms appear in the chronicles, however, we have few cases of them being applied directly to individuals: rather, they are often category terms whereby the status of a group of people is discussed, or where a group of people gather to a monarch for a particular event. The majority of our prosopographical information is on those considered members of the *didebuli* and *aznauri* classes, particularly the former.

This abstraction of *didebulis* and *aznauris* is commonly appealed to in chronicle writing, but it may mask as much as it reveals when it comes to the location and exercise of power. How the categorisation works – that is, whether all *didebulis* were considered to be *aznauris* by definition, or whether the two are at times treated as fully separate categories – is not wholly clear, for example. On the one hand, it appears that in origin the *didebuli* status was an addition to the existing status of *aznauri*.¹⁸⁸ On the other, we have rhetorical statements from the chronicles that in times of prosperity 'aznauris became *didebulis*' which may suggest that the transformation into the latter status removed the former and certainly suggests that these statuses could be fluid within a person's lifetime.¹⁸⁹ There is indeed no evidence that there was a clear legalistic definition of a *didebuli* or *aznauri*, and within those categories there could be

¹⁸⁸ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 17.

¹⁸⁹ KT, 242; *ძგ* II, 34.

very wide ranges indeed of variation.¹⁹⁰ This fluidity of status, and other aspects we know about the organisation of provincial administration in Georgia which will be discussed in the next chapter, make it unlikely that these terms represent a strict hierarchy. Even within the uppermost nobility, a figure like Ivane Orbeli or Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, both amirsp'asalars and each one of the most powerful members of the polity in their respective periods, had a court political role that was utterly different in scope to say an *eristavi* of Odishi, very much a *didebuli*-rank post but not one where the holder in any sense held the fate of the whole polity in his hands.

We know of few *aznauris* named as such in the chronicle literature from our period – the small upper echelon who form the lion's share of our records of persons were mostly from families that would have been of *didebuli* rank. As a result of the ill-defined nature of the roles, there may arguably be more than we realise, but this is difficult to judge. Also difficult is knowing to what extent this and similar social categorisations could cross other social boundary lines such as ethnicity – this is discussed further below. A lot of briefly named figures in our sources who we do not have an attested office for are likely to have been *aznauris* nonetheless – figures like Zakaria Asp'aanisdze or Saghir Makhatelisdze, both named for emerging victorious in localised military struggles on Tamar's behalf, are likely to have been of this rank. We therefore can see that *aznauris* probably formed the local backbones of Georgia's military aristocracy through our period, as well as being notable landowners. Given the lack of explicitly noted *aznauris* much of the time at court, it is possible that part of the distinction was formed by the *aznauris* remaining a more provincial landowning nobility whereas the *didebulis* were those with more direct courtly access by virtue of office.

Below the *aznauris* and *didebulis* in rank, as in so many medieval societies, were the general mass of the non-elite population. We have a suggestion from one point in the chronicles that there was a landowning class immediately below the *aznauris* in perceived rank, as well as the

¹⁹⁰ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 43.

glekhis aforementioned in charter evidence.¹⁹¹ There were also likely certain tenant distinctions based upon who a certain individual's landlords or superiors were – monastic, royal, or noble – but this is largely speculative. Georgian studies on this social hierarchy have often attempted to tackle it by drawing parallels to western experiences of feudal tenancy and vassalage, referred to by Chikobava as “the universal event”.¹⁹² Whilst some interesting linguistic parallels have been drawn in the creation of the *glekhi* as a diminutively referenced social category like the western *villanus* and terms for lordship becoming derived from previously sacral ones, in other ways the parallel with the western European experience may obfuscate as much as illuminate.¹⁹³ We do not for example see any suggestion of a ‘feudal revolution’ of rights being claimed locally by castellans after the turn of the millennium in Georgia as has been posited in, for example, France.¹⁹⁴ The social history of medieval Georgia outside its elites is a badly understudied area and one where more work is badly needed, especially via improved interfacing with archaeology and via more work on the charter material.

A group that does deserve particular attention among the non-aristocratic groups in society are merchants and townspeople, who have been the subject of considerable discussion in some of the Georgian literature compared to their limited appearance in the sources. The towns, especially Tbilisi, were likely more ethnically, linguistically and religiously varied than the countryside, with Muslim and Armenian populations large enough to be differentially treated for administrative purposes.¹⁹⁵ Some Georgian historians contend that the ‘merchant class’ were key as supporters of the monarchy: we discuss this contention further in the next chapter.¹⁹⁶ We have few mentioned by name in the chronicles, an exception being the *didvach'ari* (“great merchant”) Zankan Zorbabel who was sent by the court to fetch Iuri Bogolyubsky to be Tamar's

¹⁹¹ KT, 242; jg II, 34.

¹⁹² Chikobava, A., ‘Issue of Class Language and Feudalism’, *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 14 (2018).

¹⁹³ Chikobava, A., ‘The Issue of Vassalage in the High Feudal Epoch of Georgia’, *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 7 (2013).

¹⁹⁴ Wickham, C. ‘The “Feudal Revolution” and the Origins of Italian City Communes: The Prothero Lecture’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 Vol. 24 (2014), 32-33.

¹⁹⁵ Minorsky, ‘Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn’, 34.

¹⁹⁶ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 32.

first husband.¹⁹⁷ We have some knowledge outside the chronicles of merchants via building dedications such as those of the Armenian merchant Tigran Honents of Ani: senior merchants were evidently, much like senior landowners, in a position to endow churches, indicating their significant societal status.¹⁹⁸

As a result of the relative paucity of information below the highest ranks of the court, analysis of all social ranks below the *didebulis* is heavily reliant on general statements from chroniclers rather than being amenable to prosopographical analysis. The most important thing to appreciate resulting from this is that most of the arguments made about other forms of identity are not necessarily fully applicable outside those most elite groups: when we look at any other form of identity and its impact on politics and society in our period, we are looking in fact at the intersection between that identity and elite social positions for the most part – something that occasionally becomes visible, as in the gaps that sometimes show between perceptions of the general population of a particular ethnic group and elite figures from it, but is often not so readily accessible.

Social class can be argued to have played a role in some political actions during our period. In particular, the case of Apridon is interesting here: a senior figure later in Giorgi III's reign whose deposition was successfully demanded by the upper nobility during the instability early in Tamar's reign. There is some confusion among scholars as to whether Apridon was an *aznauri*, or of lower rank and humbler origins – the latter claim is made by Met'reveli and Rayfield, but the 2013 translation provides the reading that Apridon was himself an *Aznauri* and Lordkipanidze gives a similar reading.¹⁹⁹ Either way, our source is explicit that it was pressure from the established nobility that forced Tamar to push Apridon out of his office of *msakhurtukhutsesi*. The typical reading of this has been that as a member of, in some sense, the

¹⁹⁷ KT, 243; *ძგ* II, 37.

¹⁹⁸ Donabédian, P. 'Ani Multicultural Milieu and New Trends in Armenian Architecture during Queen Tamar's Period' in Skhirtladze, Zaza (ed.) *Ani at the Crossroads* (Tbilisi, 2019), 125-126.

¹⁹⁹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 127; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 107; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 136; KT, 241; *ძგ* II, 30.

lower orders, he represented an affront to noble sensibilities and someone who, having been raised up by the Bagrationid monarchs, would be unfalteringly loyal. The tradition of seeing the nobility acting in concert in opposition to dilution of their grip on high offices, and opposing royal interests and centralisation of power, is thereby invoked as a complete explanation.²⁰⁰ It does indeed seem that Apridon was pushed out in the power struggles early in Tamar's reign – his deposition is reported alongside Q'utlu-Arslan's rebellion – and it is likely his social standing made him more vulnerable in that regard, but the logic behind his removal from office is not included in the text. Samushia argues that these events are likely to have been connected, with Qutlu-Arslan's position pressing the advantage of the great nobility into an unsuccessful attempt at proto-parliamentarianism.²⁰¹ This reading of Apridon's fall as deriving from a broad state-nobility struggle is, however, more based on seeing the chronicle text in light of the theory rather than the text providing evidence that supports the theory. Apridon's holding of one of the great royal offices at a time of turmoil might inevitably have made him a potential target for those who sought preferment under the new ruler, whether or not they sought a different deal for the nobility as a whole.

We can additionally consider families entering and leaving the ranks of those visible to us in society, or attaining particular ranks. There are two large difficulties with analysing this: first, many of the familial connections cannot be fully ascertained except in one or two large families, and second, many posts even at the highest level were either incompletely recorded or not always occupied. We can look at the 'vizier' level posts mentioned in the previous section, however: of these we see quite a high turnover in families, with one or two dominant families such as the Orbeli and Mkhargrdzeli holding numerous offices simultaneously but other families coming and going: names like Gamrek'eli, Dadiani, or Kobuletsidze that were likely very much *didebulis* only appear once in lists of vizier-level roles, and appointments like those of Apridon

²⁰⁰ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 136-137; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 135-137; Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 183.

²⁰¹ Samushia, J., 'At the Origins of Georgian Parliamentarianism (Qutlu-Arslan)', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 10 (2016).

or Q'ubasar from outside those most elite Georgian circles imply that at least sometimes monarchs had significant freedom in appointments to these positions. In turn, this is likely to have increased competition for these positions whilst also meaning that holding them was not a social necessity for maintenance of high status: the circle of viziers was too small by far to encompass all the major *eristav* and *didebuli* courtiers and families. This decreases the utility of our sources for discussing class, because it is these functional *ukhutsesi*-type roles that tend to be some of the most visible in our materials, but the relationship between those roles and class distinctions may have been a complex one.

One thing we know less about is whether some families that more significantly rose or fell during the century were deemed to have changed social rank. For example, the Grigolisdze family who became *eristavis* of Kakheti later in the century: we do not know if they would have been classified as of *didebuli* rank prior to their elevation, or if their status as local notables suggests they were senior *aznauris* who thus made the jump to the senior status. This is an area where additional evidence from regional epigraphic studies might later bear some fruit, if more inscriptions from certain lesser-known families can be incorporated into prosopographical data-sets. Apridon's case may suggest some bias against social climbers or desire by the upper nobility to protect their positions, but it is effectively unique.

A final interesting question is whether there was an intersection between social class and religious or ethno-racial identities: for example, whether being a *didebuli* implied not only senior nobility, but also *Georgian* or *Orthodox* senior nobility. This is a difficult question to answer because the terminologies are loosely held. However, we can make a few suggestions that these ranks did not strictly hold to ethnic categories. For example, Giorgi III is mentioned in the *History and Eulogy* as seeing the Shirvan-shah as one of his *didebulis*, neatly placing someone in the category who, as Giorgi's most significant Muslim ally, was very much neither Georgian nor Orthodox.²⁰² The fact that we know such identities could be applied elsewhere,

²⁰² KT, 234-235; *ძგ* II, 17.

however, does not tell us about whether they were in most individual cases. Thus, for example, families like those of the bishops of Siunik that Stepannos Orbelian writes about, or foreigners attached to the Bagrationid court as we know Ibn al-Azraq was, are difficult to place in such a social categorisation in the wider Georgian-Bagrationid polity.

Social class is therefore talked about and often demarcated in our chronicle texts: it was something that people in the Bagrationid court certainly noticed and commented upon in writings. It may have been one of the most immovable dividers in the Bagrationid court, in that there seem to have been very few visible and recorded movements between these classes of person. Discourses between or about classes are effectively absent, with no sense that the *didebulis* were acting in collective competition with other voices. This was not a world, however, in which these distinctions were imagined as immutable hereditary divides that could not be overcome – a good monarch could be praised for elevating people through these societal ranks, indicating that the upper nobility were not solely defined by lineage. Apridon's case, and the fact that he was remembered for his lower birth, shows the limits of this fluidity however: attaining a great office of the Bagrationid court was not enough to be remembered or accepted among the *didebulis*.

POLITICAL, ETHNIC AND RACIAL IDENTITIES

Identities based on culture, racial categorisation, and political allegiances all formed a complex and interlocking web in people's views of themselves and one another. As discussed in chapter three, from a data perspective these and polity-based identity were merged into a single data type for this study, in which multiple options could be selected: such that someone could be, for example, both Armenian and Georgian. The factors causing someone to be identified in our sources as a particular ethnicity are frequently invisible, and political and ethnic identities, whether or not theoretically separable, often use the same terms. It makes sense, then, to not try and discern whether someone was "really" in a certain category, or held a certain identity to a

greater or lesser extent. Importantly for the ensuing discussion, this means not making a strong distinction between someone treated as Georgian simply because they were part of the Georgian polity, and someone for whom we have a range of Georgian ethnic, cultural, or onomastic traits recorded.

In the first chapter of this thesis a brief discussion was offered regarding referring to the Bagrationid polity as Georgian: to start looking at the categories of ethnicity and how they worked in our period, we can usefully start by returning to the basics of that relationship between identity and power. By the 12th century, one of the underpinnings of Georgian political culture seems to have been an acceptance of Bagrationid rule in some form. There were no rebellions recorded in the entire century that involved someone of a different family claiming any of the titles that the Bagrationis claimed for themselves: even if one portrays rebels like Ivane Orbeli or Q'utlu-Arslan as ultimately aiming for sole rule (which is very arguable), in both cases they were attempting to be the primary power behind, rather than seated upon, the throne. This immensely effective dynastic monopoly on power was, in turn, important for shaping the interactions between power and identity, precisely because the polity was not conceptualised in its own rhetoric as having a singular, essentialised ethnic character.

The Bagrationids' titulature specifically covered their claimed rulership of a range of peoples. In particular, charters began with their rulership as mepe of the Abkhazes, Kartvelians, Rans and Kakhis, and the titles of Shirvanshah and Shahanshah.²⁰³ There has been some discussion about the latter, a Persian term meaning King of Kings, though probably brought into Georgian usage via its Armenian adoption.²⁰⁴ The circulation of texts such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, generally thought to have been available to Georgians at this time, would however have ensured that Georgians were aware of the Persian meaning: the claim to the role of King of Kings would therefore have been understood in our period.²⁰⁵ These titles were in any case a mixture of

²⁰³ Enukidze, Silogava, Shoshashvili (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XII სს*, 77.

²⁰⁴ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 170.

²⁰⁵ Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, 70.

claim and practicality: Abkhazia, Kartveli, and Kakheti were core territories, but Arran/Ran was never a secure Bagrationid possession, and actual allied Shirvanshahs still held the title even while the Georgians wrote it on their charters: this is discussed further in the section on Shirvan in chapter eight. The fact that even the core Kartvelian-speaking territories were divided in the titlature is also of some interest. For one thing, it suggests a lack of any concerted attempt to try and forge a more singular ethnic or state-focused identity: a member of one of these identity groups is rhetorically presented as thereby being a subject of an individual monarch, rather than of an abstracted state. Furthermore, it means that the monarchs themselves are not explicitly referred to as being from, or representing, any one of these groups: the polity's multi-ethnic character is essential to its presentation in titlature.

These categories are, however, barely if at all present in the chronicle literature covering the twelfth century. There are references on occasion to Imiers and Amiers – that is, western and eastern Georgians.²⁰⁶ These terms may plausibly roughly map onto Abkhazes on the one hand and Kartvelians and Kakhis on the other, but whether “Abkhaz” could be taken to encompass the former territory of that kingdom (most of Western Georgia) or a specific ethnic group within it, or either depending on context, is unknown. We also have terms used for the peoples of different regions or eristaviates, such as the Meskhis, Kakhis, T'aoans, and so on.²⁰⁷

It is very unusual to have reference to any specific person as a Georgian in our Georgian-language sources. This is a problem of assumed identity norms: the Georgian material, like most narrative sources, tends to specifically identify people who deviate from, rather than conform to, an assumed set of identity norms – Chalcedonian/Orthodox and Georgian. There are, however, some ethnonyms that are more commonly used for individuals. These tend to be those that indicate a personal or family origin, or one which the chroniclers found more culturally different or worthy of note. Armenians, peoples of the North Caucasus such as Kipchaks and Ossetians, and Turks or other largely Muslim peoples all come into this category. It is important

²⁰⁶ KT, 229; 240; ქს II, 5; 30.

²⁰⁷ KT, 234; ქს II, 16.

here to stress that this is a matter of perception and varies heavily according to context: we cannot very neatly point to a subset of “internal” subdivision ethnonyms that were used or singled out less and a converse “external” or “othered” set that were used more. We also have a small sample set of texts and should not assume that the opinions of any one chronicler can be taken as universal regarding which ethnonyms were noteworthy or compatible. Even for non-Georgian texts, such as the Armenian chronicles which tend to refer to Armenian identity more often, we still have both the issue of assumed Armenian identities in the text and the reality that more unusual ethnic statuses are more likely to be reported and discussed. We should, consequently, not take the presence of someone being “Armenian” to necessarily say anything about whether or not they could also be considered “Georgian”, or vice versa, as noted in our earlier discussions on identity and the data structures used to model it in chapters two and three. Indeed, this is a significant argument for examining action and the career-lines of people between ethnic groups as opposed to simply rhetoric in this regard. Nonetheless we can certainly suggest that some ethnic divisions, especially those which indicated significant differences in cultural and religious practice, were more noted by the writers whose works we have available.

In literary sources, elite figures often have explicit ethnic identities: in the *Knight in Panther skin*, Avtandil is explicitly an Arab, and Taniel explicitly Indian, whilst in the *Amirandarejaniani* explicitly Khazar, Yemeni, Arabic, Chinese, and other characters appear.²⁰⁸ This is a geographically far wider and mostly non-overlapping array of ethnonyms when compared to those which appear in the chronicle texts, and is closely reflected in Persian works such as the *Shahnameh* or *Visramiani* which would have been known to Georgian writers of our period.²⁰⁹ Beynen has suggested that Rustaveli uses Indian and Arab identities to explore ideas of instinct, recklessness, and rationality, with his Arab characters providing the rational mirror to the

²⁰⁸ Rustaveli trans. Vivian, *The Knight in Panther Skin*, 65-68; *Amiran-Darejaniani* trans. Stevenson, 74-76.

²⁰⁹ Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, 69-70.

impulsive Indian figures.²¹⁰ This, however, does not necessarily map onto contemporary perception of those ethnonyms, and we do not see for example Tariel's plot-central recklessness as a feature of the King of India who appears at the beginning of *Amirandarejaniani*, who indeed unlike Tariel is explicitly able to identify himself that his emotional state is a core issue.²¹¹ Rather, part of the point may simply be to place the personas Rustaveli wishes to write about onto people outside the immediate context of the poem's reception. This is something he very clearly does when setting up initial plot elements that closely reflect contemporary Georgian politics of Tamar's era under an 'Arabian' guise, and may reflect a greater freedom of commentary available when writing via analogy.

We find ourselves, then, with a kaleidoscope of ethnonyms, and some preference for different sets in use in different types of source material. Moreover, these ethnonyms that divide within fairly core Georgian territories are very rarely used in chronicles to refer to individuals, as opposed to groups. Given that we are mostly looking at elites in these sources, we can maybe in part see this as a symptom of quite a court-focused elite culture, wherein regional titles had some weight but senior nobles might have held land across areas well outside their core and might not have identified as strongly with the localities they were nominally responsible for. For example, the Dadiani family were from western Georgia, but we know from the accounts of Iuri's rebellion and the early part of Tamar's reign that Vardan Dadiani had held multiple central offices and owned fortresses in the east such as Orbeti and Kveshi as well.²¹²

The question we can now turn to is the extent to which these divisions mattered in the balance of power within Georgian politics. In later chapters we will revisit the extent to which some of these perceptions and identities may have shaped external relations with regions, client-states, and neighbouring polities: here we focus on their shaping of the heart of Bagrationid power.

²¹⁰ Beynen, B., 'Shota Rustaveli's Theory of Friendship', *The Kartvelologist* 24 (2015).

²¹¹ *Amiran-Darejaniani* trans. Stevenson, 1-5.

²¹² KT, 248; ქს II, 49.

Estimating the balance of ethno-cultural backgrounds in the Georgian court is difficult, as a result of the lack of direct attestation of Georgian ethnic-cultural backgrounds and as a result of the potential fluidity of such terms. The large majority of records in the database for this project which arise from the Georgian material are tagged as ‘assumed Georgian’ – that is, they are Georgian elites with Georgian onomastic traits but to whom the ethnonym is never directly applied. This category accounts for a significant majority of our records from the Georgian chronicles: we would not expect from the data that the court lacked a notable majority of Georgian nobles and attendees, though minorities of various kinds did make up significant numbers. Rough estimates like this from the available data give little indication of the range of social functions connected to certain identities, however: besides our difficulties in seeing beyond the court’s upper echelons, the fact that the heavily represented Mkhargrdzeli and Orbeli Armeno-Georgian families were well established at the court does not necessarily give a full picture of how they interacted with other elites around them.

The Orbeli family is of particular interest for the consideration of identity among court elites. The Orbelis themselves were Orthodox in the twelfth century, though their family history from the subsequent century, written by a Gregorian member of the family, paints them as a mixture of Georgian, Armenian, and (perhaps most surprisingly) Chinese by way of their family background.²¹³ Like the Mkhargrdzeli family which largely took on their offices and role in the court after the 1170s, they can be broadly considered Armeno-Georgian. The fortress of Lori, a power centre for both families at different times, was in the natural marchland between lower Kartli and the routes down into Armenia, too, giving their power a certain geographic ambiguity in its connections.²¹⁴

The presentation of the Orbelis as Chinese merits a little further consideration. This is only mentioned in the Orbeli chronicle, but given the very sparse and usually negative mentions of anything relating to the Orbelis in the Kartlis Tskhovreba, and the rather brief nature of most

²¹³ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 193-197.

²¹⁴ KT, 235-6; 251; *ძგ* II, 19; 55.

Armenian texts of the period, this is perhaps unsurprising. Whilst the story having some distant grain of truth cannot be ruled out, the most likely explanation would seem to be that this is some sort of exoticising heroic origin story. Indeed, the same story is used in earlier Armenian texts for the Mamikonean family, which may be a reason for the Orbelis' adoption of it.²¹⁵ An alternative theory mentioned by Pagava, that here Chen is an archaic term for a region of Lazica, is highly unlikely.²¹⁶ Stepannos Orbelian makes the location of his 'Chenastan' explicit in the text, placing it to the east of the lands of the Khazars and Huns and extending as far as Mount Emavon – that is, Imeon, an ancient term for the Hindu Kush.²¹⁷ Whilst one cannot disprove that the information might once have been a corruption of the Lazica-related term, it is very clear that Stepannos' understanding, and probably that of his work's twelfth century subjects, was that this term was a description of China. If a heroic origin story copied from that of the Mamikoneans is, then, our best explanation, it is unclear why China would have been selected for such a purpose by medieval Armenian families, and the lack of even a name for the ancestor who reportedly fled China a thousand years earlier makes that construction rather limited. Whilst China appears in literary texts with which the chronicle writers would have likely had some familiarity, it is often rather secondary to Persia, India, and Arabia in these, though perhaps the comparative remoteness of China might have made it a good candidate.

Following on from the Orbelis, the Mkhargrdzelis fulfilled a similar role during the reigns of Tamar and Giorgi IV Lasha. The family is known as Zakarid or Zakarian in some Armenian scholarship: the name Mkhargrdzeli is almost exclusively used in Georgian histories.²¹⁸ They were strongly connected to the Orbelis and likewise Armeno-Georgian. Unlike the Orbelis they seem to have been largely Gregorian in faith, though at least one notable member of the family,

²¹⁵ La Porta, S., 'The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined: Legitimizing Land and Power in Armenia During the 12th and Early 13th Centuries', *Revue des études arméniennes* 34 (2012), 79-80.

²¹⁶ Pagava, K., 'On Relatedness of Medieval Georgian Families Baghwashi and Orbeli', *Proceedings of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences: Series of History, Archaeology, Ethnology and Art History* 2 (2020), 48.

²¹⁷ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 193.

²¹⁸ Eastmond, A., *Tamta's World* (Cambridge, 2017), 27; Pogossian, Z., 'Women, Identity and Power: A Review Essay of Antony Eastmond, *Tamta's World*', *Al-'Uşūr al-Wuṣṭā* 27 (2019): 248-250.

Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, converted sometime later in Tamar's reign.²¹⁹ Occasional mentions of their ancestry as Kurdish have also been argued to be an exoticising origin much like the Chinese story was for the Orbelis.²²⁰ Their power at the end of the century was likewise based in the fortress of Lori, which moved to them on the deposition of the amirsp'asalar Q'ubasar and Sargis Mkhargrdzeli's appointment to that title: they were heavily involved in Georgian wars and governance in Armenia, on which more is said in the Diplomacy chapter below.²²¹

To these two families should be added an interesting third case, that of the amirsp'asalar Q'ubasar who was in the post late in Giorgi III's reign. He was a Kipchak, likely one of the leaders of the Kipchak forces that Bagrationid monarchs had been able to call upon since David IV's time (and, if this is the case, he may well have been born in Georgia: the Kipchak military population in Georgia came with families and had been present for half a century by the time of Q'ubasar holding senior court posts).²²² The identification by Met'reveli of Q'ubasar as a *former* Kipchak is confusing, and not clearly supported by any of our source materials.²²³ The identification of him as a Kipchak comes from Stepannos Orbelian, while his mentions in the Georgian material give him no explicit ethnonym.²²⁴ He was selected as a replacement for Ivane Orbeli in the post during the Orbeli rebellion: having the Kipchaks on his side in the early, tense days when Giorgi was holed up in Tbilisi waiting to see how united the rebel front would prove to be must have been crucial. It is interesting, however, that this was the strategy, rather than for example offering the post to one of Ivane's subordinates in the hope of breaking his coalition apart. It is certainly no accident that the one post of such a high rank held by a Kipchak during our period was that of the amirsp'asalar, given the Kipchaks' relatively high military importance, and suggests an interplay between the social roles of certain ethnic groups and the need for leaders connected to those groups.

²¹⁹ KT, 263-267; ქს II, 81-90.

²²⁰ La Porta, 'The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined', 80.

²²¹ KT, 242; ქს II, 33.

²²² Bakhtadze, M., 'How many thousand Kipchaks (Russ Polovtsi) were settled in Georgia by David the Builder', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 11 (2016), 92.

²²³ Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 127.

²²⁴ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 199.

Whilst admittedly our sample size is small, it is thus interesting that the post of amirsp'asalar in particular tended to be held by an Armeno-Georgian, or in one case a Kipchak-Georgian, holder. There are a few key theories that could be advanced here as to why a pattern might have emerged. One possibility is that the fact that these families were not entirely Georgian might have been seen as a protection against them seeking power in their own right. This theory, however, lacks explanatory power considering firstly, that rebellions in our period practically all operated under the assumption of a Bagrationid monarch, and secondly, that the Orbelis were indeed behind one of the most dangerous rebellions in our period. Alternatively, their positioning in Lori on the Armeno-Georgian marches coupled with granting of senior military office might mark a continual policy choice towards Armenian-majority territories with the theory that a more strongly Armenian linked family would provide more success in engaging with potential Armenian subjects. In Q'ubasar's case, brokering better links with the Kipchak troops at a time of crisis could have played a similar role. Such a focus on the potential for families to act as brokers would fit with other examples we shall see of how Georgian monarchs tended to use and maintain power.

We do not see the same pattern – to the extent that it is a pattern – repeated with other court functions, excepting in that the Orbelis and Mkhargrdzelis frequently did hold other senior posts, making them further over-represented in our views of the period. The post of ch'q'ondidel-mts'ignobartukhutsesi was, as far as we can tell, held by Georgians throughout this period: whilst we cannot say that religion presupposed ethnicity or vice versa considering the narratives of conversion, the two did correlate strongly. One thing we can perhaps suggest is that the nature of the amirsp'asalar's post may have made it more important to have someone with useful connections beyond Georgia or beyond the immediate confines of the court, whether in areas in which Georgia was engaged in conflict or in Q'ubasar's case directly to a key military faction. For other court roles, other routes of connectivity within the court might have been more important.

The identities that are usually bundled as ‘Georgian’ are worth considering seriously in their own right when it comes to ethnicity. The broadly Kartvelian-speaking “Abkhazes, Kartvels, and Kakhis” mentioned in Georgian monarchs’ titulature are all treated in most works – by omission of significant discussion of them - as teleologically Georgians. Being Georgian is generally not something that is discussed at length or given any notable attributes in our chronicle materials, except perhaps when it is used in religious terms to differentiate from for example Armenians: but the sub-identities are used even less, and almost solely to refer in general terms to people from those regions. We never, in chronicles from this period, get individual actors who are very particularly labelled with regional identities, potentially both indicating a degree of cultural homogeneity among the upper aristocracy and also suggesting a low level of preoccupation with this form of identity. We do see some subdivisions potentially being important in east-west splits, especially in Iuri Bogolyubsky’s rebellion.²²⁵ This, in turn, may map onto mentions of “Imiers and Amiers” in Georgian chronicles, a pair of terms referring to Georgians from the east and west of the Likhi ridge respectively.²²⁶ We therefore cannot discount the idea that western Georgian elites resented the shift of power eastwards from Kutaisi to Tbilisi after the 1120s and that this was a source of ethno-political tension. However, we do not see many points at which the Georgian nature or regional identity of individuals is treated as explicitly notable or where the chronicles assign particular attributes thereto, and this may reflect a generally low level of societal concern with this form of identity.

Political-ethnic allegiances were, like class ones, noticeable in our period enough to be recorded and indeed reified in governance: the aims of those processes, however, were not attempts at homogenisation or promotion of a dominant identity, and we see little sign of that at the court level either. Orthodox Georgians formed the majority of the court and particularly the upper nobility, but within the upper nobility there were a number of appointees to high office from other ethnic groups and little sense that ethnic identity posed a further barrier. Nobles such as

²²⁵ KT, 249; ქს II, 49-50.

²²⁶ E.g. KT, 240, 269; ქს II, 30; 96.

the Orbelis could appeal to foreign ethnic origins in their family myth-making, and elite warrior culture crossed ethnic divides in literary texts from our period. Where we do see a concern with ethnicity or correlations with particular roles, indeed, ethnicity beyond the dominant one may well have been an indicator that a high-ranking noble was able to access those communities and build connections more effectively on behalf of the monarch and court. This is likely to have helped the rise of the Mkhargrdzelis, the Orbelis, or individuals like Q'ubasar, whose seniority in court thus likely came as a result of, rather than despite, their ethnic differences from those around them.

FAITH

The south Caucasus, in the twelfth century as now, was a religiously diverse landscape. Indeed the broad contours of that diversity had already been established: a predominantly Chalcedonian Orthodox Christian Georgian population, Armenian communities that were largely Gregorian monophysite Christians, and a mix of Turkic-led Muslim polities and communities, mainly Sunni. From an elite and political perspective, this tripartite split functions as a starting point for our considerations, though it absolutely should not be taken to encompass the fullness of religious variation and belief. It is also vital to stress from the start that Georgia and its neighbouring polities included significant numbers of believers outside their majority or elite faiths. The Muslim and Gregorian-monophysite population in Tbilisi is usually considered to have been larger than its Orthodox population, for example.²²⁷

Members of other religious communities, especially Jews but also likely other minority faiths, certainly existed in the Caucasus at this time. Jews in Tbilisi after David IV's capture of the city had a lower rate of tax than Georgians, but higher than Muslims.²²⁸ We do not, for the most part, see Jewish figures in the prosopographical record, however. There may have been other small

²²⁷ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 109.

²²⁸ Ibn al-Azraq trans. Minorsky, in Minorsky, V., 'Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13, No. 1 (1949), 27-35.

minorities, such as a continuing Zoroastrian element, but this is speculative. It is possible that the Yezidi Kurdish population in Georgia arrived during our period: Chikhladze & Chikhladze suggest that they arrived during Giorgi III's reign in a paper discussing the modern diaspora, but without further elaboration.²²⁹ There are some ethnic communities such as the Kipchak population invited in by David IV where their belief systems are unclear – if they were non-Christians, then the Kipchak general Q'ubasar's period as amirsp'asalar may have been the most important role held by someone not of a Christian faith during this period.

There are also some unanswered questions as to the belief systems of various peoples in the Upper Caucasus Mountains, where distinct non-Christian belief systems exist to the present day. We have some hint of these in the source material on Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's military expedition into the Upper Caucasus, where the Pkhovs are said to worship either the invisible devil or a spotless black dog.²³⁰ These belief systems have at times been taken to represent an unchanged pre-Christian Georgian religion that would therefore date back to our period.²³¹ This, however, is not well supported by the evidence of significant adaptation and syncretism in those cultures themselves, where for example major cultural figures include Erekle II and Zurab Eristavi, romanticised versions of figures from the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively.²³² Therefore, whilst it is extremely likely that the mountain communities were not Christian in our period, this is not the same as being lacking in influences from Christianity and other neighbouring religions. The lack of contemporary medieval evidence speaks, in any case, to the relative exclusion of those groups from the upper circles of the interconnected Caucasus elite: while it is likely that some people with these belief systems were at the Bagrationid court (especially as the aforementioned war ended with the taking of hostages) no individuals who can be definitely identified with these faith practices appear in our material.

²²⁹ Chikhladze, I., and Chikhladze, G., 'The Yezidi Kurds and Assyrians of Georgia: The Problem of Diasporas and Integration into Contemporary Society', *Journal of Central Asia & the Caucasus* 3, No. 21 (2003).

²³⁰ KT, 276; ქც II, 111.

²³¹ Tuite, K., 'Highland Georgian paganism — archaism or innovation? Review of Zurab K'ik'nadze, ქართული მითოლოგია I. ვარი და საყმო.', *Annual of the Society for the Study of the Caucasus* (1996), 1-2.

²³² Ibid, 6-7.

Finally, whilst our starting tripartite sketch of groupings, both in our sources and now, is sometimes taken as monolithic, just as with ethnic identity the overlaps and complexity were considerable. Some sources stress the Gregorian-Orthodox divide far more heavily than others: Stepannos Orbelian does not even comment on the religious difference between Tamar and her Gregorian Christian advisors or on Ivane Mkhargrzelis conversion, whilst the chronicler of the History and Eulogy of Monarchs devotes several pages to a particularly colourful vignette about dogs eating or refusing to eat correctly consecrated eucharists to show the importance of Orthodox religious correctness.²³³ Equally interestingly we also see devotional overlaps in this period: for example, the Armenian church at Haghartsin Monastery, of which Giorgi III is named in an inscription as having ordered the reconstruction.²³⁴ Ibn al-Azraq's account of his time serving Demet're mentions him donating 200 gold dinars to a mosque in Tbilisi.²³⁵ It was, in other words, very clearly accepted and acceptable practise for Georgian monarchs to be patrons of religious institutions of other faiths, despite the religiosity of their own position.

We therefore have a multifaceted picture of the religious landscape, one in which actions were taken across faith lines and where minority faith groups were not necessarily left out of a monarch's considerations. Faiths were still, however, important to the construction of political difference in our period, despite – perhaps even at times because of – the diversity and heterodoxy present across the region. There are numerous examples in our chronicles of religion being used as a general set of terms in preference to ethnonyms to categorise people. The largest, and simplest, is that ethnonyms like Turks, Persians, and Shirvanis are often disregarded in favour of simply talking about Muslims. Even though the actual compositions of Georgia's neighbouring peoples were more mixed, the religion of their leaders was often as likely as ethnic identity to be a first point of labelling.

²³³ KT, 264-265; ȝȝ II, 85-89.

²³⁴ Chitishvili, N., 'Haghartsin Monastery' in Eastmond et al, *Crossing Frontiers Project*, at <https://sites.courtauld.ac.uk/crossingfrontiers/crossing-frontiers/armenia/haghartsin-monastery/>, accessed 12/05/2022.

²³⁵ Ibn al-Azraq trans. Minorsky, in Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn', 27-35.

The Orthodox Church was also a deeply integrated part of Georgia's political and administrative infrastructure. In particular we should note the aforementioned role of the *ch'q'ondidel-mts'ignobartukhutsesi*, the permanent combination of the *mts'ignobartukhutsesi* viziership with the post of the bishop of *Ch'q'ondidi* in western Georgia. This combination of infrastructure and religious positioning tied the bishop's role closer to the monarchy. This gave the holder of the title very close access to the monarchy – but, as one of Georgia's senior bishops, such access might have been hoped for anyway. The benefits to Georgian monarchs may have been greater, and indeed Georgian historians have tended to argue that the creation of the combined role was an effort to extend royal power within the church.²³⁶ First, providing a second religious post with an obvious call on access to secular power, other than that of the *Catholicos*, may have provided a wider range of options and lines of preferment within the church, giving monarchs more potential routes to have their preferred outcomes endorsed. Second, it is notable that it was the *mts'ignobartukhutsesi*, the chancery role, where this combination was used. Church resources may have been particularly suitable for crossovers with administration and documentation offices as a result of having relatively high access to trained scribes, and so it is possible that in this way Bagrationid monarchs were able to draw upon church resources to support administrative and diplomatic functions.

We therefore have two main vectors to consider by which religion may have had a role in constructing and shaping court behaviour: first, there is the question of how and whether religious groupings could be used to rhetorically construct lines of political division, and whether such lines of political division can reasonably be shown to have impacted action or policy in a meaningful way. Second, there is the more direct role and influence of clerics themselves to consider.

Religion certainly was used in the construction of certain political dividing lines. This can for example be prominently seen in the Georgian material's treatment of Muslim rulers and conflict,

²³⁶ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 84-85.

where religious symbolism is often heavily invoked in the chronicle material and religious rituals before battle are explicitly discussed. We also have strong evidence for religion as a vector for determining violence both inside and outside war: for example, Vardan Areweltsi has Eldiguz attacking and burning the fortress of Mren with all its defenders inside – a site notable more for having a prominent Armenian church than for strategic importance to Georgia – and burning a famous cross.²³⁷ The account also notes Giorgi's forces sparing Christians in Dvin: religion and religious war rhetoric could be a matter of life and death for those facing the direct realities of violence.

We do *not* see such ingrained antipathies, however, at the court level, except perhaps in questions of marriage and even there more softly expressed: there is no question or argument given that a Georgian monarch might have refused preferment or refused to help a subordinate or that any particular faction might have formed or failed on specifically religious lines. This is interesting, considering the importance of non-Orthodox leaders such as the Mkhargrdzelis and indeed the likely presence of Muslims in the Georgian army in some of these conflicts, which we discuss further below.

Explicit conversion narratives or tests of conversion, which show aspects of how contemporaries saw the process of moving across religious divides, are rare but present in the chronicles. Two notable episodes are the conversion of Ivane Mkhargrdzeli in the Georgian Chronicles, and the failed conversion of Elikum Orbeli from (implicitly Gregorian-Armenian) Christianity to Islam in the History of Siunik.²³⁸ These are the only individual conversions noted in this period, and the latter was promptly reversed according to Stepannos Orbelian. Elikum was the only person mentioned in our sources who is shown being pressured into conversion and he was serving the Eldiguzids at the time. Ivane's conversion was not shared by his brother, suggesting low social pressure to do so.²³⁹ This implies that at least among the nobility within

²³⁷ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 74.

²³⁸ KT, 264-267; յԳ II, 81-90; Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 204.

²³⁹ KT, 267; յԳ II, 90.

the Bagrationid polity there was not a significant pressure towards religious drift: the Georgian monarchs' patronage of multiple faiths further suggest this. Some of the individual cases of religious violence noted by Vardan Areweltsi may well be against Muslim to Christian converts: of three martyrs he explicitly names between the 1140s and 1190s, two – Yovsep and Yordanan – are mentioned as a Persian and a “Tachik” (Turk) respectively, whereas the third case may have related to the Christian in question's status as a tax collector.²⁴⁰ Whilst this is far from sufficient to draw firm conclusions, we may wonder if these stories represent more general violently expressed social norms either against conversion or against members of at least the region's Muslim-led societies whose faith was not shared by most of those who shared their ethnicity. It is a great pity that we do not have more similar discussions of religious pressures in Georgia: Vardan's cases all seem to be from cities that were Muslim-led at the time (Dvin, Ganja, and K'ari).

It is also of particular interest that whereas Elikum's conversion is initiated by Eldiguz – a character generally not wholly unsympathetically portrayed – the events that lead to Ivane's conversion are initiated by his own brother attempting to take Orthodox sacraments.²⁴¹ Despite the colourful array of characters that the Georgian court seems to have included and communicated with, there is never once a recorded active attempt to convert a neighbouring foreign ruler on record in the period under consideration. Offers of marriage to Tamar by Muslim rulers are mentioned to include offers of conversion, which was clearly seen as a prerequisite – but these were unsuccessful in the event and the offer of conversion is more presented as inadequate and insincere rather than as a religious opportunity. The events of Ivane's conversion are presented as a confirmation of the correct nature of Orthodoxy more than as a victory or advance for it, too.²⁴² We therefore see, despite the strong emphasis on religion rhetorically, little obvious pressure on people to conform to a ruler's faith. Given what we saw when discussing ethnicity, this may not be surprising – if co-ethnicity and co-religion

²⁴⁰ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 75-77.

²⁴¹ KT, 263; յԹ II, 81-82.

²⁴² KT, 264; յԹ II, 85.

were useful prerequisites for people to maintain connections to local power-brokers and elites, and therefore provide utility to rulers via those connections, then it made sense for rulers to maintain subordinates and followers who retained religious convictions other than their own.

The construction of royal power included a range of religious elements in our sources, and here Christian imagery and more specifically Orthodox figures and spaces dominated, especially in key ceremonial roles such as coronation but also in Georgian monarchs being able to display power through detailed intervention in religious affairs.²⁴³ Bagrationid rulers are frequently portrayed with religious imagery or compared to religious figures, indeed in one notable case a chronicler describes Tamar such that “with the incomparable and honored Tamar, the Trinity appears to consist of four.”²⁴⁴ Full-length portraits of monarchs in churches were produced during this period, strengthening the associations between religion and royalty. War practices seem to have been sacral in nature as well, with rituals such as kissing a cross before battle.²⁴⁵ Here, in particular, our portrayals are of specifically Orthodox religious figures: Ant’oni Glonistavidze was present at the battle of Shamkhor despite being a monk, and during the Basiani campaign Tamar was accompanied by the Catholicos Tevdore.²⁴⁶ We do not see Bagrationid monarchs taking anything that might be seen as an inter-faith approach in our chronicle depictions of Georgian warfare. Sacral constructions of royal power reached perhaps a particular peak in chronicle portrayals of Tamar: we discuss the gendered nature of this later in this chapter. This is perhaps the strongest evidence for religion as a major divide in court politics: whatever royals may otherwise have done regarding patronising religions, by volume of patronage and in the exercise and display of visible authority, the Orthodox Church was the clear religion of power in Georgia.

There is considerable rhetorical evidence too that contemporaries did understand religion to be an important part of political legitimacy, as well as it being an important part of personal

²⁴³ KT, 288-289; 239; jG II, 118; 25-26.

²⁴⁴ KT, 239; jG II, 25.

²⁴⁵ KT, 298; jG II, 138.

²⁴⁶ KT, 257; 298; jG II, 69; 138.

presentation or military favour. Georgian rulers, for example, in their charters held their rule “სახელითა ღმრთისათა” – in the name of God.²⁴⁷ This was not just a case of religious favour being part of a nebulous sense of worth, but a very explicit tie between power and faith.

A further divide to mention is one of practical governance. As mentioned, there seem to have been noticeable taxation differences between different faith (overlapping with ethnic) groups in Tbilisi, and certain restrictions such as bans on non-Muslims entering the Muslims’ baths, as recorded by Ibn al-Azraq.²⁴⁸ We should not assume that the situation in Tbilisi was reflected elsewhere or that it necessarily affected the lives and factions of the *didebulis* and court nobility to any great extent, however. We do not get any sense that Muslim or Armenian elements at Tamar’s court had any obvious commonalities or groupings, or that the arrangements for minority groups were a significant or contested political issue within the court.

Endowment is a useful final consideration when it comes to definitions and divisions in religious practice, as it represented both a very important benefit that the church in general gained from its connection to secular nobility and the monarchy, and in return a very important opportunity that the church provided those other power centres. From our period we have numerous images of donors and secular figures from church walls, especially of monarchs but not solely so – for example, Rat’i Surameli, Eristavi of Kartli, has his image on the wall of the central church at the Vardzia cave monastery.²⁴⁹ The prestige and presence that this provided to those figures, getting their image out across Georgia in a way few other avenues could, was no doubt seen as important in securing and ideologically reinforcing important messages about a ruler’s reign and legitimacy. In turn, we know that the church received significant donations of land and wealth, as represented in some surviving charters.

We can therefore see a number of ways in which religion does appear to have formed meaningful dividing lines in the Bagrationid polity. Whilst conversion seems to have been quite

²⁴⁷ Enekidze, Silogava, Shoshashvili (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XII სს*, 77.

²⁴⁸ Minorsky, ‘Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn’, 34.

²⁴⁹ Gaprindashvili, G., *Ancient Monuments of Georgia: Vardzia* (Leningrad, 1975), 20-21.

rare, there does seem to have been rivalry and competition between different religious groups such that faith could be portrayed in the Georgian chronicles as a point of contention among important members of Tamar's court. Religion was also clearly a sufficiently important that it could be the focus of actual law-making, too: and it is interesting that it is upon faith lines that Ibn al-Azraq suggests the divisions in Tbilisi were made (such that conversion to the ruler's faith might actually have been a financial negative for a Tbilisi merchant in the 1130s). This was not a deeply proselytising culture, but it was one that took faiths and the divisions between them seriously. This picture of hard lines and legalistic divisions, however, starts to at least require some additional nuance when we start weighing the prosopography, among other evidence, into the picture.

Militarily, the Bagrationids were happy with non-Orthodox nobles wielding force on their behalf or nominally under their auspices. As we have already seen, the Georgians' military upper echelons were on numerous occasions filled with people who were not Orthodox such as the Mkhargrdzeli family. We cannot confidently assign a religious identity to Q'ubasar, the Kipchak Amirsp'asalar in the later years of Giorgi III's reign, either – and it is a certainty that Georgian forces fought alongside Muslim allies and were happy to intervene on their behalf as the situation demanded, as happened with Giorgi III's intervention supporting Shirvan-shah Aghsartan's Derbent campaign and with Tamar's military support for Amir Miran in the Eldiguzid civil war for control of Ganja.²⁵⁰ The same may have conversely been true of Georgia's neighbours. Tsurtsumia suggests that Muslim campaigns against Georgia in the early part of the century were not significantly influenced by a theory of *jihad* expressed as warfare, and Georgian conflicts with the Eldiguzids and eastern Anatolian beyliks through the middle of the century likely fall along similar lines.²⁵¹ Whilst conflicts could be understood sacrally in retrospect or in the abstract, and religious groups could be targets in such conflicts, this rarely if

²⁵⁰ KT, 234-5; 293; *ძგ* II, 16-18; 127-128.

²⁵¹ Tsurtsumia, M., 'Jihad against Georgia? 1121 campaign in light of the holy war' *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 14 (2018).

at all seems to have led to specific mechanisms for specifically religious doctrines or motivations in warfare in the 12th century Caucasus.

We might very tentatively suggest a certain chronology to the prevalence of non-Orthodox military leadership in Georgia, albeit one that is difficult to divide from other political developments: that is, the most prominent examples of non-Orthodox military leadership in our period in Georgia tend to be from the later part of Giorgi III's reign and the reign of Tamar. This is closely connected to the discussion of ethnicity in military leadership above. We are talking about so few positions and events that it is difficult to treat this as a smooth trend per se, especially due to the limited material on Demet're's court. Other scholars have, however, similarly suggested an increase in the diversity of constituencies to which Georgian monarchs had to appeal in the later part of the century based on expansions in the diversity of their legitimising rhetoric.²⁵² We can certainly say that religious issues did not prevent a relatively diverse leadership in the Bagrationids' realm by the end of the century, and that there is no suggestion in our sources that this was a particular source of tension at the time.

Marriage, too, was not entirely blocked or divided by religion, at least among the elite - we can say nothing either way from our sources of the situation for commoners in in this regard. We know more about the interaction between marriage and faith from the Bagrationids' external marriages than anything taking place internally within the polity, within which we see few precise indications. Certainly Bagrationid women such as Rusudan could and did marry Muslim husbands, as did Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's daughter who was married to the ruler of Khlat as part of a ransom agreement. Ivane also reportedly at one point wanted to marry a daughter to Liparit' Orbeli the younger: whilst it is not clear whether this happened before or after Ivane's conversion to Orthodoxy, if the latter this may be an example of a proposed Orthodox-Gregorian marriage. Muslims marrying into the Bagrationid family or other senior elites in the polity are not as well recorded, but the possibility seems to have been taken entirely seriously whilst

²⁵² Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 163.

Tamar rejected at least two Muslim suitors their suits are not portrayed as inherent impossibilities albeit that they may have required conversion as a marriage prerequisite.

Supporting these historical and prosopographical views is the handling of religion in literary sources. The twelfth century Georgian texts are remarkable in their view of religion – or indeed perhaps more precisely in their lack of a view of religion. Rustaveli's hero, Avtandil, prays to God (in a very generic sense) but also to a classical pantheon of seven stars.²⁵³ Clerics and religion likewise barely appear in *Amirandarejaniani*, where at one point princes from China, Yemen, Daylam and Khazaria all arrive to court a king's daughters without any mention of religious difference or issues.²⁵⁴ Both these texts and the Georgian version of *Visramiani* are set in worlds where there are very significant cross-border relations between characters and peoples who audiences at the time would not expect to share a religious outlook, as with the *Knight in Panther Skin*'s hero being Arabian and its titular character being from India (Georgian audiences, familiar with Persian texts mentioning the topic, may indeed have had a perception of India that included its status as neither Christian nor Muslim).

The remarkable thing about relations between monarchs and the church, meanwhile, is how poorly they are connected to relations between monarchs and the secular nobility. We do not lack cases where chronicle writers were happy to speak badly of clerics they disliked or felt were opponents of their protagonist monarchs, a feature of the chronicles that likely helped build the common Georgian historiographical view of church and monarchy being essentially in conflict.²⁵⁵ Despite this, if we look at all the secular rebellions we have recorded, we have precisely zero recorded cases of clerics turning up on the rebel side, or of explicit appeals to religion or the church on the part of rebels. We do have an example from Iuri's first rebellion of Tamar bringing both Patriarch Tevdore and the bishop of Kutaisi into her efforts to negotiate

²⁵³ Rustaveli trans. Vivian, *The Knight In Panther Skin*, 137.

²⁵⁴ *Amiran-Darejaniani* trans. Stevenson, 74-76.

²⁵⁵ A discussion of the death of Mikael Mirianisdze is an especially notable example: KT, 290; jg II, 122.

with the rebels before conflict arose.²⁵⁶ On the other hand, there is no clear church involvement recorded in the Orbeli rebellion, Giorgi III's messy rise to power, or any other internal conflicts.

This lack of clerical-lay ties extends to the upper nobility. There are few to no obvious familial ties between the major didebuli families and any of the senior clerics mentioned in the chronicle texts. This also suggests a possible reason why Georgian monarchs were keen to invest the church with administrative functions. As mentioned above, there seems to have been little possibility for a non-Bagrationid to actually aim for the throne, but the church nonetheless potentially provided a mechanism by which people who were less well networked with the major noble families and who had a different set of opportunities and incentives could be given power. In this reading, we can suggest that lateral ties between secular nobility and senior church figures may have been relatively weak – although the tendency of major noble families to endow churches and monasteries may be a counterpoint here.

The best way to reconsider the role of faith and religion in Georgian society and politics may be to reframe some of the expectations around it. Expectations of religion are frequently tied to its interactions with modern concepts of state: religion is either seen as a tool of statecraft and public opinion management, or alternatively it is religion as faith, a matter outside the purview of the political infrastructure that is primarily expressed via the personal motivations of individuals. It is not clear that either viewpoint neatly maps onto the experience of the medieval Caucasus.

Religion was indeed deeply tied to the machinery of government, but there does not appear to have been an incentive towards homogenisation: what religious difference and religious infrastructure provided in cold practical terms were tools for differentiation among the population and human resources for administration, rather than being tools solely for assimilation and messaging (which could, indeed, be provided via the ruler's patronage of multiple faiths). Chroniclers stressed the importance of their rulers' faith, but this was not

²⁵⁶ KT, 249; *ძგ* II, 50.

necessarily to appeal to a particular Orthodox constituency at the expense of others: rather, expressions of divine favour were important for conferring personal legitimacy, and these had to be expressed in court chronicles via the ruler's own faith. The punitive nature of religious violence, as occurred in the sacks of Mren and Dvin mentioned earlier, therefore doubled up as an expression of personal rebuke to leaders from other faiths – though one that was visited in grim and bloody terms on those unfortunate enough to be their co-religionists. We nonetheless get an overall picture of religion as a legitimating factor in discourse, but one that rulers expected to be able to access in multiple different ways and even, at times, across faiths beyond their own.

It should not, given the various factors pressing on the Bagrationid monarchs, come as a surprise that faith was in practice a far weaker determinant of political action than it was political rhetoric. The church, whilst and partly because clerics were intimately involved in the organisation of the Bagrationid political centre, was not a truly cohesive political actor in its own right and nor were its incentives necessarily (if at all) aligned to contest the objectives of its monarchs. Religion likely mattered to most 12th century Caucasians well beyond its social-political implications: but it did matter in political terms, partly because it was one of a number of assurances and promoters of legitimacy, partly because it could be a source of other forms of support such as chancery labour, and partly as a mechanism whereby communities were divided that needed accessing for political success.

GENDER

Studies of gender in the medieval Caucasus are limited, with occasional pieces that focus on specific figures but little wider discussion, especially in the English-language literature. Like in other parts of this chapter, this lack is too great to rectify in full here, but the question of how gender and power interacted is too important for our assessments here to pass over, and a prosopographical approach offers a great deal in moving the conversation away from one or

two exceptional high-profile individuals. In this endeavour, we will first consider masculinities and male identity, corresponding to the large majority of figures in the database presumed to hold it, and then consider women and feminine forms of identity and power. There are no clear-cut examples in the material consulted for this project of individuals who clearly show gender identities outside these two primary categories.

The Georgian chronicles, and other texts consulted for this prosopography, tend to be male-dominated texts. In this project's database, only around ten percent of the entries were for women. The major holders of official offices and other known elite figures in 12th century Georgia were mostly but not exclusively men, and this was equally true of its major neighbouring polities. Our initial viewpoint is therefore one of power being a largely male phenomenon, with women such as Tamar forming occasional exceptions. Nikolaishvili suggests that religious ideology was an important part of forming this general state of affairs.²⁵⁷

Male identity in medieval Georgia has been characterised as valorising masculine – and particularly militaristic – ideals.²⁵⁸ We do indeed very often see chronicled rulers and other elite figures lionised for military success: however, we should question if there were other routes and virtues that could also be seen as important among Georgian men in our period, and where we risk conflating royal presentation with masculine ideals more widely. The characters we have detailed representations of in our sources, to the extent that we can talk about their presentation to a significant degree, are mostly rulers, plus a few very senior nobles, usually holders of military posts such as that of amirsp'asalar. These figures are indeed lauded for military victories, but not exclusively so: Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli's wealth and general virtues are placed before his military accomplishments when the History and Eulogy of Monarchs reports his death.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 171; 192.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 172.

²⁵⁹ KT, 275; *ძგ* II, 109-110.

Turning to literary sources, we find other representations of male protagonists which deserve some consideration. One interesting feature to note is that the major texts of the period, whilst all of them do consider war as a core element, do not necessarily centre things that can be thought of as wars as their primary backdrop. The battle at the end of Rustaveli's *Knight In Panther Skin* is a single rescue mission with an explicitly small number of soldiers involved: there is a war in Tariel's retelling of his own past, but mainly the text focuses on a small number of individuals, and journeying and building social bonds with other characters are far more important and central activities than war. Even in *Amirandarejaniani*, a text that consists for the most part of a very large number of fight scenes with minimal insistence on anything so pace-slowng as characterisation or plot consistency, the focus is reliably on single combats rather than true warfare.²⁶⁰ This compares interestingly to a vignette in the chronicles where the loss of a battle commanded by Giorgi III is blamed by the chronicler on Vardan K'olonk'elisdze, the *eristavi* of Hereti, who due to envy of Giorgi "dared even to hold him back by the reins of his horse" – that is to say, it is the lack of his personal presence in combat that is the focus of the chronicler's text, rather than anything to do with his generalship.²⁶¹

It may seem to be a matter of splitting hairs to treat combat prowess and militaristic virtue as being separable, but they suggest different essential sets of societal values. In a militaristic or warfare-focused construction of masculinity, then war, raiding and territorial gains (or at least their accompanying aesthetics) are more necessary proofs of masculinity than in a prowess-driven model. Leadership and generalship would need to be primary elite virtues. In the latter, whilst war may still be something for which a warrior aristocrat needs to be prepared, contests might be much more individualistic. This has some significant impacts: contests in a prowess-driven masculinity may give far more allowance for allegiances and connections that cross barriers of place and polity, the necessary dividing lines of war. It also affects how interactions between men should be seen, as in a warfare situation, obedience to commanders is paramount

²⁶⁰ *Amiran-Darejaniani* trans. Stevenson, (Oxford, 1958).

²⁶¹ KT, 232; *ႱႱ* II, 12.

– so we should expect men to prefer that their status is as high above that of their subordinates as possible. In a prowess-driven model, by contrast, a leader might wish to surround himself with individuals who have the highest possible status and prowess, because their acknowledgement of his superiority in turn displays that his own is higher. This seems closer to the model we see preferred in Georgian literary and chronicle texts alike.

Religious ideology is, as aforementioned, another important consideration on the subject of gender roles. Given Nikolaishvili's aforementioned suggestion that Christianity was a key aspect of determining ideologies of gender, we might expect Christian influence to produce particularly male or masculine elite ideals. It is not clear that we see this in practice, however. The works we have that deal prominently with idealised male figures, such as the literary texts mentioned above, are Persianate in style with few explicitly Christian elements. Chronicle texts do note prayer in the context of favour in battle, and religious actions from rulers such as religious patronage – but it is harder to point to explicit connections between Christian religion and gender roles through our texts, in part because, especially in texts covering Tamar's reign, the set of men who were being praised for their virtues were far from all Christian. Virtues such as charity and generosity which intersected most with religious discussion in our texts were some of those least heavily associated with masculinity. We see the ease with which these virtues were attributed to Tamar, and indeed the extent to which Ibn al-Azraq praises the same features in Demet're: many of these virtue features were shared across cultures and faiths, and the fact that we do not generally see critiques of other cultures framed in terms of their masculinities may be because the warrior aristocrats of nearby Muslim polities valued many of the same things as the Georgians did in their leaders.²⁶²

Religion and gender also clearly intersected in the presentation and masculinities of religious figures: the church and monasteries as presented in our sources were an emphatically male-dominated space just as much as the battlefield was. Religious figures may have been praised

²⁶² Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn', 34; KT, 202-203; JG I, 368.

for different virtues to their secular counterparts – for example, the Nikolaoz Gulaberisdze is praised for modesty in the Life of Tamar, and he and Anton of Kutaisi are described with light-centred imagery as being like stars or the dawn.²⁶³ Senior secular figures like the Mkhargrdzelis were meanwhile more likely to be described with animal attributes, as lions or leopards, and praised for values such as loyalty or fearlessness.²⁶⁴ There are exceptions, however: in the History and Eulogy of Monarchs Anton Glonistavidze, the mts'igobartukhutsesi, is described as a knight and with the cross he carries as being a form of royal armour, while conversely the chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time praises Demet're's humility.²⁶⁵ We therefore perhaps see a different balance of description and virtue when it comes to religious masculinities, and the virtue of religious figures was not framed in terms of the same expectations of secular figures, but there were some significant overlaps.

These, here roughly sketched, ideas and ideals of masculinity likely had an impact on political affairs, especially when it came to political presentation but also in how male social bonds affected political life. Elements of warrior-masculinity probably provided certain shared understandings of conduct across boundaries of faith or ethnicity – indeed for men, those ideals may have been an important prerequisite for cooperating across such boundaries. Amir Miran, as a Muslim whose cause the Georgians supported, cannot be described with religious war imagery in our chronicle, but he is compared to a noted archer in a classical text.²⁶⁶ By doing this, the chronicler places Amir Miran instead in a shared heritage of warrior culture: Islam and classicising ideas of Persia are at times conflated in our texts, so it is particularly notable that it is a mythic figure from a clearly Mediterranean-world source who is used as his analogy (the 2013 translators of Kartlis Tskhovreba attribute the reference to Flavius Josephus, though I have not been able to ascertain where in the latter's corpus he appears). Ideals of warrior masculinity and generous rulership were cross-cultural and cross-faith values in the medieval

²⁶³ KT, 289; jg II, 118.

²⁶⁴ KT, 257; jg II, 70-71.

²⁶⁵ KT, 201; jg I, 365.

²⁶⁶ KT, 257; jg II, 69.

Caucasus, and could be recognised and respected across those boundaries. This in turn eased the creation of other – social and thus political – bonds that crossed those boundaries, and made it more possible to produce an elite culture and a polity that co-opted non-Georgians effectively.

Against this backdrop of warrior masculinities that dominated the social-political scene, Tamar has sometimes been exceptionalised, portrayed as a singular, unusual, female figure in a ruling position. Discussions of feminine power in medieval Georgia all too often begin and end with her reign, even in more recent revisions of the period: Nikolaishvili states that “Several influential women are known from the high medieval West and Byzantium, but only one woman stands out in Georgia”.²⁶⁷ Gender is, as noted by Eastmond in his study of the historiography around Tamar, sometimes sidelined in discussions of her reign: and where discussions of relationships between women and power do emerge, including Eastmond’s own, they tend to stress the extent to which Tamar was a breach in a traditionally masculine system. Eastmond suggests, indeed, that “There was clearly a perception of women and power common to all the societies of Anatolia and the Caucasus at this time that saw women rulers as an impediment”.²⁶⁸

This last point, however, is far from indisputable. In fact, a number of records occur throughout the chronicle material of women in important roles that wielded significant political influence, including aspects well beyond the heading of ‘wives and mothers’ that is the primary vector for feminine power outside rulership that Eastmond examines in his *Tamta’s World*.²⁶⁹ One of the first of these to consider is as heads of household and tutors, wielding huge influence over the world-views of members of the court and being able to build up significant inarticulate power as a result. Tamar’s second husband David, for example, had been brought up as her aunt Rusudan’s ward: Rusudan is explicitly mentioned as being an important figure in brokering Tamar’s first marriage, too. Meanwhile Giorgi III’s tutor was his aunt Tamar, who therefore had

²⁶⁷ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 171.

²⁶⁸ Eastmond, ‘Gender and Orientalism in Georgia’, 101-102.

²⁶⁹ Eastmond, *Tamta’s World*, 109-111.

the opportunity to present a formative influence on him.²⁷⁰ This capacity for women to be in such key teaching roles for male political leaders suggests a world in which women were assumed to be capable of shaping the social roles of men around them: whether or not women could directly participate in some of those worlds, this was not a society where politics and war were *conceptually* closed off from women, or having a woman tutor a prince expected to be involved in such matters could not have been possible. We should also, as Pogossian notes when discussing Khuashak and Tamta (Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's wife and daughter respectively), not underestimate the role of these elite women in educating one another and thereby transmitting and reshaping their collective roles alongside the societies around them.²⁷¹

The use of women in negotiation roles was also recorded on multiple occasions. For example, when facing down the attempted palace coup of Q'utlu-Arslan at the start of her reign, Tamar's negotiators were K'rava, described as 'mother of the Jaq'elis', and Khuashak Tsokali, the mother of Rat'i Surameli, Eristavi of Kartli. This incident is remarkable: it is unclear which side in the coup these women's families were on, but the fact that Tamar could use them as negotiators, and at the start of her reign when her right to rule was at its most threatened, can only suggest that it was already accepted practice to. This was no act of futile desperation either: Tamar's negotiations were successful and the coup threat defused. A further example is that a generation earlier, when Giorgi III was negotiating peace with the Eldiguzids, his sister Rusudan was a major broker of peace on the Georgian side.²⁷² She is later mentioned as being one of the brokers that western Georgian nobles appealed to at the end of Iuri's rebellion, suggesting that her brokerage potential was not confined to her particular experience of the Muslim world.²⁷³

Rusudan's case can lead us to look at the wider region and approaches to women and power: as the widow of a Sultan herself, she is shown in the chronicles to have been well versed in the cultural norms of Georgia's Muslim neighbours, and indeed that familiarity would likely have

²⁷⁰ KT, 231; ქს II, 10.

²⁷¹ Pogossian, 'Women, Identity and Power', 241-246.

²⁷² KT, 234; ქს II, 15.

²⁷³ KT, 250; ქს II, 54.

been fairly widespread given the traffic between courts.²⁷⁴ Rusudan's status and the strength of her personal ties likely also made her a good candidate as a diplomat – which in turn shows that her status was accepted and acknowledged by both the Eldiguzids and by Giorgi. We can therefore suggest that constructions of women and their potential exercise of power in the region crossed the major religious and cultural boundaries in the area. Indeed, the period of Tamar's reign also saw a number of other women in positions of great power across the wider region. This included the role of Inanj Khatun, wife of Muhammad Jahan Pahlavan, as a major political player in the Eldiguzids' internal conflicts involving her sons, the reign of Melisende of Jerusalem somewhat further afield, and finally the somewhat obscure leadership of Mama Hatun in Erzurum, an unusual case of a woman ruling one of the east Anatolian beyliks.²⁷⁵

A common thread in these interactions between women and power is that their power was frequently expressed via brokerage: the power that comes from being an effective connecting element in a social network, and thereby controlling the flow of information to influence decisions made.²⁷⁶ Phiphia and Tsimintia note the lack of evidence for gender segregation in their study of medieval Georgian feasting – a key location of connectivity – which may indicate a relatively open environment in which women were able to perform these connective social roles.²⁷⁷ We can see this idea of power reflected in our literary sources too. In the *Knight in Panther Skin*, the maidservant Asmat is a critical figure mainly because she is the go-between and broker, the sole person with the power to create the relationship between Avtandil and Tariel that drives the core of the narrative.²⁷⁸ Later in the text we can note that it is Phatman, not Avtandil, who is both able to arrange for the transport of messages to Nestan in captivity and who writes the letter itself.²⁷⁹ Aleksidze notes the importance of dialogues in Georgian literary texts, and the role of the rational figure as an important element in overcoming

²⁷⁴ KT, 248; jg II, 47.

²⁷⁵ El-Shorbagy, A., 'Women in Islamic architecture: towards acknowledging their role in the development of Islamic civilization', *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 7 (2020), 3.2.

²⁷⁶ Stovel, K. and Shaw, L, 'Brokerage', *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012), 140.

²⁷⁷ Phiphia, and Tsimintia, 'Commensality in the age of David Agmashenebeli and Queen Tamar', 360.

²⁷⁸ Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 75-78.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 279-281.

challenges and disputation or discussion as an alternative to combat.²⁸⁰ Critically, though, women like Vis, Tinatin, and Nestan could participate in the disputations of their respective texts even whilst being unable to take up arms. Disputation and rational arguments were a stage on which the idealised women of contemporary epic were shown standing – an ideal that we can, then, suggest was likely at least at times reflected among these poems’ audiences.

A final part of the wider milieu of constructing women’s power which would have been a common-knowledge element for Georgians at the time was the religious power that could be accorded to women. St. Nino was accepted by this time as the primary conversion saint in Georgia, and Eastmond notes that representations of her increase in Tamar’s reign, connected to Tamar herself.²⁸¹ Nino provided an antecedent for the principle that women could hold, if not most sorts of formal religious power, certainly a less articulated sense of religious inspiration, connection, or authority. This was in a sense the ultimate form of power as brokerage: women, as well as men, had the capacity to conduct miracles and form personal links between the human and the divine. It is through a link between women – Nino and Queen Nana – that ultimately Mepe Mirian becomes connected to Nino and converts.²⁸² Eastmond additionally notes the sense of the commandment given to Nino that reads “There is no male or female; for you are one in Jesus Christ” as a precursor idea for women being able to equally manage certain sorts of power – a religious parallel, perhaps, to Rustaveli’s ‘lion’s cubs are lions all’.²⁸³ Perhaps equal weight in our considerations here, though, should be given to two other commandments in the same set: one of Jesus commanding Mary Magdalene to ‘bring the news to my brothers and sisters’ and another that emphasises God’s love for Mary (likely also Magdalene)’s ‘true words’. Mary, and by extension Nino, are presented as having a divine mission that functions through dialogue and connectivity, and results in the exercise of power. Even in a well-known

²⁸⁰ Aleksidze, N., ‘Let Us Not Obstruct the Possible: Dialoguing in Medieval Georgia’ in Cameron, A., and Gaul, N. (eds.) *Dialogues and Debates from Late Antiquity to Byzantium* (Abingdon, 2017), 172.

²⁸¹ Eastmond, ‘Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar’, 292.

²⁸² KT, 56; jg I, 86.

²⁸³ KT, 50; jg I, 104-105.

miraculous work, the potential seeds for a theory of inarticulate, feminine power-as-brokerage were there.

These antecedents should not make us assume that Tamar taking royal authority as a woman was in any sense uncontested – far from it. We do not have formal succession rules surviving, and it is not clear that any existed, contra the statements of for example Tezelashvili that Tamar represented a breach in such rules.²⁸⁴ Nonetheless, clear challenges did exist in relation to her gender. The tone is perhaps best set in *The Knight in Panther Skin*, the most major work of literature surviving from her reign: it opens with the situation, familiar to Tamar's court, of an elderly king with only a woman as his heir preparing to begin her reign – and with this scenario comes some remarkably pointed commentary in favour of the fitness of women to rule.²⁸⁵ This gives us a strong suggestion that such a commentary was seen as needed in the contemporary (likely late 1180s or 1190s, certainly after Tamar's marriage to David) political environment. We should, however, be cautious about taking the approach of Eastmond wherein rhetoric defending Tamar's reign becomes 'endless apologies' that excuse Tamar's position, whereas rhetoric against women's power from other parts of the region is allowed to stand neutrally as 'the theory'.²⁸⁶ Both ideological positions were constructed and contingent, and the idea that the latter was an inherent baseline of reality among Tamar's wildly diverse subjects, most of whose voices do not survive, is an unevidenced one.

Eastmond argues that gender concerns can be seen at three distinct junctures in Tamar's reign: firstly, her early reign and the pressure on her to marry; second, the rebellion of Iuri, which he attributes in part to nobles wanting to see "traditional male-centred rule", and third, Rukn ad-Din's invasion that culminated in the battle of Basiani, which he suggests is solely justified by Tamar's femininity.²⁸⁷ The early reign and pressure on Tamar to marry is arguably the strongest case of the three, although there is little doubt that a male monarch would also have had

²⁸⁴ Tezelashvili, I., 'T'amar Bagrationi (1184–1210)', *MDPI Encyclopedia* 2 (2022), 1484.

²⁸⁵ Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 29.

²⁸⁶ Eastmond, *Tamta's World*, 113; 104

²⁸⁷ Eastmond, 'Gender and Orientalism in Georgia', 101-102.

significant social pressure to marry: the death of Demna had left the Bagrationid line thin on the ground, and the risk of instability from the lack of an heir was undoubtedly very great. Whilst in general the chronicles tend to present Tamar's resistance to marriage as virtuous, and we today may rightly feel revulsion at imagining the pressure on a woman to marry unwillingly, the threat of instability or war in the event of Tamar dying without an heir was very real. The court's position here, incidentally, is a point against the view sometimes expressed that the secular nobility were striving for maximised individual power and ideally secession.²⁸⁸ Pressing Tamar to marry very much meant pressing, conversely, for continuity and stability. It also meant potentially reducing Tamar to secondary status on the throne, but it is unlikely that this was the only factor involved.

Moving on a few years, there is not an especially strong base of evidence for Eastmond's thesis that Iuri's supporters were primarily in the business of nursing their wounded masculinities. No such idea is directly expressed in the Georgian chronicles' coverage of his rebellion, and if anything the feature that noticeably ties together the rebel movement is geography, rather than gender, with the west of the country largely declaring for Iuri and the east for Tamar. In the *Life of Tamar*, indeed, Iuri is almost seen as an accessory to a revolt largely framed in geographic-ethnic terms.²⁸⁹ Abulasan, the figure behind the marriage to Iuri, is not mentioned on either side in Iuri's revolt in any of the Georgian sources, so there is also little evidence of a consistent line or body of opinion running through from the initial pressure toward marriage for Tamar and the rebellion some years later.

As to Rukn ad-Din, the Georgian text of his apparent letter does disparage Tamar's femininity, but the key thrust both in the version in the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs* and the *Life of Tamar* actually focuses rather more upon Georgian attacks on Muslims and their religious differences.²⁹⁰ As noted above, the Saltukid beylik centred on Erzurum had until recently been

²⁸⁸ E.g. Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 122.

²⁸⁹ KT, 290; jĠ II, 122.

²⁹⁰ KT, 268; 297; jĠ II, 93; 133-134.

ruled by a woman, and this had not brought down attacks from the Seljuks of Rum: whilst Tamar's womanhood could be plausibly used as a dismissive comment by a Turkic war leader, in practice the Muslims of east Anatolia and the Caucasus were no strangers to feminine power. Indeed, when taken into account alongside the decidedly political career of Inanj Khatun in the 1180s, the extent to which ideas of feminine power existed across religious and cultural borders should not be underestimated. We therefore do have evidence that Tamar's combination of royal power and femininity was seen negatively by contemporaries inside and outside Georgia, but there are few events where it can be clearly treated as a sole or primary driver of actions against her. Rather, a warrior-masculine ideology likely affected the tenor and preconceptions of some of Tamar's opponents: whilst this is unprovable, one might reasonably hypothesise that it could have led to certain opponents underestimating Tamar's ability to form the centre of a war effort or succeed in military conflicts and therefore being more likely to undertake such efforts or doing so in a less prepared way.

We can see the result, in any case, of the antecedents to Tamar's power in the way that her specifically feminine power was constructed. Tamar's power as presented in *Kartlis Tskhovreba* covers a mixture of diplomatic and religious tones, and it has been suggested that it specifically draws on the image of St Nino as a precedent for feminine authority.²⁹¹ We see more discussion of Tamar's appointments to offices than we do for a monarch like David IV, hence the considerably better prosopographical records for her reign. This is in part just a matter of chance, in that we have two chronicles for Tamar and only one for David and there are always certain differences of style between writers. There may well be, however, another reason for this – the use of a wider cast of surrounding figures emphasises Tamar's ability as the leader of a court, and therefore her skill in connecting and appointing people to offices. This helps frame her in ways that line up with some of the expectations of feminine power already encountered, wherein she could be shown to direct, shape, and broker the power of those around her, making

²⁹¹ Honeycutt, L., 'Tamar of Georgia and the Language of Female Power', in Woodacre, E. (ed.), *A Companion to Global Queenship* (Amsterdam, 2018), 32-35.

their strength implicitly hers, with the emphasis of the power of her vassals as warriors being drawn together and collected under her rule.

Some rhetorical strategies evocative of how men are presented are used for Tamar, for example bringing powerful animal imagery in when one of Tamar's chroniclers notes that "we know a lion by its claws, and Tamar by her deeds", echoed by a comment on Tinatin, Rustaveli's stand-in character for Tamar, that "a lion's cubs are lions all".²⁹² Perhaps as interesting, though, is another connection between Tamar and the image of lions, when a chronicler discusses the lion cub she was given by Aghsartan of Shirvan, mentioned earlier.²⁹³ Whilst there is no reason to necessarily disbelieve that she was actually given a lion as a present, the framing, especially in light of other aspects of her presentation, stands out. Tamar as the rearer and tamer of a lion who was passive and docile towards her can be linked to her role vis-à-vis the generals and warrior nobility in her court – who, as noted in the discussion on masculinities above, are specifically related to the same animals in Georgian texts.²⁹⁴ Nikolaishvili notes another specific example of this rhetorical trope, in David Soslan's presentation in the panegyric poem *Abdulmesiani*.²⁹⁵

In a stroke of some genius, chroniclers even used the religious aspect of Tamar's power to cover for her lack of direct military campaigns. In multiple occasions in the texts where there are conflicts taking place, Tamar's actions during the conflict are given some detail, usually encompassing her going to a particular place for prayer, possibly with particular religious figures, and commending the troops to god.²⁹⁶ Tamar is therefore given a new positioning as the bringer of military victory through her role as intercessor with the divine. Sacral qualities attributed to her may have been more important in cementing Tamar's memory than her presentation in life – Eastmond in particular notes the importance of familial connections,

²⁹² KT, 291; ქს II, 123; Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 29.

²⁹³ KT, 254; ქს II, 61-62.

²⁹⁴ KT, 260; 203; ქს II, 77; ქს I, 369.

²⁹⁵ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 197.

²⁹⁶ KT, 292-93; 297-98; ქს II, 126; 134.

especially to her father, as being key in church art from her reign.²⁹⁷ Familial legitimacy was something that could be used without particular reference to gender, and as noted above Rustaveli's defence of women's power makes explicit use of this concept. Rhetorically giving women derivations of prestige from parentage, rather than marriage, strengthened their capacity for independence of action by avoiding defining their role in the immediate context of marital relations and expectations of childbirth. Whilst Tamar's own children and births are celebrated in the Georgian chronicles, her role as a mother is not heavily emphasised despite the potential strength of mother-child imagery in contexts of rulership and protection.

One further question is whether Tamar's presentation is in some way reduced in its femininity to help strengthen her image: Nikolaishvili suggests that while she is presented with some virtues otherwise associated with male rulers, 'the Georgian sources do not try to masculinize Tamar'.²⁹⁸ Tezelashvili has conversely suggested in his extremely valuable summary of surviving images of Tamar that her visual presentation in and of itself was masculinising, referring to her depictions as a 're-gendering'.²⁹⁹ Eastmond meanwhile suggests that she 'rose above her gender to become something more than a man or woman'.³⁰⁰ The argument for a re-gendering primarily relies on a reading of her adopting similar titulature and iconography to her male predecessors as being an explicitly male form of dress. Whether we should read the term *mepe* and see the royal regalia as inherently masculine is, however, unclear. The literary and chronicle evidence pushes hard not on the point of Tamar being unique among women, but on women's capability to rule more generally, as we mentioned above in Rustaveli's work and as Tezelashvili himself notes from the works of Nikolaoz Gulaberisdze.³⁰¹ He additionally notes that some iconographic distinctions were made, such as not depicting Tamar with a sword, suggesting that this was perhaps not an explicit attempt at presenting Tamar as a masculine

²⁹⁷ Eastmond, *Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar*, 289-290.

²⁹⁸ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 206.

²⁹⁹ Tezelashvili, I., 'T'amar Bagrationi (1184-1210)', 1484-5.

³⁰⁰ Eastmond, *Tamta's World*, 117

³⁰¹ Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 29; Tezelashvili, I., 'T'amar Bagrationi (1184-1210)', *MDPI Encyclopedia* 2 (2022), 1484.

figure.³⁰² We can therefore broadly suggest that if anything was being de-gendered in Tamar's reign, it was the terminology and iconography of rulership as opposed to trying to de-gender Tamar as an individual royal figure. We can perhaps even go further than Nikolaishvili's suggestion that Tamar was presented as a strong ruler 'despite her gender'.³⁰³ Her power, as best we can see from the available material, was understood clearly and indeed promoted as that of a woman.

As noted above, though, we should not begin and end this discussion with Tamar. Whilst her exercise of power did break ground, even had she not gained the throne we would still be able to meaningfully talk about significant exercises of power by women in the Caucasus in our period. Nor, looking a little way beyond the end of our period, was Tamar the end of this particular story, with her daughter ruling as Mepe Rusudan in the 1220s. Rusudan's reign is often portrayed as unsuccessful (the fate of many a Eurasian ruler during the period of peak Mongol expansionism). However, importantly she does show that Tamar's accession and titulature were not merely a singular historical incidence of a wholly exceptional awe-inspiring figure, but existed within a context where particular narratives and styles of women's power continued to exist after her death – so much so that a chronicler could give to Giorgi Lasha on his deathbed the statement that his nobles should crown his sister as their new mepe 'as it has been the custom of your ancestors'.³⁰⁴

In conclusion, elite women's potential roles as diplomats, as facilitators of cultural connection, and as people who could draw upon particular religious traditions were all well understood, and were understood to some degree across Caucasus cultures, in our period. Contra Eastmond, we should therefore perhaps not see Tamar's power as being essentially passive but rather see it as active and connective: her feminine role as a broker of power, information, and even prayer created a system in which she could, despite the limitations placed upon her, effectively wield

³⁰² Tezelashvili, I., 'T'amar Bagrationi (1184–1210)', 1491.

³⁰³ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 185.

³⁰⁴ KT, 322; jg II, 166-167.

the power structures of the Georgian court and emerge as not only the polity's uncontested ruler but one capable of backing further significant projection of power. For her and for other elite men and women in our period, the ability to broker relationships and information effectively could be as important a form of power as the authority to directly command manpower: unlike formal office and battlefield roles, brokerage and connection was an aspect of power very much accessible to elite women in this period. These roles can easily be missed in more traditionally statist readings, in which women's lack of formal office-holding means that their appearances are taken as side-notes on particular events rather than as part of cohesive discourses and forms of power.

Gender was an important part of how power was constructed, the relationships, and the information channels that dictated how it was used. These relationships, however, were more complex by far than a simple case of a male-dominated system geared for war which was occasionally broken through by singular and exceptional women. Prowess-driven ideals of masculinity could on the one hand drive warfare and raiding, but on the other also provide a potential basis for cultural ties that looked beyond the confines of a single polity or cultural group. This came to combine well over the course of the period with a view of women and power that not only accepted, but at times actively selected, women for roles that involved high levels of brokerage and connectivity. Women's power was less likely to be formal and articulate than that of their male counterparts, but at moments of crisis and negotiation they came to the forefront. When Tamar did take a clearly articulate position of power, she was able to draw on this background of legitimacy, as well as emphasising her parentage and utilising inarticulate sacral forms of power which Georgian society already accepted were available to women. In doing so, she was able to place herself in a position to direct and shape the roles of the men around her, providing a basis for her rule.

NETWORKS AND FACTIONALISM

We have now looked at a number of key societal vectors that may have shaped power and how it was exercised within the court. Two arguably missing elements, the importance of regional power centres and bases and the potential importance of wider regional connections, will be covered in more detail in the two following chapters.

One of our problems in this endeavour, and the reason that a social network analysis approach to factions in our period is difficult despite being highly desirable, is that factionalism in the Georgian court in our period is relatively poorly recorded, and primarily becomes apparent at breaking points – for example, rebellions – when previously loose connections get forced into a temporarily cohesive form. These events are however definitionally exceptional, and do not necessarily reflect the perhaps rather more fluid alliances and enmities that may have shaped court politics on a more regular basis. The act of drawing sharp lines at times of crisis should not cause us to presuppose that those same lines and alliances were in some sense “natural” or definitely long pre-dated their particular crisis.

Further problems emerge when we think about the overall networks available to us from the prosopographical data. These are primarily formed via event-based connections – if two people were in the same place at the same time, or we have a record of them making a specific contact with one another, they are thereby connected. There are some problems with analysing these connections – in particular that the literary nature of the chronicle means that they give no sense of actual frequency of connection, and that some connections are greatly prioritised over others. For example, all the members of the nobility at a battle are significantly more likely to be mentioned than everyone who was present when holding court, or everyone who accompanied the monarch on a particular mentioned hunt. The precedence of the monarch in the narrative also tends to mean that the network is highly centralised – we do not often find meaningful discussions of lateral links between courtiers excepting their participation in wider events or on occasion their familial connections.

Despite these difficulties, this is a useful area for us to consider. Whilst a comparative approach between episodes in the data will not be meaningful as a result of the rather different levels of detail in the portrayals, the factions within a specific case can reasonably be discussed – and, whilst these specific cases are likely to be exceptional, we can still discuss what they imply about the system when it was under great levels of socio-political strain. Not all of the points of system strain we have recorded were armed rebellions, though these tend to be the best recorded of the set: we can however also discuss the people around certain events such as marriage negotiations in this regard.

A first point of departure is to ask why such tensions, generally between factions of nobles and the monarch, arose. As noted earlier, typically the historiography suggests that they were systemic and inherent, resulting from a tendency on the part of the nobility to want to maximise their feudal rights and heredity of office at the expense of the monarch, whilst the monarchs in turn wanted to maximise their power and reduce or subordinate the nobility more effectively.³⁰⁵ This is often framed as the nobility attempting to increase their independence from the monarch, in a process of decentralisation of power.

What we see when we look at recorded points of tension, however, is that they tend to be heavily focused on royal power and succession. Both of Iuri's rebellions, the Orbeli rebellion, and all the recorded issues in Demet're's reign – that is, just about all the direct internal contests of power in our period – seem to have been specifically focused on who the monarch was, rather than openly about the balance of power between the monarch and their vassals. The tensions throughout Giorgi's reign seem to have focused in this area, with the Orbelis as protectors and guardians of Demna leading up to their rebellion in the 1170s. Whilst Georgian scholars have argued that the central motivator for the Orbelis was to make Demna only king in name and to rule the country themselves, this is not strongly supported by our source material: even the primary Georgian source, the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs*, introduces the rebellion by

³⁰⁵ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 126-7.

noting of *Demna*, not Ivane, that “the Devil entered his heart and soul”.³⁰⁶ Whilst we cannot rule out that Ivane Orbeli might have hoped for a puppet monarch, the monarchy not the power balance with other elites is the primary focal point in our sources. During the first half of Tamar’s reign contests tended to be about influence over (usually via marriage to) Tamar herself, especially in Iuri’s two rebellions.³⁰⁷ This is true even outside armed conflicts, as for example we see the high expenditures and significant numbers of suitors between Tamar’s two marriages.³⁰⁸ Whilst these tensions undoubtedly included the nobility, the nobility were weighing in on what was essentially a collective problem to which the polity as a whole could only have a single solution.

Views of these points of tension tend to focus on the danger or threat to the monarch, which was undoubtedly there – but this should be expected from the tendency in our chronicle materials toward painting the victorious monarch as the protagonist. If we shift our perspective, we can note that the threat to participants and opponents in a rebellion or point of political crisis was arguably at least as great as, if not greater than, the threat to the ruler (especially when one considers that such risings were rarely successful). There were enough such risings that participants undoubtedly knew the risks: it therefore does tell us a lot that who ruled was a matter of sufficient importance for elites to knowingly enter into such contests. This is one of the strongest points in favour of the idea that central power and the institutions around it were of very high importance in medieval Georgia, in that changing who was nominally in control of them was treated as worth that risk, and it is simultaneously one of the strongest points against the thesis that the elite and aristocratic families were consistently trying to pull away from the centre, in that the centre seems to have been exactly where their political ambitions were focused.

³⁰⁶ Met’reveli, *Golden Age*, 124; KT, 235; *ქს* II, 18.

³⁰⁷ KT, 248-251; 254; *ქს* II, 48-55; 61.

³⁰⁸ KT, 246-247; *ქს* II, 42-45.

The coup attempt by the mech'urch'letukhutsesi, Q'utlu-Arslan, at the start of Tamar's reign is an unusual case in that it does seem to have focused on the balance of power between the monarchy and the nobility, with an endeavour to shift towards a much more council-driven style of government that has been characterised as proto-parliamentarian in nature.³⁰⁹ The presence of senior women from aristocratic families as Tamar's negotiators with the coup plotters – not to mention the coup's obvious failure – do, however, suggest that the nobility were not united behind the view that royal power being subordinated to a noble council would be good for them.³¹⁰ Nor does our report of Q'utlu-Arslan's proposal make it sound much like an attempt to devolve powers out to individual noble families: government by council need not have meant in any sense decentralised government, and it is perhaps telling that having a council dictate the use of the monarch's power was the model Q'utlu-Arslan envisaged. The rebellion therefore suggests both the lack of a consistent body or movement amongst the noble families against royal power, and suggests that those who wanted to gain power in this period at the monarch's expense need not have envisioned this as a process of weakening central power or authority.

We have little knowledge of how factions formed because of our lack of information on lateral familial links and the day to day operation of the court. We can suggest that such links were probably strong and regular, with a prowess-oriented masculine culture tending to encourage shared pursuits such as hunting and with women marrying and moving between families and playing important connective and brokerage roles. Links outside Georgia were also potentially important, with connectivity to the Eldiguzids (for the Orbelis) or the Rus and Kipchaks (for Abulasan of Tbilisi) providing options for internal politics around which particular ideas or agendas could coalesce or be made possible. The geography of power at the heart of Georgian politics may have played a factor when it came to mobilising such coalitions in force: we have seen both that there was quite a centralised geography of power, but also that there was more

³⁰⁹ Samushia, J., 'At the Origins of Georgian Parliamentarianism (Qutlu-Arslan)', *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 10 (2016); Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 136-139.

³¹⁰ KT, 241; JG II, 32.

than just a single location to it, creating situations where the different locations and their respective functions or defensibility mattered greatly. The Orbeli rebellion reportedly aimed to capture Giorgi whilst he was under-defended at Saxate – he was able, however, to move to Tbilisi, where he was able to utilise Kipchak troops to secure his defence and wait until Ivane’s coalition fractured.³¹¹ Factions formed, and broke, around personal connections, not just for constructing the membership of a faction but for constructing its range of potential political action: that action, however, then needed to be successfully translated onto Georgia’s political geography and into material manpower. The limits of the social network as political power structure could be, at times, thereby revealed.

Whilst we have seen in the above sections how these factors may have affected other aspects of court politics, it is not the case that there were any obvious dividing lines based on class, ethnos, gender or faith that determined the make-up of rebellions and political factions. In the Orbeli rebellion we see many Armeno-Georgians on the Orbeli side, but this is probably primarily a result of family links. Indeed the Mkhargrdzelis, who seem to have had close links with the Orbelis, split off and joined Giorgi III in the 1170s rebellion.³¹² This may suggest that there was opportunity to be had precisely in not forming too close an alliance with those with whom one might be in competition precisely because of similarities of locality or ethnic identity: given that the Orbelis would undoubtedly lose their positions if they lost the war, and given the Mkhargrdzelis’ ability to offer the same connections into Armenia as the Orbelis did, switching sides gave Sargis Mkhargrdzeli the possibility of obtaining those roles. This is, indeed, what happened. Although for the most part families like the Dadianis and Orbelis were all aligned during their respective rebellions, we do occasionally see intra-familial splits: for example, Botso Jaq’eli and Ivane “Q’uarq’uare” Jaq’eli found themselves on different sides of Iuri’s rebellion.³¹³ We also hear of Ivane having become sp’asalar of Samtskhe, which may indicate

³¹¹ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 198-199.

³¹² KT, 235; յԹ II, 19.

³¹³ KT, 248; յԹ II, 49.

again that his stand against his family member successfully gained him Botso's previous titles.³¹⁴

In both these cases, the closeness in identity between the rebel and their replacement is unlikely to be an accident, and suggests the importance of providing connectivity and links outside the court into other key groups.

This short analysis of tension and factionalism suggests, first and foremost, a highly centralised political system – which does not necessarily mean an autocratic one or a 'strong state', but rather that elites saw the goings-on at court and decisions and connections made there as being at the core of their political interests. This contrasts with a model in which elites in general were engaged in a struggle for power with the centralising proto-state tendencies of the monarchy – rather, certain elites at certain points engaged in specific attempts to rearrange the workings and holders of a powerful central office. These occurred mostly in cases where a claimant could argue that they had stronger legitimating factors than an incumbent, so we cannot generally suggest that these were 'overmighty subjects' trying to install puppet rulers: they also mostly failed to attract and maintain wholehearted support, so we cannot suggest that they describe a general and ongoing anti-monarchy sentiment amongst elites.

Why elites took the immense risks of factional struggle is, then, the final interesting question, as is why other elites conversely took the risks of standing by monarchs in their times of relative weakness. We should, firstly, not exclude the importance of ideological positioning which very likely underpinned several of our rebellions. Whatever the Orbelis motives regarding personal power, it may also be true that they genuinely considered Demna, a man who had been brought up as a ward in their household, to be a claimant with stronger legitimacy and a greater likelihood of providing stable rulership. Q'utlu-Arslan may well have genuinely believed in the cause of conciliar government, and Vardan Dadiani might genuinely have thought that Iuri, a proven general, had a legitimate claim to rule via his marriage to Tamar. Different ideologies of legitimacy are difficult to prove from a source base that has so few sources detailing the

³¹⁴ KT, 295; *JO* II, 129. The exact relationship between Botso and Ivane is unfortunately unclear.

positions of losing sides in rebellions, but this does not mean they were unimportant. Stability was clearly a genuine desideratum for the Georgian elite, and probably a more important one than power maximisation most of the time, which may have contributed to legitimacy-driven tendencies in rebellions.

It also contributed to another major potential factor, essentially a 'rebel's dilemma' – being on the winning side of an internal conflict meant unusually large chances of gaining power and offices, so there was an incentive to be on the winning side and to ensure that was the opposite side to any obvious power competitors. Identity-driven power roles could create particular skews to this incentive, as with the Orbeli rebellion: Sargis Mkhargrdzeli clearly had more opportunity to replace the Orbelis as a major Georgio-Armenian power broker by aligning against them, which he did, whereas had they won that space would not have opened.

Finally, there is the possibility that central preferment was more important to elites than maximising local rights or theoretically maximising resource control: whilst rebel leaders do not seem to have fitted an 'overmighty subject' role for the most part, preferment to and relative power within offices meant competition for certain limited resources, and changing control of those resources may have been deemed valuable enough to be worth the – frequently immense – cost. These calculations, far more complex than a simple struggle for power, underpinned tensions in Georgia's warrior aristocracy throughout the twelfth century, and occasionally burst out in the form of visible factionalism with life and death consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

Given this chapter's discussions of power and identity and their interplay, we can come to some brief general conclusions – though much of the social system, as we have seen, relied on the specificities of connection and particular identities more than any generalised behaviour patterns. We can certainly start by rejecting the idea of a zero-sum power logic in Georgian elite politics, or a simplistic split on the dividing line of 'state power' as has sometimes been

hypothesised. Instead, we see a political system that was centralised, with preferment from and access to monarchs being a more usual point of contention than trying to reduce the centralisation of power. We also see other likely objectives as potentially important to monarchs and their high-ranking subjects alike. In particular, the perceived need for stability and the potential for gaining prestige and stronger relationship networks may have been prioritised over necessarily gaining nominal resource control directly.

Within this system, identity groups among Georgian elites conferred different mechanisms of using power and different forms in which that power could be accessed. The high diversity of figures in the upper echelons of the Bagrationid court, with Kipchaks and Armenians and Muslims and powerful women all rubbing shoulders with Georgian and Orthodox elites, reflects not a system in which royals were attempting to promote figures weakened by their being outside the dominant ethno-religious group, nor necessarily an embrace of diversity as any kind of inherent virtue. Instead, it was a recognition that effective use of power relied upon the acquiescence of, and therefore the monarch's connectivity to, their subjects and allies. How these connections beyond the court helped them draw upon resources and secure power will be covered more in the following chapters.

A system in which connectivity was an important element in its power structures better explains a range of the features of careers and individuals we see through the 12th century. Whilst the variable density of surviving records must have an effect on what we see in our sources, it is nonetheless perhaps no accident that we see relatively more discussion of ethnic diversity and women in powerful positions in the later part of the 12th century, which coincides with a period when Georgian horizons for action were relatively broad and as such connectivity and relationships beyond the immediate court milieu could be of comparatively greater importance. Connectivity may be equally important in explaining ethnic and religious preferment among elites, with Kipchak, Armenian, or Muslim elites sometimes offering higher

levels of connectivity beyond the immediate court infrastructure. Connection also could imply recognition, which provided increased security to elites.

These social-structural aspects of power, however, required that they were recognised and able to govern material elements of power beyond the immediate confines of Georgian elite life. A court-focused elite culture, with a central nexus of connections around the monarchy, could not exist in isolation. We must, therefore, next turn to examining how elites managed the connectivity between centre and locality in more detail, especially in the form of the ducal-level Georgian rulers who formed many of those connections – the *eristavis*.

7. REGIONAL POWER AND THE HIGH MEDIEVAL ERISTAVI

Having looked at the court, we can now turn outwards to look at how linkages and power were articulated across the Bagrationid political world more widely. The primary focus of our discussion here will be the *eristavis*. This category of upper nobility, who may be loosely thought of as regional dukes or governors, are a key and yet somewhat under-discussed feature of the twelfth century Georgian political landscape. To what extent they were local potentates or conversely central figures or appointees, and what their aims and objectives tended to be, are some of the questions that this chapter examines to see how they fitted into the socio-political structures of High Medieval Georgia.

One of the first questions we must ask about the *eristavis* is what contemporaries might have understood the word to mean and encompass. The word *eristavi* derives from *eri*, a people (*eris* in the genitive), and *tavi*, the head – hence, *eristavi*, the head of a people. It is notable in this regard that the medieval chronicles discuss the peoples of particular regions as much as their geographical area. This suggests that there was seen as being a degree of synchrony between people and place, such that it was logical for the governor of a geographically defined region to be classified as the head of its people.

From the medieval texts, *eristavi* does not seem to be a title used specifically and solely for posts of that name; it can be used more generally for non-Georgian leaders seen historically as being positioned similarly. In parts of the Georgian chronicles that deal with the pre-Islamic period, Persian leaders are reported to have left *eristavis* of their own to govern the Georgians, and in other places Armenian *eristavis* are mentioned, so we can broadly suggest that non-Georgian governors could be thought of or known by that title.³¹⁵ Most of the *eristavis* we find in the 12th century, however, are clearly in specific titled roles as the *eristavi* of a certain region.

³¹⁵ KT, 77; KT, 159; jᄁ I, 140; 307.

THE ERISTAVI IN THE SOURCES

The extant secondary material on *eristavis* is a little less developed than that for the central court, and as such it is worth returning to see how our source issues affect this discussion. Some of these problems will be familiar from the general discussions of source issues offered earlier, but it is important in particular to consider how they affect discussions of regional politics and policy.

There are one or two major challenges in how to look at the material we have on *eristavis*. Firstly, there is a simple lack of such material. Not all chronicles discuss *eristavis* in any level of detail, by any means. This is understandable – it is important to emphasise in general how few mentions there are of even elite Georgians in the majority of the chronicle sources. Many of the chronicles are not long documents and are highly focused on one or two monarchs as their central figures. Whilst by and large needing to report things in a way that would be believable to an audience with access to other sources (and in some cases memories) of the same events, chroniclers were for the most part considering the narrative of rulers and their polities rather than trying to capture the details of the structures of government effectively. Focusing on other nobility except where needed might also have risked displacing the monarch as the central figure of the story, which was clearly treated as a core part of the purpose of many of our chronicle materials.

A second challenge when considering the source material is how wide a scope of material to include when considering, for example, the roles and functions that *eristavis* could and did perform. A strong temptation is to fill gaps by chronologically extrapolating from, for example, the *eristavis* of the early eleventh century who have a reasonable amount of chronicle documentation, or those of the later medieval period likewise. This, however, would be to use material from fundamentally different political contexts to the one in which the *eristavis* of our period were operating. The absence of evidence of change is not, in itself, evidence for the absence of change. To consider a parallel, beyond the most basic level one would not

contemplate observations of the career of Charles James Fox in the 1780s in order to make pronouncements on the roles and functions of Francis Pym, his distant successor as British Foreign Secretary in the 1980s – similarly, observing *eristavis* in the year 1000 is an unreliable starting point for considering their role in 1200. Indeed, this comparison to modern political offices in one of the modern world's more stable states may give an overly rosy picture of how much one can extrapolate from one period to another, for the fundamental organs of the Georgian monarchs' infrastructure that lay above the *eristavis* in the hierarchy changed dramatically between different parts of the medieval period – the post-Mongol or pre-unification political landscapes involved considerably more fragile and preoccupied central rulers than the period we consider here. We should not entirely discount this area of evidence, but we should certainly handle it with extreme caution.

For the chronicles most pertinent to this chapter, that of David the Builder does not use the term *eristavi*, and only mentions one person who may plausibly have held the title, Beshken Jaq'eli.³¹⁶ David's chronicle is likewise scant in its mentions of court figures; compared to other medieval Georgian narratives it is exceptionally heavily focused on the deeds of its central figure, and the other characters that appear are with very few exceptions his adversaries. The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his Time mentions just one *eristavi* in its final section, but it is such a short document that this is unsurprising. The History and Eulogy of Monarchs and the Life of Tamar, by comparison, are far more fruitful as sources and account for the majority of our references, alongside one or two references in Armenian chronicles. This means that our chronicle source material on the twelfth century *eristavis* is very heavily skewed towards the later part of the century.

Non-chronicle sources for the *eristavis* are few in general and do not heavily feature in this chapter, but some do exist – in particular, Rat'i Surameli, the *eristavi* of Kartli under Tamar, is

³¹⁶ KT, 177; *ḡ* I, 334.

mentioned in at least one further surviving charter, as is his son.³¹⁷ Surameli is also the subject of what may be the only visual source from the period to directly show an *eristavi* – a full size wall painting in the central church at Vardzia.³¹⁸ There may well be more epigraphic evidence not consulted here – the relatively inaccessible, or difficult to transcribe and translate, nature of some of the charters and epigraphy mean they may be of necessity under-utilised in the following analysis.

Within the class of *eristavis*, it should finally be noted, some provinces and their leaders were mentioned far more than others. In the entire History and Eulogy of Monarchs, Odishi and Tskhumi are mentioned about once apiece, in the same list with the names of their respective *eristavis* (who likewise are not seen or heard from beyond this). For Hereti, meanwhile, we can with some confidence trace a chain of four rulers across Giorgi III and Tamar's reigns, and three for Kartli likewise. The following should therefore be seen with the appreciation that general conclusions are likely to be skewed towards the experience of provinces accorded greater importance in the chronicles.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

To the extent that the *eristavis* as governors could be considered to constitute a *system* of governance, a helpful starting question is what this system covered, and to what extent it was coterminous with the polity of Georgia. We have few pieces of evidence that give us a wide overview, but the History and Eulogy of Monarchs gives a useful list of *eristavis* at the start of Tamar's reign – Svaneti, Rach'a-Tak'veri, Tskhumi, Kartli, and Odishi are listed west of the Likhi ridge, and Kartli (again), K'akheti and Hereti to its east, plus Samtskhe in the south.³¹⁹ These regions cover most of what forms the modern state of Georgia, most of the kartvelophone

³¹⁷ Enekidze, Silogava, Shoshashvili (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები IX-XII სს*, 107-108.

³¹⁸ Gaprindashvili, G., *Ancient Monuments of Georgia: Vardzia*, 20-21.

³¹⁹ KT, 242; ქს II, 33-34.

regions in the area, and most of the Bagrationids' territory – but most, rather than all, in any of these cases.

To turn to the south-west first, if we assume that the “Kartli” named to the east of the ridge roughly covered Imereti, then the list in the History and Eulogy would suggest that for example T’ao did not have an *eristavi*, despite the fact that it seems to have been under Georgian control at this time – it is mentioned shortly after this passage in relation to a Georgian noble, Guzan Abulasanisdze, who set out from there to fight Turks in Shavsheti and K’larjeti. Guzan is described, however, as *p’at’roni* “პატრონი” – approximately lord, or master, rather than *eristavi*.³²⁰ We do have earlier and later records of *eristavis* in some of these areas, for example in Shavsheti in the earlier eleventh century where the *eristavi* reportedly defected to the Byzantines.³²¹

We can consider a few basic hypotheses for why these regions fail to appear in the list. The first is that it is an omission, either as a result of the chronicler’s access to documentation or perhaps because southern *eristavis* were too preoccupied or remote to be able to attend court. Beyond that, there are a number of reasons why they might not have had *eristavis*: they may not have been under Georgian control enough to have had any Georgian governance at all; the *eristavis* may not have been seen as a suitable system for dealing with these regions; or there may have been factors pushing Georgian monarchs not to extend the *eristavi* system any more than it needed to be. The possibility of omission seems unlikely, in that a number of south-western Georgian nobles are mentioned in our sources without use of the title. Those same mentions mean we can probably largely discount the idea that the Bagrationids’ hold on those regions was especially weak. The likelihood, then, is that the Bagrationids were content to leave these regions without official holders of this title.

³²⁰ Q’aukhchishvili, S (ed.), ‘ისტორიისა და აზმისა’ Part 3, 49. Accessed via via Gippert, J., Chitunashvili, D. (eds.), <https://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etca/cauc/mgeo/kcx2/kcx2.htm>, May 16 2022.

³²¹ KT, 219; ქს I, 385-386.

Bakhtadze has argued that in fact these south-western regions did have *eristavis*.³²² This, however, is largely based upon the idea that they had *eristavis* at earlier or later points, and then consequently extrapolating that known senior figures in those regions must have been the *eristavis* in the twelfth century. He lists Zakaria Asp'aanisdze of Panaskert, for example, as *Eristavi* of T'ao, but he is not mentioned as such in the chronicle material despite appearing at multiple points in the chronicles.³²³ His thesis does not explain why the *eristaviates* fail to appear or be mentioned as such, and conversely fluctuating control in the south-west may explain why some titles fell into disuse in the later eleventh century. The fact that a title existed at multiple points does not necessarily mean that it was continuously in use.

As well as the issue in the south-west there is no mention of an *eristavi* in Lori, one of Georgia's southeastern regions at this time, or any of the regions south of there in Armenia, a number of which moved in and out of Georgian control during the period under discussion. Lori, the name of both a particular fortress and its surrounding region in the Armeno-Georgian marches, is a particularly interesting case as it was under relatively direct and secure Georgian rule, and indeed was disposed of by Georgian rulers as such on a number of occasions (to the point where it seems to have been less heritable than other regions: for example, upon the death of Gamrek'eli it passed to his successor in office, who was not a family member). It largely seems to have remained in the hands of the current *amirsp'asalar*, at least after the 1170s when the Orbeli family lost it in their abortive rebellion.

How much these matters of precise role definition matter – that is, whether having a titled *eristavi* or not made a significant difference to the administration of a given area – is a worthwhile question, but not one on which we can say much given the lack of detail on administration of other areas. A brief discussion of *demesne*, church, and city land follows later in this chapter, and the sections on Armenia and Shirvan in the next chapter discuss how those

³²² Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 70.

³²³ Bakhtadze, M., *ერისთავობის ინსტიტუტი საქართველოში*, (Tbilisi, 2003), 180-182; KT, 251; 295; ქც II, 55; 130.

areas might have interacted with the Bagrationid centre. The breadth of functions of the *eristavi* were clearly also fulfilled by people in offices in those areas, though the precise rights and responsibilities may have had differences that we cannot discern in the sources. What we can say is that we do not have any significant evidence for the systematic expansion of the *eristaviate* system in the later twelfth century, despite significant land acquisition on the part of the Bagrationid policy: Armenia, in particular, saw a two-tier model where governors seem to have reported to the *Mkhargrdzelis* as much as to the Bagrationids. This regional variation, in turn, should factor into how we see relations between the centre and the provinces: this was not a polity where the political projects being undertaken were heavily reliant upon incorporating and regularising systems of government into a politically monocultural model.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

To understand the function of an *eristavi* locally, we have two major approaches available. The ideal approach, to take a full overview from a source of what the formal duties and functions of this office were, is far from simple. This is both because no such source is extant and because it is unlikely that any set of formal rules was laid out – and if it was, we should not assume it would have been adhered to. As covered earlier, descriptions of an *eristavi*'s functions from other periods of Georgian history may exist but cannot necessarily be extrapolated over hundreds of years. This approach can become deeply embedded, as in Surguladze et al.'s discussion of the *eristavi*'s functions which sees numerous elements unmentioned in the high medieval sources, such as the balance of justice powers between the *eristavi* and the crown, as nonetheless sufficiently obvious that they do not require referencing.³²⁴ Additionally, the nominal official functions of the *eristavi* are often foregrounded in this approach, with priority being given to attempting to ascertain the formal structure of the office. For example Bakhtadze's monograph focuses for its later period on questions such as the relationship

³²⁴ Surguladze et al., ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში, 71.

between the *eristavi* and other titles such as the *eristavt-eristavi* or the *monapire*, generally taken in a very *longue duree* sense: he explicitly argues that the institution remained almost unchanged through the centuries.³²⁵ This chapter takes a different approach, to avoid these assumptions of lack of record indicating lack of change: our alternative best way to understand the *eristavis* may be to focus on their recorded actions and interactions, and formulate a descriptive theory of their functions as fulfilled rather than a prescriptive theory that attempts to describe what an abstract *eristavi* “ought” to do or have done.

The actual governance conducted by *eristavis* is, frustratingly, one of the areas about which we can say the least, despite quite possibly being the most important regular aspect of their role. The two obvious functions that they may have had in their respective provinces are those relating to taxation and those relating to matters of justice. Surguladze states that *eristaviates* held static power centres from which they exercised a range of fiscal, military, and administrative duties, including executing justice with the exception of certain particularly severe crimes which were tried in royal courts.³²⁶ We do not have records of *eristaviates* functioning according to these principles in the major available sources from this period: the reading that they did is entirely plausible, but it relies most probably on extrapolation from other historical periods. We know at least that there was some regular taxation levied by the Georgian state in this period in general, such that David IV was able to give particular reductions in taxes to the Muslims of Tbilisi.³²⁷ We have less idea, however, on how taxation levied by *eristavis* was related to royal taxation, and whether taxes in general were assessed in a localised and specific, or more generic and centralised, way. Regarding justice, Giorgi III’s fame for his brutal approach to thievery suggests that there was a strong royal element in the system rather

³²⁵ Bakhtadze, M., *ერისთავობის ინსტიტუტი საქართველოში*, 15.

³²⁶ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 71.

³²⁷ Met’reveli, *The Golden Age*, 96.

than it being entirely left to the *eristavi*s, but how such policies were implemented is something on which our sources are largely silent.³²⁸

One area to consider on which we can say rather more is the *eristavi* as courtier, which Surguladze notes as an important development in this period – perhaps in tension with her statement that the *eristavis'* power centres were statically based on their residences.³²⁹ Whilst these posts were related to particular locations or provinces, most of our mentions of *eristavis*, especially collectively, involve them having been at court. The relative ease with which the chronicle suggests that *eristavis* gather at for example Tamar's religious council is extremely interesting.³³⁰ The implication is that it is normal for at least a reasonable number of the *eristavis* (and there are not many in total) to be personally present at court, corollary to which it was therefore normal for a reasonable number to not actually be in the region for which they were *eristavi*. This impacts how we should see their interaction with the provinces: the *eristavi* being a courtier strengthens the extent to which *eristavis* could contact one another, the crown, and other institutions of government and diplomacy, but conversely weakens the extent to which we should expect the *eristavi* to have fine-tuned direct control of their own provinces.

This possible model of a courtier-*eristavi*, moving between regional estates and the semi-mobile court, suggests a few other possibilities of interest. First is that access to the centre of power was important for achieving the *eristavis'* goals: that their ability to influence the monarch was highly important to them compared to spending time in their regions. This may mean that their local relationships (largely with a region's *aznauris* and perhaps also its monastic power centres) were less important, or that those regional relationships relied upon the *eristavi's* effectiveness in brokering between a local constituency and the court. The *aznauris* of a particular region may well have needed the *eristavi* as a broker of relationships between

³²⁸ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 77.

³²⁹ Surgulade et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 70.

³³⁰ KT, 289; ქც II, 119.

themselves and central authorities, making the courtier aspect of the *eristavi*'s role more important.

Eristavis clearly also had some interactions with the church. So far as we know, church roles did not double up with those of the *eristavis*, unlike some of the vizier (*ukhutsesi*) roles in the Georgian monarchs' administration. From the career of Rat'i Surameli, *eristavi* of Kartli under Tamar, we do however know that *eristavis* could be *patrons* of churches. He was for example, as aforementioned, the patron of the church at the cave-monastery of Vardzia, which contains a large surviving painting of him along with those of Tamar and Giorgi III.³³¹ As for monarchs, religious patronage was doubtless in many cases sincerely given, but church art did also double up as public legitimisation via church and family. We can note that previously the *eristaviate* of Kartli had been with the Orbeli family, so Surameli's holding of it in Tamar's reign implied a change of family and thus, perhaps, a particular need to try and consolidate people's associations between him and his office.

The military role of *eristavis* is another major area to consider here. The Georgians had a specific term for a general – *sp'asalar* – and the *eristavis* and military commanders are on at least one occasion listed as separate categories, indicating a degree of separation of role and function.³³² We also know that someone could be explicitly appointed as *both* an *eristavi* and *sp'asalar*, as Botso Jaq'eli was in Samstkhe at the start of Tamar's reign – this implies that the functions were considered separately.³³³ This in turn would seem to initially suggest a non-military, or at least not a direct commanding, function for the role of the *eristavi*, which could be combined in certain circumstances with the role of a *sp'asalar*.

This is not the only possible hypothesis: it may alternatively be the case that the appointment as *sp'asalar* was more a matter of location – an additional title for nobles near what was perceived to be the border – or that the role as *sp'asalar* meant the attribution of some troops and funding

³³¹ Gaprindashvili, *Ancient Monuments of Georgia: Vardzia*, 20-21.

³³² KT, 289. ქს II, 119.

³³³ KT, 242; ქს II, 34.

from royal coffers whereas an *eristavi* would otherwise have had what troops they could raise from their nominally assigned regions. Surguladze et al suggest that the *sp'asalar* formed a connecting link between the *eristavi*, responsible for mobilisation of levy troops, and the *amirsp'asalar* as commander-in-chief, with the *eristavis* losing some of their military independence under David the Builder due to a strengthening of central power.³³⁴ This is plausible reading, but we lack a detailed description of the structures and there are some suggestions in the sources that things may not always have worked this way in practice.

The idea that *eristavis* were able to raise their own levies is undoubtedly correct. In Iuri's first rebellion Tamar reportedly asked her loyalist *eristavis* to raise the *sp'asalars* and *didebulis* from their respective regions.³³⁵ This suggests, *contra* to Surguladze, that the *eristavi* was more likely to have been the connecting link between more *sp'asalars* at a more local level and the *amirsp'asalar* at the centre, rather than vice versa. This would also tend to suggest a higher likelihood of *eristavis* having command roles, if they were effectively above the *sp'asalars* in their region and responsible for calling them into service rather than the military structure having any useful separation.

The military functions of the *eristavi* are therefore not entirely clear, but it seems likely that the *eristavis* did have some military command capacity when it came to their own troops, and nowhere do we see an *eristavi* transferring troops to, or being placed subordinate to, a *sp'asalar* in a military situation. Indeed we see leaders below the level of *eristavi* in explicit command roles, such as in Iuri's second rebellion where a local east Georgian noble called Saghir Makhatelisdze was able to scratch together a local force along with his family and defeat Iuri's forces.³³⁶

³³⁴ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 71.

³³⁵ KT, 249; ქც II, 50.

³³⁶ KT, 254; ქც II, 61.

One thing that should be stressed, given this range of functions, is that contra to the work of some scholars such as Chikobava on earlier centuries, the evidence does not suggest provincial administration in twelfth Georgia being governed by anything particularly recognisable as a system of feudal bonds or vassalage.³³⁷ The *eristavis* may have been responsible for mustering troops by calling on other local nobles, but there is no suggestion in the Georgian chronicles that these nobles owed any direct *personal* submission to them by dint of living and holding land in the area a particular *eristavi* governed. Whilst the Georgian aristocracy were a mounted, militarised class and presumably counted military service among their expectations, we do not see anything akin to the ‘feudal revolution’ that has been posited for the early millennium in western Europe, in which very local lords were able to usurp rights over areas like justice and gain power by virtue of their access to fortifications and local military strength.³³⁸ Indeed in contrast, chronicles that discuss justice in Georgia stress the efficacy – at times brutal – of royal justice.³³⁹ The functions of the *eristavi* should not, therefore, be thought of as existing within a system akin to western feudal bonds.

A final note on roles among the *eristavis* is a subdivision of the titulature, there was the separate title of *eristavt-eristavi*, or *eristavi of eristavis*; this is only mentioned in the context of being attached to the *eristavi* of Kartli, Rat’i Surameli, in the twelfth century.³⁴⁰ The title had long been used by this time, and it is used in chronicles that discuss the tenth century as the title of the rulers of T’ao prior to Georgian unification under Giorgi I.³⁴¹ No holders of the title are mentioned in chronicle sources for the earlier part of the twelfth century, until Rat’i Surameli’s holding of the title.

³³⁷ Chikobava, A., ‘The Issue of Vassalage in the High Feudal Epoch of Georgia’, *Proceedings of the Ivane Javakhishvili State University Institute for Georgian History* 7 (2013).

³³⁸ Wickham, ‘The “Feudal Revolution” and the Origins of Italian City Communes’, 32-33.

³³⁹ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 77; KT, 203; ქც I, 369.

³⁴⁰ KT, 241; ქც II, 32.

³⁴¹ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 60.

Whilst Bakhtadze places the question of the *eristavt-eristavi*'s role first among his list of key topics to discuss about the high medieval *eristavi*, for our period it is not clear that it merits such a key role in our considerations.³⁴² In the twelfth century use of the title, it did not obviously imply any particular sovereignty, nor so far as we can tell did it come with any other titles: what if any additional privileges or duties it conferred is unfortunately unclear. Surguladze suggests that there may have been a privilege of rank but no actual subordination, and that an *eristavt-eristavi* may just have been a title granted or even an epithet less strictly used for one who governed regions especially significant in scale or strategic importance.³⁴³

SUCCESSION

Having looked at what *eristavis* did, we can turn to how people entered their ranks. A key thesis in kartvelological historiography on the subject of *eristaviates* is the thesis that over time they became progressively more hereditary.³⁴⁴ Whilst this study does not extend beyond the disruption to the political system that came in the 1220s, we can usefully present a more detailed data point as to the state of the system through the twelfth and into the turn of the thirteenth century.

Succession to the position of *eristavi* was often but certainly not exclusively hereditary in this period. For most *eristaviates* we cannot string together consecutive holders to be sure of the succession, though the presence of the same families ruling the same regions in later Georgian history might lead us to assume heredity as a norm. The aforementioned list of *eristavis* at the start of Tamar's reign includes comments upon two of them – Botso Jaq'eli, who is explicitly said to have been *appointed* as *eristavi* of Samtskhe, and Asat Grigolisdze, who took his post by force from a certain Saghir K'olonk'elisdze.³⁴⁵ This latter was a part of the Orbelis' rebellion in Giorgi

³⁴² Bakhtadze, M., *ერისთავობის ინსტიტუტი საქართველოში*, 184-185.

³⁴³ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 60.

³⁴⁴ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 18-20.

³⁴⁵ KT, 242; ქც II, 34.

III's reign, in which the Eristavi of Hereti is mentioned as having opposed Giorgi.³⁴⁶ We also see appointments at other times when eristavial families were removed or deposed, such as after the Orbeli rebellion when the Surameli family must have taken over the rule of Kartli – Rat'i Surameli being mentioned in the post at the start of Tamar's reign.³⁴⁷ We do additionally see one example where an eristaviate probably did not go to the head of a house: Liparit', not Ivane, was the last Orbeli eristavi of Kartli, and given Ivane is treated by all accounts as the more central character in the rebellion, he was probably the elder.³⁴⁸

Asat Grigolisdze, however, did later pass his post onto his son Grigol, and Saghir was probably the son (and almost certainly a close relative) of Vardan K'olonk'elisdze, a predecessor in the role.³⁴⁹ For Hereti, then, we have at least two hereditary transferrals and one by force. In Kartli, the situation is similar. Rat'i Surameli appears to have gained his post after the Orbelis' rebellion, but then successfully passed his position onto his son Bega.³⁵⁰ This, combined with a wider long-term lack of change in which families held these posts, suggests that heredity was normalised. The picture is complicated a little when we consider the utility of the eristavis' role, however. Giving an eristaviate to a less senior member of a noble family or to a local noble who was not a member of one of the region's most senior families might well have risked instability both in producing local power struggles and through interconnections that likely existed between senior families. Giving one to a member of a family not local to a region would have meant an eristavi who lacked personal connections with other local leaders: given that the monarch needed the eristavi to be able to personally call upon those leaders to raise troops (and likely to ensure other functions such as taxation were carried out well), a strong personal network in a region was probably very important. Therefore, whilst we can say there was a strong tendency towards heredity and almost certainly a normal expectation of it barring outside circumstances, there may have been few cases where it would have made sense for a

³⁴⁶ KT, 236; յԸ II, 19.

³⁴⁷ KT, 236; 242; յԸ II, 19; 34.

³⁴⁸ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 198-199.

³⁴⁹ KT, 232; յԸ II, 12.

³⁵⁰ KT, 338; յԸ II, 206.

monarch to appoint anyone other than the senior representative of the most important local family to the position.

We do not have any examples from this period of a family being unable to hand on an *eristavi*ate to the next generation where there were no extenuating circumstances that allowed a monarch to intervene in the line of succession. The case of an *eristavi* dying and the monarch then simply deciding that their heirs would not succeed, in order that they could place a preferred candidate in the role, is unknown. This did happen in the case of another role, however, that of the *amirsp'asalar Gamrek'eli* – a title that also came with some responsibility for land, given that his heirs explicitly did not retain *Tmogvi* on his death.³⁵¹ This suggests that it may not have been impossible in theory for an *eristavi*ate to be removed from a family on the pure will of the monarch. Replacing a court-centred role, however, did not require a new incumbent to have the ability to operate in any given locality – an ability that may have relied, as discussed, in part on their ability to broker connections with the centre. Adding to this, we do not at any point see a family moving between *eristavi*ates in our period. The notes to the 2013 translation of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* suggest that a *Beshken Jaq'eli* mentioned late in David's reign was, on the basis of *Matiane Kartlisa*, *eristavi* of *Kartli*.³⁵² This would be an example of a family moving (from *Kartli* to *Samtskhe*) but is in error: the *Beshken* mentioned in *Matiane Kartlisa* was in the reign of *Bagrat III*, over a century before the mention in the chronicle of *David the Builder*, and was in any case *eristavi* then in *Tukharisi* not *Kartli*.³⁵³ Some families did thus clearly shift in their centres of operation in the very long term, but we see no evidence of this happening in the twelfth century, indicating the importance of some mix of heredity and localised power in the *eristavis'* positions.

We thus have a general backdrop of the importance of localised power that the monarch needed to draw upon via a norm of heredity, with occasional breaches resulting from political crisis. A

³⁵¹ KT, 251; *ḡ* II, 55.

³⁵² KT, 196.

³⁵³ KT, 156; *ḡ* I, 298.

curious proposition then emerges regarding succession and power over appointments: one in which rebellions more usually *cemented* royal power than overthrew it, by giving a monarch a unique and rare chance to parcel out some of the most coveted titles and positions in the Bagrationid political world. This is not to say that such a burst of power was at all worth the preceding cost and risk: the chronicles make it clear for example that Giorgi being overthrown by Demna was a very real possibility in the 1170s. Despite being something to be avoided, however, rebellion raised the possibility for opportunistic intervention in the system and replacing established families with new ones who had stronger connections to a given monarch. We can now consider those events and what they tell us about the *eristavi*ates.

POWER AND REBELLION

Erstavis are often, though not consistently, mentioned with regard to central power politics and especially rebellions. As leaders with major regional power-bases and likely with responsibility for levying military forces as noted above, their support was crucial for any would-be rebel in order to actually obtain the fighting forces needed to succeed. Such discussions of rebellions are important for considering *erstavis* and their power, in that they expose the internal politics in a way that is well covered by chronicles: we do not get similarly detailed discussion of opinion groupings on other more day-to-day political matters. However, as noted in the previous chapter's discussion of factions and factionalism, rebellions are also by definition irregular, forcing once-fluid social structures into sharp division in a way that may obfuscate connections broken and overstate connections forced by circumstance. As noted earlier in this chapter, *erstavis* clearly had some access to local levies, and had roles as courtiers that may have been important to their core functions. *Erstavis* thus possessed two important features for a rebellion: the material capacity to usefully support one side or another, and a high investment in the polity's central politics, making them far more likely to have an interest and connections within particular factions.

Rebellions tended to be central in nature, with alternative claimants to the throne being a core element of them. Conditions were poor in the 12th century for regional uprisings. As noted above, a rebellious *eristavi* took the risk not just of themselves but of their family losing the title altogether, and a region that did successfully gain autonomy had little in the way of regional allies to call upon: the various Muslim powers had their centres far away and would have little interest in supporting a Christian separatist region in Georgia, and Byzantium was even further out of reach. Regions that had recently had some autonomy, Kakheti and Hereti in particular, might have had some sentiment against Bagrationid rule in theory, but we do not see such sentiments reflected anywhere in our source material in practice. The closest thing to a regional rebellion was that of Guzan T'aosk'areli, who as discussed above may or may not have been an *eristavi*: and it is an exception that to some extent proves the rule, for his revolt (which came after his participation in Iuri's failed rebellion) was explicitly an attempt to pull his lands into the orbit of the Muslim rulers of Khlat, an option that was open to him solely because of his position deep in the south-west of the Bagrationid regions and closer to the power centres of the Bagrationids' rivals.³⁵⁴

Our sample size for rebellions essentially comprises the mountain rebellion late in Tamar's reign, Iuri's two rebellions, Guzan T'aosk'areli's revolt, Q'utlu-Arslan's attempted coup, the Orbeli rebellion, and the various plots and possible rebellions against Demet're and David V's reign. The period of Demet're's reign is poorly recorded and therefore harder to discuss in terms of the *eristavis*, Iuri's second rebellion was small enough to be defeated by a scratched-together local force, and the mountain rebellion was seemingly localised and outside the *eristaviates* – it is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Guzan's rebellion gives us little more than has been discussed above, especially as the status of the *eristaviates* (or lack thereof) in the southwest remains unclear.

³⁵⁴ KT, 251; *ძგ* II, 55.

Iuri's first rebellion is therefore one of our best recorded for discussing *eristavis*, for we have some significant indicators as to its geographical scope. The *Life of Tamar* says that it was organised by the Imeretians and Svans, who failed to gain help from the Meskhis.³⁵⁵ We get far more detail in the *History and Eulogy of monarchs*, which details as the primary rebels Guzan, the ruler and possibly *eristavi* of T'ao, Botso Jaq'eli, sp'asalar of Samtskhe and the primary Meskhian rebel, and the *msakhurtukhutsesi*, Vardan Dadiani, who possessed a number of fortresses across Georgia but seems to have been a courtier and soldier with more of a career in central politics, having previously been *chukhcharkh*.³⁵⁶ We get a list of the *eristavis* early in Tamar's reign: those named as having been in western Georgia, the area that Vardan reportedly raised in rebellion, were Baram Vardanisdze, K'akhaber, Otagho Sharvashidze, Amanuelisdze and 'Bediani' (the latter a title or epithet rather than a name, held by the Dadiani family, so this was either Vardan himself or a relative).³⁵⁷

The heavy implication of the text of the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs* is that the *eristavis* of the region did join the rebellion – the chronicler comments that Vardan got the *didebulis* of those regions to swear allegiance to Iuri's cause, and even more tellingly Tamar's response was to order 'all the *eristavis* that were faithful to her' to gather their regions for the civil war, with the chronicle listing Hereti, Kartli, Kakheti, Somkhiti and Samtskhe as the areas involved.³⁵⁸ This in turn probably implies that the remaining *eristavis* were supporting the rebellion, or at least were in no position to provide support to Tamar. It is notable, despite the clear geographic split and Dadiani's roots in the west of Georgia, that Vardan as a core leader of the rebellion was mainly known for holding a central, not a local, office. Whilst we might therefore suggest that geography could contribute to social connections, and undoubtedly asserted itself as a factor when it came to the military campaign, we can equally suggest that these *eristavis* saw themselves as seeking power via a centralised, court-driven social system.

³⁵⁵ KT, 290; *ქს* II, 122.

³⁵⁶ KT, 238; 248-249; *ქს* II, 25; 49.

³⁵⁷ KT, 242; *ქს* II, 33-34.

³⁵⁸ KT, 248-249; *ქს* II, 50.

Q'utlu-Arslan's coup does not feature many named individuals, but Tamar's two named negotiators, K'rava 'mother of the Jaq'elis' and Khuashak Tsokali, were from *eristavial* families – the Jaq'elis in Samtskhe and the Suramelis, who Khuashak had married into, in Kartli.³⁵⁹ This is a very strong piece of evidence for the idea of *eristavis* as courtiers, if wider members of their families such as senior women were stationed at court such that they could be called upon in this situation rather than the wider family being primarily based in their regional seats of power. Having women from two families acting in concert in this role further suggests that there were probably far stronger lateral links between the *eristavial* families than our surviving source material provides evidence for: family linkages and shared actions were not necessarily just the preserve of senior male heads of houses.

Accounts of the Orbeli rebellion touch on *eristavis* primarily in that they provide evidence for the aforementioned transfer of power in Hereti to the Grigolisdzes from Saghir K'olonk'elisdze, and likewise the transfer of the *eristaviate* of Kartli from the Orbelis to the Suramelis. *Eristavis* are not otherwise mentioned, and nor indeed is the entirety of the western half of Georgia.

Whether the *eristavis* of the west were simply waiting to see who won, or whether they were unrecorded partisans of one side or another, we can perhaps be reminded by the episode not to over-state the importance of *eristavis* despite their importance for raising levies. If the unmentioned *eristavis* initially tended to support the Orbelis, their support was not enough to unseat Giorgi: if they supported Giorgi, then the support went unrecorded and unrewarded.

Several figures were promoted as a result of the rebellion, including the Kipchak leader Q'ubasar who became *amirsp'asalar* and the two new *eristavis* abovementioned: this might be a recognition of the importance of local support and of the Kipchak forces in winning, either at the expense of recognising any *eristavis* who stood with Giorgi or because few of them, at the beginning of the rebellion, actively did so.

³⁵⁹ KT, 241; *ძგ* II, 32.

Despite the importance of the Georgian court as the focal point for political linkages and the centre-focused nature of most rebellions, geography still mattered considerably when the balance of political power in Georgia was contested. The *eristavis* were, therefore, undoubtedly among the important foci of power at such times. These were, however, for the most part focal points for power around which rebellions aimed at the centre could be put together: the prospect of isolation on the one hand and the lack of prestige opportunities offered by the court on the other meant that independence or a weakening of the centre were less attractive options than trying to maximise access to central power. Families like the Dadiani held both *eristaviates* and central offices, and it is plausible that many *eristavial* families had members at, or were even significantly based around, the court which allowed them to grow their influence even if not necessarily their autonomy.³⁶⁰

CITIES, DEMESNES, AND CHURCH ESTATES

Surguladze et al state that the *eristaviates* had certain exceptions in the areas that they covered, and that certain lands came under more direct royal or ecclesiastical control and, therefore, also direct supervision by those other powers in matters of justice and taxation.³⁶¹ Indeed, they suggest that in the twelfth century the *eristavis* controlled only a minority of Bagrationid land and population, because of the large directly controlled royal estates and the significant level of church holdings. Such percentage calculations are of necessity largely speculative, but we can reasonably suggest from the available evidence that there were significant land-holdings and estates that may have been held more directly or had different arrangements, as per what we know of Tbilisi for example. On the other hand, we certainly do not see any hint in the chronicle material of needing dual systems for certain of the *eristavis*' functions to account for the royal or church lands: when Tamar calls the *eristavis* to summon troops to fight *Iuri*, she does not for

³⁶⁰ KT, 242; ქც II, 34. Note that *Bediani* is a territorial epithet for the Dadianis.

³⁶¹ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 70.

example separately issue summons directly to her cities and demesne lands.³⁶² Cities may stand alongside demesnes and church lands in this calculation, and Georgian historians have claimed a tendency for urban merchant classes to be supporters of the monarchy, which we can examine here from our limited prosopographical information.³⁶³

That aforementioned lack of evidence undoubtedly places some significant limitations on any discussion of how these lands were managed, taxed, and levied, or the social structures such systems were maintained around. We should not expect that these systems were simple or that types of landholder outside the secular nobility were entirely independent of one another, and it may at times have been dependent on custom and context whether certain matters were handled by certain power sources or centres. It seems unlikely, for example, that villages owned by monasteries or the crown were necessarily exempted from providing levies, or that it would have made sense for them to do so via an entirely separate system to the *eristavi*'s own: different functions of ownership, justice, war, taxation and other rights could potentially have overlapped, and we should be no means assume the simplest ideas of these structures we can hypothesise to be the correct ones. The issue of demesne and church lands and how they were governed could in particular be better tackled with a fuller analysis of the extant charter material than I have been able to find or conduct within the largely prosopographical scope of this thesis: there is little available in the chronicle material that leads us to definitive conclusions. We can nonetheless make a few comments based on the available material.

The church clearly had certain financial obligations to the monarchy from its land-holdings: we know this because we have records of exemptions being given.³⁶⁴ It seems unlikely that the church was generally tax exempt as Tsurtssumia suggests in his comparative study of Georgian church responses to warfare, at least in our period, and rather that specific privileges and

³⁶² KT, 249; *ძგ* II, 50.

³⁶³ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 32-36.

³⁶⁴ KT, 242; *ძგ* II, 34.

removals of duties could be temporarily or permanently awarded by monarchs.³⁶⁵ It is clear, too, that at times clergy did accompany Georgian forces to war, though to what extent this made them fully 'part of the feudal military system' per Tsurtssumia is unclear. The pertinent question is perhaps less about whether individual clergy took up arms, and more about how church lands were integrated into other forms of local and regional levy formation. It seems unlikely, despite the records we have of military clergy and the more permissive approach of the Georgian than the Greek orthodox to clergy in war, that clergy consistently led their own levy troops into battle. The presence of senior clerics outside the battlefield, for example during the Basiani campaign, indicates that they were a possible but not a necessary part of the military infrastructure.

Royal demesne land – that directly owned by the crown – likely had some of its own systems of governance that might have differed from those of the *eristaviates*, although again we have relatively little record of crown lands and their governance as opposed to royal-owned fortresses and locations.

When it comes to the governance of cities, Tbilisi is by far our best recorded case, with a number of mentions of it and its governance being made through our source material. The city had been an independent emirate in its own right until shortly before the start date of our study. The title of Emir of Kartli and Tbilisi was indeed still in use in the later twelfth century, being held by a noble called Abulasan under Tamar, though it is unclear what functions this entailed.³⁶⁶

Certainly Kartli had an *eristavi*, and we might expect the title of emir to more closely involve the governance of Tbilisi. We also have another mentioned ruler of Tbilisi in our sources, though in this case the term 'emir' is not used: Mkhitar Gosh mentions a Vasak son of Vahram who ruled Tbilisi in the mid 1150s, a favourite of David V who later fled to the Saltukids.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Tsurtssumia, M., 'The Church of Georgia in War', *Historia i Świat* 8 (2019), 123.

³⁶⁶ KT, 243; *ქს* II, 36.

³⁶⁷ Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 8.

As to the position of these leaders, Abulasan reportedly suggested Tamar's marriage to Iuri, suggesting he had strong long-distance connections: this might have been bolstered if he was heavily involved in the governance of such a merchant-heavy city, but given that courtiers of all sorts were present in the capital this cannot be conclusive. His probable predecessor Vasak is explicitly mentioned by Mkhitar Gosh as having been an Armenian: given that Tbilisi was clearly a city with a large Armenian and Muslim merchant population at this time, having an Armenian family in charge may have made it easier to broker relations between the monarchy and senior local merchants. The likely connection between Abulasan suggesting the marriage to Iuri and Zankan, the grand merchant (*didvach'ari*) who went to summon Iuri to Tbilisi, may further strengthen this possibility. We cannot be certain of Abulasan's origins – the title of emir was certainly used without religious or ethnic implication, as per e.g. Ivane of Akhaltsikhe, almost certainly an Orthodox Georgian, becoming emir of K'ari.³⁶⁸

We also know that Tbilisi had differential taxation between faiths in Demet're's time, from the work of Ibn al-Azraq.³⁶⁹ Interestingly, the suggestion is that non-Christians were favoured in taxation terms, with Jews assessed at four fifths the rate of a Georgian and Muslims at three fifths, possibly as this was important for attracting merchants from Georgia's non-Christian neighbours or perhaps because this most decreased any chance of unrest in the decades after the Georgian capture of Tbilisi, which was probably not an Orthodox-majority city at the time. This tells us both the extent to which there was a developed regular taxation system, and that taxation was used for purposes beyond raising revenue: the differential taxation strongly suggests that varying taxes could be done to achieve underlying social objectives in our period.

One of the primary unanswered questions about Tbilisi is the extent to which it was exceptional. Certainly its position as an independent emirate until the 1220s might have given it an unusual degree of self-governance. Surguladze, on the other hand, states that a number of cities

³⁶⁸ KT, 267; *ḡ* II, 92.

³⁶⁹ Minorsky, 'Caucasica in the History of Mayyāfāriqīn', 34.

classified as “royal towns” and were therefore outside the jurisdiction of the *eristavis*.³⁷⁰ The only other settlements for which we have noticeable chronicle evidence for their governance are well outside the core *eristaviates* of Georgia – for example, we see the Zakarids holding court in Dvin, suggesting they had some authority there, and we see a number of exchanges of who was in power in K’ari and Ani, but we lack mentions for Kutaisi or any of the Black Sea ports. We do see cities in the Caucasus outside the *eristaviates* acting as collective units to some extent: the people of Khlat are shown by Ibn al-Athir working to invite and depose their rulers, while Mkhitar Gosh shows the people of Ganja collectively (and successfully) seeking Georgian intervention against a troublesome warlord.³⁷¹ We can, therefore, generally say that there seems to have been an assumption that urban elite could collectively take political action and be seen as representative of their cities, but in what manner such decisions were taken or whether there was any structural consistency in doing so is less clear.

The claim that cities were bastions of Bagrationid support and supported a centralising agenda, made by Lordkipanidze and others, is somewhat difficult to substantiate effectively. The case that a ‘strong central power’ was important for protecting merchants and facilitating construction is not at all clear, in a period when such efforts needed coordination by local far more than central officials.³⁷² The claim that cities like K’ari wanting to surrender directly to the monarchy rather than to an intermediary is a sign of popular support, as in the case of K’ari, is also far from clearly the case: the ability to directly appeal to the monarch as one’s liege might have had decidedly prosaic advantages rather than indicating a supportive stance *per se*.³⁷³ As such, we cannot make easy generalisations about urban relations with the monarchy in this period: the interests of cities were not necessarily consistent, and may indeed have been in

³⁷⁰ Surguladze et al., *ცენტრალური და ადგილობრივი სამოხელეო წყობა შუა საუკუნეების საქართველოში*, 70.

³⁷¹ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 3, 122; Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 6.

³⁷² Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 33; Met’reveli, *The Golden Age*, 164.

³⁷³ KT, 301; ქს II, 143-144.

competition where for example the benefits or disbenefits of particular relationships to leaders and their centres of power were concerned.

What we know of administration outside the *eristaviates* is, perhaps excepting the case of Tbilisi, every bit as patchy if not more so than what we know of administration within them. Epigraphic evidence in other settlements from the period could plausibly help provide some additional information on this area, but this has not been systematically exploited and its potential is unclear. We should be cautious about assuming that the system was too neat, or that the distinctions between different sorts of land worked the same across all aspects of governance.

OUTSIDE THE ERISTAVIATES

Considering the discussion on geographical scope close to the start of this chapter, the explicit use of *eristavi* and whatever functions that formally implied was probably limited in the twelfth century to what might be thought of as Georgia proper – a set of provinces, most of which were some mixture of majority Orthodox, majority Georgian-speaking (or at least Kartvelian-speaking), and which had a history within Georgian-ruled state structures in previous centuries. Even if we allow the thesis that the southwestern regions did have *eristaviates*, this still holds true, for these regions too fit the pattern of historic control by Kartvelian-speaking dynasties and Orthodox religious dominance.

We will consider some areas outside the *eristaviates* in more detail in the next chapter, but we should note that the rule of these once brought into the Bagrationid fold is discussed in our sources mainly in terms of grants of particular to particular individuals, rather than in terms of formal titulature. We hear for example that Ivane Orbeli was given the rulership of Ani by Giorgi III after its capture in the early 1160s, not that he was made e.g. *eristavi* of Ayrarat.³⁷⁴ Similarly, David IV's conquest of Shirvan just before our period seems to have resulted in the adoption of

³⁷⁴ KT, 229; *ძგ* II, 6.

the title of Shirvan-shah in Bagrationid titulature rather than in the creation of *eristavis*, although as discussed in the next chapter this period of semi-direct Georgian rule was admittedly very short. The conclusion we should reach, therefore, is that Georgian conquests in our period did not involve a programmatic extension of Georgian regional governance structures, and probably therefore did not result in a direct replication of those structures' relationships with the Georgian polity's central infrastructure – although some requirements for rulers in those areas, especially the need for effective local connections and a bridge to the court, were probably similar.

CONCLUSIONS

Regional governance in medieval Georgia is an area that is in great need both of additional work and of bringing together additional epigraphic evidence beyond the rather loose theorising permitted by our chronicle materials. Better material on the prosopography of the *eristaviates* than has been available for consultation here might in particular improve our views of how the *eristavial* families interconnected, and their links to the church, as well as perhaps telling us some more about land and boundaries (some boundary marking stones with inscriptions still exist from this period).

We can, nonetheless, draw some useful if tentative conclusions. The roles of *eristavis* were likely wide-ranging: in areas from justice to taxation to warfare, their rule may have been every bit as key to the lives of the majority of the population as that of the Bagrationid monarchs they served. Importantly too, though, they were not just leaders with local power bases loosely strung together: they were court figures drawn together by central networks, whose power may well have relied on their ability to broker relations between their regions and the centres of power in the Caucasus. We should not necessarily see this as implying weakness on their part or suggest that they were therefore subordinates needing to come to the centre to receive orders or largesse: the court was a place to build connections with others of equivalent rank and

influence, matters beyond the borders of any given eristaviate. We should look for the opportunities it offered these actors – gains of status, titulature, marriage, and influence – rather than assuming a duelling tension between central and local authority.

This importance of connectivity means that certain questions around the relative powers of the eristavi and the monarchy may be more theoretical than practical. Under normal circumstances, the son and heir of an eristavi was the best placed person to inherit those social connections that he – and the monarch – needed to make use of, and therefore likely to be the strongest candidate for the role in the first place. Traditional readings that have tended to take a zero-sum view of power and a legalistic view of its operation explain far less well the general lack of contest over these positions or any attempts to assert or contest them. Monarchs were likely to have far more control over succession in cases of rebellion, giving them the opportunity to promote certain families or individuals: their lack of doing this at other times, almost as a result of this, might have signalled stability and strength to contemporaries rather than indicating a state with weak central authority.

The eristavis were by no means the only part of local administration: the monarchy, church, city elites, and minor nobility all had a part to play, and relationships and rights may have been granted more individually and had more overlaps than we would like to pretend in an idealised system-model. Tbilisi, and perhaps other cities, likely had very socially important and perhaps idiosyncratic laws and forms of governance. These patterns of personal connectivity being a key to authority, of relationships with particular areas and regions operating on an individual rather than systematised basis, and of largely opportunistic political interventions were also notable when it came to the Bagrationids' relations with the wider Caucasus beyond Georgia – which we shall turn to in the next chapter.

8. DIPLOMACY

In this chapter, we will consider the activities and relationships of the Georgian polity, and individuals within and connected to it, with a range of polities and regions beyond its (as previously discussed, semi-mobile) centre. Where in our previous chapters we attempted to consider the court and then regions more, here we move outwards to consider relations with entities that can more often be considered external – an approach that is fraught with difficulty, as we shall see, as a result of disagreements about what was ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ Georgia as a political unit.

The historiography of Georgian diplomacy in this period has traditionally tended to show a fairly simply delineated struggle for conquest and land between Georgia and its Muslim neighbours – Lordkipanidze refers to the “unremitting struggle against the Seljuks” to open her discussion of foreign policy under Tamar.³⁷⁵ This complete opposition of interests is often simply left to an implied assumption of state expansionism being a general aim or pressure. On occasion particular overarching goals regarding land or trade are formed into some idea of a grand strategy, as with for example Gabashvili’s suggestion that Georgian policy focused on the securing of the Trebizond to Tabriz trade routes.³⁷⁶

An immediate complicating factor even in traditional historiography is how to treat the various political units that were aligned with Georgia or were somewhat under its auspices, including at various points Shirvan, Zakarid Armenia, various smaller North Caucasus political units, Trebizond, and some Turkic-Anatolian states and rulers. These varied in type and in their relationship with the Bagrationid court: they are referred to in a variety of ways in the historiography, partly as a result of their varying characteristics and partly because different historians have chosen to present them as more or less closely attached to the Bagrationid

³⁷⁵ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 146.

³⁷⁶ Gabashvili, M., ‘International trade coordination of Christian and Islamic worlds on basis of numismatic materials, Xth-XIIIth CC.’ in *38th International Congress of Asian and North African Studies* (Ankara, 2009), 163-165.

monarchy (or, in numerous framings, the Georgian state). Modern maps and writings alike show tendencies to try and systematise the status of these surrounding political units, including grouping certain of them into categories like client-states or buffer states and adjudicating whether or not they classify as within Georgia's supposed borders.

Such a discussion of integration and what was or was not within Georgia must start with David the Builder. Whilst his reign remains mostly outside our scope for this thesis, so much of the historiography is framed in connection to him that discussing the Bagrationids' external views necessitates a brief discussion here. Typical Georgian narratives tend to portray David's foreign policy as essentially integrationist, seeking to directly expand Georgian royal rule over as much of the Caucasus as possible.³⁷⁷ This is particularly based on the conquests of Shirvan and much of Armenia that reportedly took place late in David's reign, and which nominally extended Georgian control (if considered in pure terms of land area) to its greatest extent. It to some extent also reflects the views of both Georgian and Armenian chroniclers for whom listing his conquests was an important part of their framing of David's reign.³⁷⁸

One consequence of this framing of David's policy is that the policy of David's successors and the apparent reduction in such directness of control requires explanation: this is usually put down to Demet're, Giorgi III, and Tamar either being in some way weaker or being stymied by fierce resistance from neighbouring Muslim regions.³⁷⁹ Lordkipanidze certainly shows this as an outcome of settling for second best, with integration into the state being the overwhelmingly preferable outcome and Tamar's chronicler celebrating her 'freeing' surrounding peoples therefore being an attempt to put a positive gloss on what was essentially a recognition of limitation and failure.³⁸⁰ Suny takes a similar position, portraying the period between David IV and Tamar's reigns as politically stagnant and characterised by internal conflict.³⁸¹ These views

³⁷⁷ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 118.

³⁷⁸ E.g. Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 68.

³⁷⁹ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 118

³⁸⁰ KT, 303-304. ȧȧ II, 147.

³⁸¹ Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 37.

tend to implicitly or explicitly expect expansionistic warfare and securing territory to be the primary internal goal of Georgian monarchs and of their military campaigning, a view also recently expressed by Antony Eastmond.³⁸²

Some scholars have focused more on the less military aspects of Georgian relations with their neighbours: Peacock's study of Georgian relations with the Anatolian Turks suggests that the relationship between Georgia and its Muslim neighbours was far from a pure rivalry and that "both sides derived prestige from their close connections".³⁸³ Non-Muslim neighbours such as the Alans or Ossetians of the North Caucasus, and the Kipchaks who formed a sizeable part of Georgia's military manpower from the reign of David IV onwards, also appear in much of the scholarship, though largely without integration into a wider concept of Georgian power: their status as buffer states or auxiliaries is largely an assumed as much as explained feature of the literature. This demands considerably more discussion, a brief outline of which will be attempted below. Certainly, simple factors such as being co-religionists rarely stopped conflict in the medieval Caucasus, and given the conventional understanding of Georgia as expansionist the lack of interest in aggression towards the North Caucasus is worth consideration.

Georgian relations beyond the Transcaucasus are mostly portrayed historiographically as exemplars to show the reach and prestige of the Georgian monarchy, assisting the general picture of the high power of the twelfth century Bagratonids, or alternatively are used to suggest cultural and social influences on the development, ideologies and presentation of Georgian power. The former treatment is given in passing by many of the standard Georgian narratives.³⁸⁴ Discussions of social-cultural influence via longer range links have been offered by scholars such as Eastmond and Nikolaishvili in some depth, especially via their visibility in the art history of the region which is often in conversation with Byzantine models.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Eastmond, *Tamta's World*, 66.

³⁸³ Peacock, A.C.S, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th Centuries', *Anatolian Studies* 56 (2006), 127-128.

³⁸⁴ E.g. Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 185.

³⁸⁵ Eastmond, *Royal Renewal in Georgia: The Case of Queen Tamar*, 284.

To turn to the sources, we do not have an especially clear idea of how high medieval Georgians and their neighbours conceptualised issues of governance and diplomacy in the abstract, but there are a few relevant points about the portrayal of such concepts that are worth looking at here. Firstly, we should note the high importance of interpersonal connection. Georgian monarchs in our period frequently crowned their heirs while still alive, a necessity in part because their chosen successor would not otherwise immediately inherit the network of interpersonal connections and allegiances necessary to rule upon their death. This is also one of the implications of Georgian titulature: monarchs in this period were rulers *of the Georgians* (and the Abkhaz, Rans, etc.), as opposed to being rulers *of Georgia*: whilst *Sakartvelo* as a term emerged in the medieval period, we see relatively few occurrences of it in ways that really suggest an abstracted idea of state or monarchic institution separate from the monarch as individual.³⁸⁶ This emphasis on the person rather than any abstraction they represented would in turn tend to lead to different scales and types of what we might think of as governance and diplomacy being more similar in practice than we might expect in theory. Both could be essentially conceived as relationships between individuals, with lower levels of transferability of relations – people, not abstract states, were connected – and higher potential for particular relationships operating in individual and idiosyncratic ways than we are used to seeing in modern conceptions of government and diplomacy.

A second point to think about is the lack of easy delineation in the sources at times between alliance, client status, and subordination. We will see this in the relations of the Bagrationids with a number of their surrounding polities. We frequently lack the formal documentation of any agreements that existed confirming the status of particular rulers, and in any case the formal recognition of a particular relationship would not confirm how often particular rights or responsibilities were drawn upon in practice.

³⁸⁶ Aleksidze, 'Caucasia: Albania, Armenia, and Georgia' in Lössl, and Baker-Brian, *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity, First Edition*, (Hoboken, 2018), 140.

We can also see the complexity of such distinctions in literary texts. For example, the relations between the major characters in the *Knight in Panther Skin* are interesting in this regard. Phridon, despite providing all but two members of the manpower for their final military expedition, is decidedly and admittedly *subordinate*, whilst Taniel is clearly treated as the ranking member.³⁸⁷ At the end Avtandil, the hero of the piece, explicitly places himself as servant to Taniel as King of India as well as Rostam as King of Arabia, his actual liege; after Avtandil's marriage and despite his status as King of Arabia in his own right, he and his bride are seated below their Indian guests in recognition of the latter monarchs' higher status.³⁸⁸ The potential tension is unexplored and irrelevant to the plot, but the device of a hero having complex allegiances to multiple rulers was clearly sufficiently within the scope of heroic expectation that it did not require any great explanation for Rustaveli to use it. Whilst the relationships between these characters should hardly be treated as a realistic idea of diplomacy, the lack of neat categorisation and the ability for the characters to have overlapping, hierarchical relationships without that reflecting negatively on their ruling status should interest us as a representation of ideal relations between rulers.

Third and finally, we should return to some of the discussions in our previous chapter. The *saeristavo* was the most direct political unit in much of the core of the Bagrationid domains: it was immediately responsible to the monarch, and requiring confirmation or appointment from them. No Georgian monarch, however, was able to simply hire and fire *eristavis* at will. The tools for dealing with an *eristavi* and those for dealing with a neighbouring monarch – negotiation, creating or attempting to break personal ties, and occasionally military action or intervention when circumstances permitted – were at times not dissimilar.

Whilst being able to consider relationships with *eristaviates*, client rulers, and neighbouring polities as being similar in type is therefore helpful, this is not to say that there were no differences, rather that it might be helpful to consider more of a continuity than a dividing line

³⁸⁷ Rustaveli trans. Vivian, *The Knight in Panther Skin*, 179-184.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 188-190; 197.

from internal to external diplomacy. This chapter to some extent is structured to show how such a continuity may be conceived and spirals outward from Georgia's centre in its viewpoint, moving from close allies and relations to broader, looser regional links: the aim of this is to give an idea of the different levels and types of contact that Georgian individuals were engaged in, and different chroniclers saw, in our period. We can then conclude by examining some overall themes across this area.

SHIRVAN

Georgia's eastern neighbour, Shirvan, covered much of what is now Azerbaijan, in the lowlands at the end of the Mt'k'vari's course, on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Its direct borderland with Georgia seems for most of our period to have only been north of the river, between it and the Upper Caucasus, with the region of Arran/Ran and the cities of Ganja and Shamkhor between the two on the south side of the river.

Shirvan had been conquered by David the Builder earlier in the twelfth century, but returned to the control of its Shahs (often referred to as Sharvanshas/Shirvan-shahs as a single word in the chronicle material) under Demet're.³⁸⁹ This course of events is an important backdrop for considering Georgio-Shirvani relations for the remainder of the century. Whilst there are points before and since in the Georgian chronicles that discuss the Georgians interacting with Shirvan as the dominant partner in the relationship, David's campaign seems to have been one of annexation – or at least one that culminated in him directly arranging the affairs of the country.³⁹⁰ Thus was created a brief window of time in which Georgia nominally stretched fully from the Black Sea to the Caspian. This departure from the norms of Georgian interaction with Shirvan was in no small part reactive – a response to the Seljuks capturing David's tributary ally Manuchihr III, who had married his daughter Tamar a decade or so earlier – but we should take the Kartlis Tskhovreba's presentation of the campaign as one of annexation seriously as a

³⁸⁹ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 20-22.

³⁹⁰ KT, 182; JG I, 345-346.

starting point, all the same. David's move of the capital to Tbilisi, as well as moving the capital near a more significantly located trading centre and displaying his recaptured territory, suggests a general eastward shift in focus from Kutaisi's days as the capital. We cannot rule out that more direct influence in Shirvan, coming just a few years later, may have been part of such a policy. Conversely, though, the reactive start to the campaign may suggest that the intervention was intended to be somewhat more temporary: if David had a long term plan to bring Shirvan directly into his fold, in any case, he died before it could be implemented.

The lack of a good chronicle of his son and heir Demet're's reign is, as so often when determining the chronology of 12th century Georgia, frustrating. Nonetheless it is clear that Demet're did not attempt to retain direct control of Shirvan for long, and as discussed in the earlier chapter on chronologies the entire country was probably back under the control of the Shahs by or before 1130. There is an alternative position put forward by Lordkipanidze that parts of Shirvan were retained under direct control with an east-west split in which only the east was returned to the Shahs, but it is unclear what the source basis for her assertions are.³⁹¹

There are a number of likely reasons for Georgia relinquishing control over Shirvan after David's death. First, even with the expansion of Georgian forces under David, the resources needed to control and hold the wide plains of the lower Mt'k'vari and Araxes may well have been beyond what was feasible. Second, there was an obvious candidate to hold Shirvan with whom Demet're could forge effective links: Manuchihr was unlikely to be enamoured of the Seljuks considering his defeat at their hands in 1123, and he was in any case married to Demet're's sister.³⁹² Third, Demet're may well have had his hands full given the need to secure his position from plotters and family members, such that regardless of the material inputs and outputs, there was some social and political value in reducing the range of entanglements that might draw him into external conflicts. Placing Manuchihr as an ally might have had other benefits, too: if Demet're was concerned about civil war, having Shirvan as a potential partisan

³⁹¹ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 124.

³⁹² KT, 181; 177; jB I, 343; 334.

actor may have helped discourage potential opponents by providing Demet're with a point of retreat and an army that might still be available even in the event of a successful takeover of parts of Georgia's royal forces.

Whatever the balance of Demet're's reasons, the return of Shirvan to its shahs created the norm rather than the exception when it came to Georgian policy in subsequent years. Despite David's brief run of direct conquests in the 1120s, his successors tended to be far more clearly engaged in elite co-option and interventionist management of the status quo in Georgia's surrounding regions. As noted above this is sometimes seen as a sign of weakness in the historiography, an idea that David's successors were simply not up to the task of managing the scale of his realm.³⁹³ In truth, David himself barely had to manage his realm at full scale: by any account, the apparent explosion in scale of his realm only happened after 1121-2, and probably not until 1123 - and David was dead by 1125. We cannot know whether David would have attempted to solidify Georgian authority or would have had the capacity to do so. We should not, however, confuse a set of military victories, no matter how dramatic, with the idea that the Georgians had meaningful direct administrative control of all of Shirvan and the capacity to sustain it through the rest of the century in 1125. They very likely did not.

Moving on from Manuchihr's restoration to the throne, there appears to have been some Shirvan-Arran conflict during Demet're's reign. We have only Khaqani's brief evidence for this, crediting Manuchihr with the conquest of the country, though any such territorial gains did not ultimately last.³⁹⁴ Mkhitar Gosh does not mention such a war either, though he does mention Demet're raiding Ganja after the 1139 earthquake that damaged the city and looting its gates, as well as some later intervention in Arranian affairs, probably in the 1140s. Opportunism seems likely in the 1139 case, and certainly when the ruler whose domains included Ganja responded to the provocation Mkhitar Gosh implies that the Georgians were put on the back foot.³⁹⁵ There

³⁹³ Muskhelishvili, Samsonadze and Daushvili, *Georgian History*, 208.

³⁹⁴ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 21.

³⁹⁵ Mkhitar Gosh trans. Bedrosian, *The Aghuanian Chronicle*, 4.

is no indication that Demet're's attack was intended as an occupation or an attempt toward any other form of subjugation, rather than the simple explanation that earthquake damage left the city badly vulnerable to a looting raid. Lordkipanidze's claim that Georgia 'waged bitter wars for Ran' in Demet're's reign may be based on some mixture of Mkhitar Gosh's testimony, and a reading of Khaqani coupled with an excessive assumption of Georgian authority in Shirvan.³⁹⁶ Either way, though, it cannot be effectively supported: we have no evidence that the Georgian and Shirvani fighting in Arran was in any way connected or coordinated, and the evidence does not support the idea that Demet're was consistently attempting to extend or further strengthen his ability to operate eastwards of Hereti, Kakheti, and lower Kartli. Rather, he took an opportunist and interventionist approach.

Manuchihr probably died in the late 1140s or early 1150s. It should not per se affect our consideration of the Georgio-Shirvani relationship that the Georgian chronicles fail to mention this: their coverage of Demet're's reign is minimal in general and frequently the deaths of otherwise senior or neighbouring leaders are passed over. His son and successor Aghsartan had a long reign that covered the end of Demet're's reign, the reign of Giorgi III, and much of that of Tamar as well. He died in the late 1190s or very early 1200s.³⁹⁷

Under Giorgi III, Georgian-Shirvan relations are mainly noted in the context of his campaigning alongside Aghsartan near Derbent.³⁹⁸ The Georgian chronicling of the war notes the presence of Andronikos Komnenos, the future Byzantine Emperor, and focuses more on Giorgi's contribution. The Shirvani poet Khaqani commemorated the same war in some couplets, none of which mention Giorgi. He does however provide some useful information, referring to seventy-three vessels destroyed by Aghsartan (implying a significant naval military movement), and identifies Russians as the primary antagonists but also refers to Alans and Khazars among

³⁹⁶ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 125.

³⁹⁷ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 31-33.

³⁹⁸ KT, 235; JG II, 17.

the invaders.³⁹⁹ The war thus seems likely to have been a response to an invasion of the region by some mixture of groups from the North Caucasus or beyond. Whatever the military realities, the difference between Georgian texts which mention the Bagrationid-Shirvani relationship and Shirvani texts which do not may indicate that the prestige from the relationship was more important to the nominally senior partner, even if perhaps the promise of direct military aid was of more value to the junior.

Aghsartan did not, so far as we can tell, intervene in the Orbeli rebellion in the 1170s, nor in Iuri's rebellions in Tamar's reign. We do have a note that the 'House of Shirvan' supported Giorgi III, in the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time, but this is not reflected in any of the more detailed sources so it is hard to know to what it refers.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst the possibility of Shirvani forces becoming involved in Georgian internal disputes must have been there (and should not be discounted when considering the behaviour of various political actors), we therefore get only a limited sense that this happened in practice. This may have been simple calculation on Aghsartan's part, but we might then have expected the Georgian sources to remember a Shah who stayed out of every chance to support his nominal liege less warmly than they appear to, with Giorgi III treating Aghsartan as a *didebuli* and a son according to the chronicles.⁴⁰¹ Rather, we get no sense at any point that there is an expectation that Aghsartan will turn up for military service on call. This would be a notable difference between relations with Shirvan and those of other vassals, who certainly did have such an expectation placed upon them.

The reverse situation, however, of Georgian troops intervening in affairs to the east, did indeed happen again in Tamar's reign. This time it was not a direct intervention in Shirvan, but rather in Arran, in support of the Eldiguzid Amir Miran's claim to rule Ganja and Shamkhor. Most of the details of this are dealt with below in the section on the Eldiguzids, but here we should note the importance of Aghsartan in the episode: he comes with Miran to Tamar's court, and effectively

³⁹⁹ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 37-40.

⁴⁰⁰ KT, 202; յԹ I, 367.

⁴⁰¹ KT, 235; յԹ II, 17.

brokers the relationship that leads Georgia into the war. As Miran's father in law and Tamar's cousin and vassal, Aghsartan had strong relationships to both parties.⁴⁰² Shirvan, here, is diplomatically important because of additional lateral personal connections its ruler brings to the table, not because it provides resources that strengthen Georgia's hand or because it operates fully independently. Here, too, we perhaps see the utility of Georgia having this relationship with a specifically Muslim subordinate power: Aghsartan could more easily build family ties like that with Amir-Miran than his Christian cousins, and thus his alignment with Georgia gave the latter additional diplomatic routes into the neighbouring Muslim world. The Georgians must have seen the link as valuable, for Tamar and David committed to the war on Amir-Miran's side. We can suggest that the relationship with Aghsartan may have been able to offer a number of things that Tamar and the Georgian court wanted, because embracing Amir-Miran offered a chance to replicate the Georgia-Shirvan relationship with a new, more manageably sized neighbour in Arran. If the model had not been working well, it seems unlikely the Georgians would have gone to war to produce another similar alliance.

Aghsartan, according to the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs*, was also among Tamar's possible suitors after her first marriage, to Iuri Bogolyubsky, ended with the latter's exile. He is presented as being willing to convert for the sake of the marriage (this is said of other Muslim suitors through the Georgian chronicles, though that does not mean we should dismiss it as a mere topos: it is fully plausible that this might have been a requirement in practice). Despite this, it is his Islam which is blamed for one of the core reasons given for Tamar's rejection of the marriage possibility: the allegation that he ignored the rules of parentage and kinship. Aghsartan's mother was David the Builder's daughter, making him Tamar's cousin once removed, so he was indeed her relative.

The later years of Aghsartan's reign were marked by tragedy: his entire immediate family were killed in a severe earthquake in 1192, including his wife and children. After his death in 1197 a

⁴⁰² KT, 234; 255; jB II, 17; 63.

succession of short-lived rulers passed by in Shirvan, about whom comparatively little is recorded. It is not suggested that there was any sort of civil war ongoing, but nonetheless it is perhaps notable that despite the region's rapid turnover of Shahs there was no Georgian record of, and therefore presumably no particular attempt at guidance of or intervention in, this process. Had the Georgians wanted to extend their power in the region, this was the time: Tamar's power was reaching its height and Georgia was more than capable of military adventuring if the need arose. That they did not do so suggests some mixture of a general satisfaction with the state of affairs - there is no obvious sense that any of Aghsartan's successors changed the broad strokes of his policies - and also perhaps that the political incentives towards territorial conquest in that direction were simply not very great for Tamar and her court.

We can now move to reviewing the overall themes of this relationship. One key question about Shirvan was the extent to which it was a Georgian "client-state": whether the Shirvan-Shahs were really just *eristavis* by any other name, or whether this can be better treated as an alliance with Georgia as a somewhat senior partner, or somewhere between the two. Bosworth, in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, suggests that Shirvan in our period was "virtually a protectorate of Christian Georgia", and Georgian material tends to agree.⁴⁰³ This has not been the sole historiographical view, however: Hasan suggests that the region "recovered its semi-independence" in the middle part of the century.⁴⁰⁴ These views both perhaps tend to share the expectation that Georgia would naturally, as a state, be trying to extend direct material control over Shirvan: in practice it is not clear that this was the case, and indeed it seems likely that the maintenance of their relationship was as much effected by the boundaries of that relationship not being defined or strongly tested as by the outcomes of such tests.

⁴⁰³ Bosworth, C.E., "Šervānšāhs," *Encyclopædia Iranica, Online Edition* (2012) <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/servansahs>

⁴⁰⁴ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 17.

The Georgian chronicles project a sense of Georgian superiority in the relationship, for example the aforementioned suggestion that Giorgi III saw Aghsartan as a *didebuli*, a high noble rank but not an equal or royal one.⁴⁰⁵ The same cannot necessarily be said of our Shirvani material: as mentioned earlier, in Khaqani's account of Aghsartan's war in Derbent, Giorgi III's intervention goes unmentioned. Looking at the prosopography and chronicle material in more detail gives us some interesting realisations. The first is the relatively low number of Shirvan-Georgian connections, almost all of them associated with Georgian intervention in Shirvan, Ran, and Ganja. As far as we can tell, Georgian monarchs through the C12th either did not want or need to call upon Shirvan for military support, nor did they seem to have any strong investment in making Shirvan behave in a more 'Georgian' way whether in religious, political or cultural terms.

A related and interesting point to consider is the clash of titulature between the Shirvan-shahs and the Georgian monarchs: the latter also claimed the title of Shirvan-shah in their official titulature.⁴⁰⁶ The Georgian chronicles refer to the Shirvan-shahs as such themselves, indicating that Georgians did understand the rulers of Shirvan to validly hold the same title their own monarchs claimed. That this did not affect the alliance suggests some mixture of a relatively flexible approach to office-holding, even at the royal level, or a state of affairs of constructive ambiguity in which the apparently conflicting claims could both be held just so long as they were not actually tested. A further interesting feature of the Georgian titulature here is that Shirvanshah is followed in charters by Shahanshah – that is, the traditional Persian title meaning King of Kings, a title further reflected by the occasional Georgian use of equivalent “king of kings” terms (*mepe mepisa*, in Georgian). This may in fact provide some logical resolution to the problem: the Georgian *mepe* could perhaps be deemed Shirvanshah in the sense that they were the shah of *the Shah* of Shirvan, as opposed to its direct ruler.

⁴⁰⁵ ქც II, 17: “რომელი მეფე იყო შარვანისა და ზღვს პირისა დარუბანდით ხირხალამდის, რომელი მეფესა უზნდა ვითარცა შვილ-ყოფად ვითარცა ერთი დიდებულთა მისთაგანი.”; KT, 234-5.

⁴⁰⁶ Enukidze, T., Silogava, V., Shoshashvili, T. (eds.), *ქართული ისტორიული საბუთები, XI-XII სს* (Tbilisi, 1984), 77.

The links with the Shahs were, as we have seen, familial as much as formal. The precise genealogies should perhaps not be considered of the utmost importance, but nor should the wider family links between the Shahs of Shirvan and the Mepes of Georgia be underestimated in the maintenance of the alliance. We have particularly seen how this was true in the events around Amir-Miran and Georgia entering into the intra-Eldiguzid conflict via these connections. Manuchihr's restoration by Demet're may also have been influenced by familial alliance ties.

Finally, the status of Shirvan as a predominantly Muslim part of the Georgian-aligned political world is useful to consider. The Georgian chronicle materials show an intriguing disinterest in Shirvani religion, in line with their general treatment of religious affairs discussed earlier.

Aghsartan is mentioned as being willing to convert to Christianity in order to win Tamar's hand in marriage, but this is a relative exception. Outside the field of marriage, the fact that the Shirvan-shahs are Muslims is not portrayed as significantly affecting Georgian interactions with them and goes unmentioned when they meet the Georgian monarchs or petition them for military support at various times in our sources.⁴⁰⁷

The arrangements in the relationship with Shirvan of nominal suzerainty, tribute, and of military intervention largely being offered by the Georgians do not necessarily fit the tendency to assume that Georgia's aims were those of state expansion and resource maximisation. Nor was Georgia's policy towards Shirvan an effective buffer-state strategy, for the most part: the primary approach from the east, on the south bank of the Mt'k'vari, remained open despite Shirvan's alignment with Georgia. Furthermore, we do not see the 'fierce resistance' to which Lordkipanidze attributed Georgia's lack of long-term annexation. Rather, we see a connection in which both Georgian and Shirvani rulers were willing to invest energy and from which both derived a measure of additional prestige and security, which may have been more important than strict resource maximisation. This relationship rarely – perhaps intentionally on both sides

⁴⁰⁷ KT, 244; 255; jg II, 39; 63.

– had its boundaries explicitly pushed and tested, which perhaps allowed at times for more satisfactory ambiguities to be maintained by Georgian and Shirvani rulers alike.

ARMENIAN REGIONS

Moving to Georgia's southern borders, the line between diplomacy and governance is less clear than elsewhere, as discussed in the previous chapter. We do have some idea that the edge of what was considered Georgia was more or less along the South Caucasus range, suggesting that regions further south were thought of differently by contemporary writers.⁴⁰⁸ The Armenian-dominated cities of Kars/K'ari, Ani, and Dvin were the most mentioned in our period, and each flitted in and out of Georgian hands on a surprisingly regular basis. There were no fully independent Armenian-led polities in the region in this period since the incorporation of the Kvirikean Bagratuni domains into Georgia, excepting Armenian Cilicia which lay outside the Caucasus proper: instead, the major cities moved between the hands of Georgia and its allies and various Muslim polities to their south. We should start, then, by avoiding treating high medieval Armenia as if it were a clear and cohesive proto-state political formation: we should certainly speak of Armenian-majority areas, Armenian elites, and Armenian people, and the historical memory of other political units and dynasties. The presupposition that there was some inevitable pressure to move from these to a single territorially defined polity, however, may not be justified. The fundamental unifying features were religious and cultural, or based on past polities or contemporary settlement patterns, rather than forming a logical singular geopolitical unit that was being contested in its entirety.

Georgian dominance of Armenia was largely the province of the two most prominent families in this period other than the Bagrationids themselves: firstly the Orbelis, and after the 1170s the Mkhargrdzelis. As discussed in chapter six, both families can be thought of as Armeno-Georgian. Whether there was a serious discourse of Armenian kingship or attempt by these families to

⁴⁰⁸ KT, 294-295; *ԺԶ* II, 129-130.

create an Armenian kingdom or polity in this period is a matter of some debate among scholars. Georgian scholars have tended to downplay this possibility, seeing the Mkhargrdzelis and Orbelis more strongly as Georgian and their actions (not least including the Orbeli rebellion discussed in chapter five) as essentially matters of Georgian court politics. Indeed, the historiography on the Georgian side tends to treat Armenia as a subjugated, integrated part of Georgia: Met'reveli lists northern Armenia amongst 'annexed' regions.⁴⁰⁹ On the other hand, the Armenian literature tends to refer to the Zakarids (that is, the Mkhargrdzelis) as princes and to Armenia in this period as essentially being a principality under the auspices of Georgia, with Dadoyan as a recent example suggesting that "the Zak'arids had their own projects for a semi-independent Armenian land".⁴¹⁰ Sergio La Porta, an Armeniologist, has argued that for the Orbelis in particular there was a clear aim of breaking away and challenging Georgian hegemony in the former Bagratuni realms, based upon their use of a Bagratuni marriage and religious legitimation for Ivane Orbeli's brief rule of Ani.⁴¹¹ He also notes the Mkhargrdzeli use of Bagratuni familial claims as a legitimising feature by the 1210s.⁴¹² Eastmond suggests that these Mkhargrdzeli claims, too, suggest a desire for independence.⁴¹³ However, the presentation of these families as heirs to Armenian kingship need not have been a challenge per se to Georgian hegemony - as with the Shirvan-shahs' retention of the shahdom, hierarchies of kingship should not be dismissed as possibilities and nor should the implied supremacy of 'independence' as a goal be embedded in our assumptions. The case of the Mkhargrdzelis, and their ability to both retain high Georgian office and claim Bagratuni inheritance, rather suggests that it was acceptable for Georgian monarchs to have recognition of their superiority from those who claimed other high-status and royal titles in the region.

⁴⁰⁹ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 176.

⁴¹⁰ Dadoyan, S., *Armenians in the Medieval Islamic World: Paradigms of Interaction, Seventh to Fourteenth Centuries* (New York, 2017), 147.

⁴¹¹ La Porta, 'Lineage, Legitimacy, and Loyalty', 133.

⁴¹² La Porta, 'The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined', 90-92.

⁴¹³ Eastmond, 'Tamta's World', 26.

During the height of their power, each family successively was based out of the fortress of Lori in the marchlands of southern Georgia and northern Armenia. By the later end of Tamar's reign, and certainly in Giorgi IV's reign, the focus of Mkhargrdzeli power may have moved south: by the early 1220s it appears that a petitioner to the Atabeg mentioned by Stepannos Orbelian headed to Dvin, rather than to Lori.⁴¹⁴ This may suggest a rebalancing of governance to be better aligned to the core of the family's domains and operations even if this meant being located further from the Georgian court, although we do also know that Tamar visited Dvin at least at times so it is also possible that the Georgian court was simply becoming more mobile by the end of our period to account for the need to govern and hear petitions across Armenian regions.⁴¹⁵

We can graphically illustrate the importance of the Mkhargrdzelis in the Caucasus' Armenian regions by simply showing a scatter plot of source events for three figures in Tamar's reign – Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli, and Tamar's two husbands Iuri and David – which is to say, as her longest serving amirsp'asalar and her two husbands, the people most likely and able to command armies through much of her time on the throne. The Mkhargrdzeli cluster is very visibly Armenocentric, whilst those of the other two generals are concentrated far more on Georgia's other fronts in the east and southwest. This implies not only that the Mkhargrdzelis focused their attention on this area, but also that there was less direct Bagrationid activity in the region, which may be an indicator that the Mkhargrdzelis had relatively high freedom of action to engage in these conquests.

⁴¹⁴ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 187.

⁴¹⁵ KT, 261; յԹ II, 77.

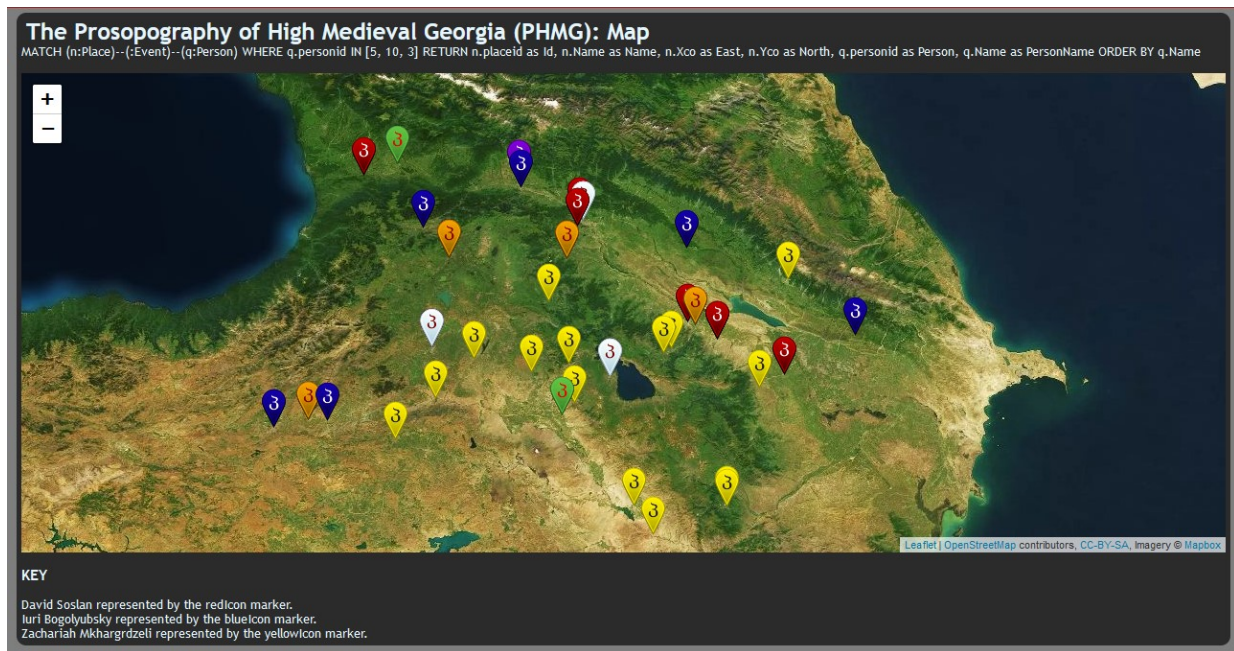


Figure 3. 'Mixed' colours are points visited by more than one of the listed persons.

This illustration, however, leaves much unanswered about how integrated these families were with both Bagrationid rule and local Armenian nobility below them, whether this changed over time, and indeed why this situation arose.

Various Armenian chronicles give us more details for our picture of Mkhargrdzeli Armenia which may help elaborate on this picture. In Stepannos Orbelian's chronicle, the Mkhargrdzelis are very much shown as the region's direct rulers though closely connected to the Georgian court, forming the rank between figures like Elikum and Liparit' Orbeli on the one hand and Tamar or Giorgi Lasha on the other.⁴¹⁶ When part of the Orbeli family returned to Georgia later in Tamar's reign, it was facilitated by the Mkhargrdzelis' links to local bishops and thereafter followed by their attempting to arrange marriage between their family and the Orbelis.⁴¹⁷ It is likely that this position was not solidified until at least the 1190s, when Zakaria Mkhargrdzeli was amirsp'asalar. By this point the family firmly held both Lore as a base of operations and the

⁴¹⁶ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 180.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 204.

dominance of senior Georgian court positions that may have given them a significant degree of freedom to act with royal authority.⁴¹⁸

The Mkhargrdzelis' close relationship to Georgia means that their actions are relatively visible in the source material, and tend both in the Georgian and Armenian material to suggest continued closeness to the Bagrationid centre. Whilst we do not have detailed discussions of many of their raids and campaigns through the 1190s and 1210s, we do see in the Georgian Chronicles examples of them requesting permission for such actions from Tamar.⁴¹⁹ This may imply either that larger actions where they wished to use the crown's military resources required permission, but some of their own expeditions did not, or it might imply a more general need for royal sanction for military action: either way, certainly some actions did require central approval. We also interestingly see, in the post-Orbelian period when Sargis Mkhargrdzeli was a senior court figure, a monastery church in northern Armenia from late in Giorgi III's reign which bears an inscription mentioning him in an explicitly subordinate role to Giorgi – implying that the presentation of the Bagrationid mepe as ruler was still considered important in Armenia.⁴²⁰ The inscription also mentions Anton Ch'q'ondideli – that is to say, a senior Orthodox Georgian bishop, an even more surprising addition than the Georgian mepe – as well as Sargis and two less well known figures, Amir-Kurda and Elbek. This strongly suggests that such patronage was treated as a matter of policy, with bishops in their role as members of the Bagrationid court being able to engage in such actions in what is most likely to have been a largely political capacity.

Some new conquests, even after the Mkhargrdzeli hegemony in much of Armenia was established, could still be parcelled out by the senior monarchs. K'ari, which had changed hands numerous times during our period, was recaptured during Tamar's reign: according to the History and Eulogy of Monarchs, she gave it to Ivane of Akhaltsikhe, a noble presumably from

⁴¹⁸ KT, 251; յԾ II, 55.

⁴¹⁹ KT, 272; յԾ II, 103.

⁴²⁰ Chitishvili, 'Haghartsin Monastery' in Eastmond et al, *Crossing Frontiers Project*.

southern Georgia where his eponymous town stands.⁴²¹ She notably seems to have made him emir and ultimately given him the emir's traditional land-holdings for his success in the role: this is another example of the Bagrationids preferring to co-opt local systems of governance, even when filling them as in this case with their own holders. From Giorgi Lasha's reign we have some discussion in the Orbelian chronicle of appointing governors in southeastern Armenia, which gives the appointments of Liparit' Orbeli in Siunik and Vasak Xach'enets'i in Vayots' dzor as being made by both Ivane Mkhargrdzeli and Giorgi IV Lasha.⁴²² This is one of the strongest points against seeing Mkhargrdzeli Armenia as a fully contained sub-polity, if regional governors within it still required sanction from the Georgian mepe.

Conversely, and supporting the idea of a more independent Mkhargrdzeli sub-polity, we do see a reflection of some of the features of Georgian, or other royal, governance emerging in microcosm. As well as the aforementioned spectacle of the Mkhargrdzelis directly holding court for Armenian nobles that could be appealed to in Dvin, we see for example that Ivane Mkhargrdzeli was able to appoint a chamberlain, Bupak, in a somewhat ministerial role, who dealt with aspects of direct governance.⁴²³ This appointment, however, as with much of our evidence for Mkhargrdzeli Armenia, comes from the period of Ivane's rulership – that is, the 1210s and early 1220s which mostly lie beyond our core period. It is unclear to what extent Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's appointment as atabeg coincided with this level of authority on his part.

How similarly the pre-Mkhargrdzeli parts of our period worked regarding Georgian influence in Armenia is less clear. The Orbelis, as the Mkhargrdzelis' most direct predecessors at least during Giorgi III's reign, certainly held or governed parts of the region, but their connections are more difficult to properly ascertain. This is in part because we have less discussion of their influence from Stepannos Orbelian, who gives by some margin the most detail on such matters – this is because his concern tends to relate to Siunik which was, under Giorgi III and Demet're, mostly

⁴²¹ KT, 267; յԾ II, 92.

⁴²² Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 205.

⁴²³ Ibid, 185.

beyond the Georgian sphere of influence. The three key cities of Ani, K'ari and Dvin were contested throughout our period, but it seems likely that only later in Tamar's reign were areas like Siunik, some distance from any of the major centres, seriously drawn into the Georgian-Mkhargrdzeli spheres of governance.

It seems likely, too, that in earlier periods the Orbelis did not enjoy the hyper-dominance of Georgian politics in Armenia that the Mkhargrdzelis later did. This may be partly a result of rulers like Giorgi III having more direct military control than Tamar did, though her first husband Iuri did campaign in Armenia and there is no obvious reason why David Soslan should not have done.⁴²⁴ The Orbelis seem never to have been as secure in their positions to begin with – Vardan Areweltsi claims that it was rumoured that they murdered David V in order to secure their holding military offices, and their leadership of Demna's rebellion may in part have been triggered by ongoing insecurity.⁴²⁵ Notably, again in Areweltsi's chronicle, we have the suggestion both that Ivane Orbeli was responsible for Giorgi III's second Ani campaign because he wanted the city, and thereafter that Giorgi gave it to Apirat, the brother of the city's bishop, instead. La Porta notes that this may have been a trigger towards the 1177 rebellion, and cites a colophon that suggests Ivane was taking an active role towards the city, including in its religious affairs and by marrying into the Kwirikean royal line.⁴²⁶ Whilst La Porta focuses on the possibility of using Bagratuni claims as a way to challenge Georgian hegemony, it is just as plausible that avoiding rivalry from other Armenian families within the Georgian hegemonic sphere was more the focus of Orbeli claims towards rulership. It was clearly not solidly endorsed among Armenian nobles: Apirat and his brother Bishop Barsegh, when successfully petitioning for Ani, were effectively refusing to recognise Ivane's claimed status. This indicates a situation in which the Orbelis were able to influence and maintain serious interest in goings-on in Armenia, and in which they were utilising historical claims to bolster their position – but, nonetheless, it suggests too that the Orbelis were limited in their capabilities and to some extent

⁴²⁴ KT, 244. jg II, 38.

⁴²⁵ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 74.

⁴²⁶ La Porta, 'Lineage, Legitimacy, and Loyalty', 138.

counterbalanced by royal patronage of other Armenian or Armeno-Georgian families and by competing Armenian understandings of the right to rulership. There is no suggestion anywhere, meanwhile, that the Mkhargrdzelis were at risk of being displaced at any point in Tamar's reign.

In Georgian historiography, Mkhargrdzeli or Zakarid Armenia has been seen as fundamentally integrated within the Georgian polity, and Shirvan conversely more or less outside it as a client state. Both conceptions may be too firm in their positions. Our sources suggest that the Mkhargrdzelis were essentially the point of brokerage with the royal power for most of Armenia by the end of our period, limiting the integration of governance, and representing the promotion of the Mkhargrdzelis to a more clearly princely rank. Attempts to represent Armenian rulers and brokers as heirs of earlier Bagratunis need not, however, have meant a separatist or regionalist political agenda: Georgian monarchs could themselves benefit from the recognition of those who had such representations, and like in Shirvan, being a ruler of king certainly did not necessarily imply a complete lack of vassalage obligations. The Mkhargrdzelis were indeed more intimately tied into the Bagrationid political system than the Shirvan-shahs, and indeed by late in Tamar's reign running the high offices of the polity was becoming something of a family business. We have evidence, too, that Tamar was asked to endorse certain military actions on the Mkhargrdzelis' part: being the amirsp'asalar of the Georgian mepe both came with increased ability to mobilise force and influence wider politics across the Caucasus and yet, at the same time, a more restricted set of options on how and when that power could be deployed.

THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Georgia's natural border to its north, the North Caucasus mountain range, is a formidable one. With relatively few crossing points, it does seem to have often acted as a barrier to peoples of the steppe and grassland regions to the north entering the Transcaucasus, albeit a semi-permeable one. We can perhaps divide the people of the North Caucasus into two vague categories. Firstly, mountain peoples, especially the Ossetians (or Alans) but also smaller

peoples such as the Durdzuks: these included semi-mobile pastoralists but also sizeable sedentary populations, with a number of settlements in the Alanian foothills linking up mountain herding regions and plains agriculture.⁴²⁷ Beyond and further north, the steppes included Turkic peoples like the Kipchaks who occasionally got drawn into south Caucasus affairs.

The principal settled northern neighbours to be mentioned repeatedly in our sources are the Ossetians, or Alans.⁴²⁸ Alania's rulers were Chalcedonian Christians like their Georgian neighbours, and married into the Georgian royal line on a number of occasions. In the twelfth century the details of politics are sparse indeed: there is some debate as to whether there was a single Alan polity or not in this period.⁴²⁹ We get very little idea from the chronicles of how Ossetians in general were seen by Georgians, but the few hints are not positive. For example, a notable mention in the chronicles occurs when it comes to justice in Tamar's reign, in which Ossetians (as well as Kipchaks) are mentioned among a series of groups who did not steal due to the effectiveness of Tamar's justice – the heavy implication being that this would have been their usual behaviour.⁴³⁰ The Ossetians were certainly aligned with Georgia, and are mentioned alongside Kipchaks among sources of troops Giorgi III could draw upon in the Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and his time: we unfortunately do not know if these were formally sent by the Ossetian polity, or if Ossetian fighters simply tended to seek service in Georgia's armies in search of opportunities to gain wealth.⁴³¹

The Ossetian depiction is, however, reversed when it comes to a prosopographical view of *individual* Ossetians portrayed in the source material. The most notable of these is Tamar's second husband David Soslan, who is given a very favourable portrayal by all of Tamar's

⁴²⁷ Treyman, J., Cartographic attribution of medieval Alan cities according to medieval written sources and archaeological research materials " *E3S Web of Conferences* 281, 02015 (2021), 2.

⁴²⁸ The terms are interchangeable by this period. See Latham-Sprinkle, J., 'One Alania or two? The question of a 'dual state' in the seventh to twelfth century North Caucasus.' *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 24 (2018): 185–208.

⁴²⁹ Vinogradov, A., *The History and Art of Christian Alania*, (Moscow, 2019), 252, argues for two polities: Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or two?' argues for one.

⁴³⁰ KT, 203; jg I, 369.

⁴³¹ KT, 202; jg I, 367.

chroniclers. David was an Ossetian royal, though he would have had very much a cross-cultural upbringing, having been brought up by Tamar's aunt Rusudan, herself a Sultan's widow and thereby a link beyond the immediate Georgian world. David is not alone in his favourable portrayal, however, so we cannot say that his exception is a singular one. A number of other unnamed Ossetians appear in the material, in particular as suitors, one of whom is said to have died of a broken heart after failing to win Tamar's hand in marriage.⁴³² Here, the Ossetian knight is given a tragic ending worthy of the sorts of figures seen in contemporary courtly literature: death by heartbreak is nearly the fate of the Knight in Panther Skin's eponymous title character.⁴³³ The individual heroic portrayal of Ossetians is not mentioned as being despite their origin – rather, there simply seems to be a disconnect between the implications of being Ossetian as applied to nobility and as applied to commoners.

The marital connections between Georgia and Ossetia were several in our period. At the least, there were three: a sister of David IV who married in Ossetia, Burdukhan's marriage to Giorgi III, and David's marriage to Tamar.⁴³⁴ Indeed a part of the suggestion that there were at least two Ossetian royal lines is based on the theorised relationship of Burdukhan, Tamar's mother, and David Soslan, her husband: if they were from the same royal line within recent generations, the thesis goes, then Tamar's marriage would likely have been consanguine, and we know from the aforementioned case of Aghsartan that this was used as an argument against marriage at the time. We know little about the remaining genealogy: Burdukhan's father was called Khuddan, but other relationships are very much lacking in contemporary evidence.⁴³⁵ Whilst Latham-Sprinkle's solution of demoting David to a wholly non-royal status is not entirely convincing – it is not clear that the passage on humility associated with David's marriage in the History and Eulogy refers to David's own origins, and his relationship to Rusudan's aunt would be implausible were his family of a particularly low status – it seems plausible that he was not from

⁴³² KT, 243; ქს II, 37-38.

⁴³³ Rustaveli trans. Wardrop, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, 196.

⁴³⁴ KT, 247; 203; 288; ქს II, 46-47; ქს I, 369; ქს II, 116.

⁴³⁵ Latham-Sprinkle, 'One Alania or two?' 19; KT, 228; ქს II, 4.

the most senior parts of the royal line. We can perhaps suggest, too, that the Georgian texts are on occasion somewhat liberal in attribution of kingly rank – see below for the example of the Durdzuks, who are shown as having multiple kings – such that a Georgian chronicler might have had no problem with the idea that a prince from an offshoot branch of the Ossetian royal line that was powerful enough to hold some land, branching off 3-4 generations earlier such that he shared a great-great-grandparent with Tamar (if he was descended from a sister of David IV), could still classify as the son of a king. We can note too that Georgian, lacking definite and indefinite articles, never needs specify whether it is the son of “a” or “the” Ossetian king. This could make him a degree less closely related to Tamar than was Aghsartan, which would make him pose less of a consanguinity problem.

This consanguinity problem has some interest in the question of what the practical boundaries on Bagrationid action were – with marriage as an important tool of diplomacy, restrictions due to consanguinity would decrease freedom of action in this regard – though as noted the evidence is unfortunately unclear. We know both that some peoples in the Caucasus did practice consanguine marriage in this period and that there could be objections raised on those grounds without knowing the balance. What we can determine from Georgian Bagrationid marriages with Alan-Ossetian spouses is that these were politically convenient relations to have: marrying into a different court avoided any appearance of marrying beneath their station, and the Ossetians were the most convenient Chalcedonian neighbours. The North Caucasus range itself, coupled with Alania-Ossetia’s likely far weaker resource position, also prevented any risk of the Ossetians holding or pressing claims in Georgia. This strong link suggests, then, that rulers’ marriage policy in our period tended to be somewhat cautious: that, perhaps in part because of how important Bagrationid lineage was to ruling the polity, it was more important to focus on marriages that were no threat to status rather than a more aggressive marital policy aimed at strengthening ties or securing additional land claims.

A number of other peoples of the North Caucasus range and beyond are mentioned in the Georgian material: the Durdzuks, Pkhovians, and Didoans. With the exception of a campaign against them toward the end of Tamar's reign, they are largely absent from the chronicle texts, although we should not necessarily see this as being a measure of low importance to Georgia – as a result of the focus of most Georgian chroniclers on matters of court and warfare, large parts of Georgia itself slip by for entire books of the chronicles with little mention.

The Pkhovian and Didoian rising, probably late in Tamar's reign and only mentioned in the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs*, deserves a little further attention. They are presented in the chronicles as 'rebels' and having 'broken away', which suggests a high degree of expectation of their alignment with Georgia.⁴³⁶ The Pkhovians are shown as non-Christians while the Didoians were not: both are blamed for a spate of pillaging and kidnapping. The Durdzuks, who fought on the Georgian side and gave tribute to Ivane Mkhargrdzeli who led the counter-rebel expedition, are presented as having kings. This again shows the Georgian monarch in the role of Shahanshah – whilst the Pkhovians and Didoians are treated by the text as being lawless and punished for disobedience, the Durdzuks as a Georgian ally are recognised as having their own royal leadership.

Whilst the presentation is one of putting down a rebellion, then, we should perhaps see this as more akin to the usual Georgian *modus operandi* elsewhere. We are told that pillaging took place before Ivane's arrival, and we can imagine that either merchants or local political leaders may have petitioned the court for assistance. The focus of the text is on these transgressions, rather than on breaking with the Bagrationids in a more symbolically rebellious way (such as refusing tributary payments they may have owed, for example). After the conflict, the defeated parties agreed to 'serve and pay duties' – presumably largely a tribute arrangement given the noted difficulty of reaching the remote mountain regions mentioned in the text. They also, critically, sent hostages to the Georgian court, which implies firstly that this was a matter of

⁴³⁶ KT, 276; *JO* II, 111.

dealing with the sort of regional elites one could take such hostages from, and second that such personal connections were seen as critical to relations with the region. The Georgian strategy therefore fits with the interventionism we see elsewhere: imposing situation-specific obligations rather than expanding the state itself, utilising personal connections with elites to manage regional situations, and placing the Bagrationids in a role of a monarch above monarchs as much as or more than a direct potentate.

The peoples further north of the Caucasus range are a different story and see far fewer interactions – here, Turkic Kipchaks are by far the most prominent example, and are almost solely mentioned from the perspective of military engagements. David IV had essentially resettled large numbers of Kipchaks in Georgia, providing pasture in exchange for cavalry service in a fashion perhaps adopted from similar Byzantine policies.⁴³⁷ Thereafter Kipchaks continued to be notable in Georgian forces for the remainder of the century. It is difficult for us to speak of any sort of policy towards Kipchaks outside the Georgian polity after David's time: whilst we do have named Kipchak figures within Georgia, notably Giorgi III's amirsp'asalar Q'ubasar who was integral in facing down the Orbeli rebellion, it is not clear if such people were actually from outside Georgia or whether they were *Georgian* Kipchaks, that is to say mostly the second generation of families David IV had invited in.

It is possible that Kipchaks or similar peoples were involved in the Shirvan-Derbent war that Giorgi III intervened in: loose references to Khazars and Alans appear alongside those to Russians in Khaqani's account.⁴³⁸ Beyond this singular example, we do not have evidence of significant incursions either by North Caucasus steppe peoples into the Transcaucasus or any significant military engagements in the reverse direction. One rare example of a Kipchak ruler coming into the chronicles is Sevinj, who is briefly mentioned because it was at his court that Iuri Bogolyubsky was staying before being invited to come to Georgia and marry Tamar.⁴³⁹ It is

⁴³⁷ KT, 178; jg I, 335-336.

⁴³⁸ Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 37-40.

⁴³⁹ KT, 243; jg II, 36.

interesting that the links to him seem to have come from members of Tamar's court rather than the Bagrationids directly, implying that at least court level aristocrats did have their own links deep into the North Caucasus and implying much wider social networks beyond the reach of our sources. Beyond that, Sevinj only plays a major role in our sources as a linking point between the Georgian court and Iuri. His brother Salavat is nonetheless mentioned as having served in Georgian forces intervening in the Eldiguzid civil war, indicating more of an ongoing relationship than is generally apparent from the sources and one that had not been severed by Tamar's rejection of Iuri as a husband.⁴⁴⁰

In general, relations with peoples and individuals in the North Caucasus suggest that Georgian monarchs and nobility alike had significant interests and connections in the region, as well as Georgia continuing to draw on manpower from the North Caucasus for military campaigns. There were no significant pressures on Georgia from that direction, and nor did Georgia make any serious attempts to enforce or expand its interests in general – though, at least in Tamar's reign, it had some capability to do so. Despite the low regard in which certain North Caucasus peoples may have been held, the presentation and treatment of individual North Caucasus allies as high-status may have been one of the most important parts of these relationships – providing important legitimization and status increases for both parties.

TREBIZOND

The foundation of the Empire of Trebizond after the 1204 Crusader capture of Constantinople was one of the most striking pieces of Georgian military adventuring during this period. The resulting state lasted a quarter of a millennium. However, explanations for the expedition, for the long-term background of Georgian-Byzantine relations in the 12th century, and how the new Trapezuntine state fitted into the overlapping spheres of both Georgian and Byzantine politics

⁴⁴⁰ KT, 255; յԾ II, 64.

are many and wildly varied, aided by the significantly different perspectives of both the medieval Georgian and Greek sources and of modern scholars in the respective fields.

The generally accepted facts of the situation that arose in 1204 are that around the time of the Crusader capture of Constantinople, David and Alexios “Megas Komnenos”, the grandsons of Emperor Andronikos Komnenos, had been living in Georgia for some years after the deposition of their grandfather. The Komnenoi had long had some links in the Caucasus, including a marriage alliance earlier in the century and Andronikos spending time there in Giorgi III’s reign, but Byzantium was militarily absent from the region by this point. In 1204, David and Alexios left Tamar’s court at the head of an army of Georgians, and captured Trebizond, the principal city of the eastern Pontus. After capturing Sinope and parts of the western Pontus as well, they ultimately ended up losing battles against the Nicaean-based Byzantine successor faction led by Theodore Laskaris, often referred to as the “Empire of Nicaea”. This halted the Megakomnenian advances, but did not reverse them, and from this newly conquered stretch of land along the Pontus Alexios ultimately founded his new Empire of Trebizond.

Georgian scholars have had a tendency to historiographically depict the Trapezuntine expedition as being essentially a part of Tamar’s wider policy objectives in some way, for example claiming it within a “buffer states” system or proposing it as existing within a policy to secure access to specific trade routes.⁴⁴¹ Conversely, Byzantinists have tended to sideline the question of Georgian involvement, writing about the foundation of the Trapezuntine polity as if it were part of wider Byzantine processes of disintegration and secession of outlying areas, all happening in a more or less endogenous (with the exception of the Fourth Crusade) system.⁴⁴²

Both of these perspectives have flaws. Whilst it makes every sense to consider Tamar’s policy objectives, from a purely geopolitical standpoint control Trebizond offered Georgia little – as

⁴⁴¹ Met’reveli, *The Golden Age*, 155, gives the buffer state theory in his narrative; Gabashvili, ‘International trade coordination of Christian and Islamic worlds on basis of numismatic materials, Xth-XIIIth CC.’, 163-165, for the trade routes thesis.

⁴⁴² See as examples Magdalino, P. *The Empire of Manuel Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 491; Angold, M. *The Byzantine Empire 1025-1204* (London, 1984), 276.

discussed further below there was no realistic westwards coastal threat to counter with a buffer state, and the resulting Empire of Trebizond was too detached and independent to offer significant alternative benefits in financial or manpower terms. Meanwhile, it is clear that this was not simply Georgia being somehow inexorably pulled into the “main event” that was Byzantine collapse: Georgia’s westwards relations were shaped in the 12th century in no small part by how *distant* Byzantium was treated as being, as discussed in more detail in the section on Byzantium below. This was, on the part of the Georgians, very much a war of choice. Their links to Byzantium via marriage – which were somewhat few – were important in permitting them access to intervene in Byzantine politics, but the presence of the Megakomnenoi as Byzantine exiles in their court did not force Tamar into a war with Byzantium any more than Andronikos’ exile had done for her father.

One question that has been discussed at length in the literature in relation to this topic is the precise relationship between the *Megakomnenoi* and Tamar. Panaretos’ later Trapezuntine chronicle refers to her as *pros patros theia*, a phrase which broadly means “paternal aunt” but which has received considerable attention as to its exact meaning without any resulting certainty.⁴⁴³ Between them Vasiliev, Kunik and Toumanoff in the early mid twentieth century proposed that marriages of unnamed Georgian princesses may have happened to almost every twelfth century generation of the Komnenoi: the somewhat obscure princess K’ata to Anna Komnene’s son Alexis, a hypothetical sister of Tamar’s to Alexios and David’s father Manuel, a hypothetical sister of Giorgi III to Andronikos himself, and possibly further unspecified marital alliances or even illegitimate children.⁴⁴⁴ I propose no additional theory or resolution to this particular problem, except to suggest that it is a problem that may not be as important to the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond as the discussions of it might suggest. None of the

⁴⁴³ Michael Panaretos, trans. Asp-Talwar, A., *Chronicle*, in Eastmond, A. (ed.), *Byzantium’s Other Empire: Trebizond* (Istanbul, 2016), 188. The discussion in Toumanoff, “On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Thamar” covers the different positions in depth.

⁴⁴⁴ Toumanoff, “On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Thamar”; Vasiliev, A.A., ‘The Foundation of The Empire of Trebizond (1204-122)’, *Speculum* 11 No. 1 (1936), 3-37.

sources in this project appear to shed additional light on the subject, and from a socio-political perspective it is not clear that it is of particular relevance. Both Greek and Georgian sources agree that they were related, and it is clear that the relationship was sufficient to support Alexios and David's position at Tamar's court: whether they were Tamar's nephews or great-nephews once or twice removed does not appreciably affect the mechanisms of power in this case.

More interesting is that we know relatively little about Bagrationid treatment of non-direct line relatives, in part because most male ones had disappeared or been killed as part of internal feuds over the course of the century. We therefore have relatively few antecedents to suggest what Tamar might have considered her obligations towards David and Alexios to be. The closest familial links for the family tended to be outside Georgia and result from marriages of Bagrationid women to rulers of other polities – the Megakomnenoi are one example, but so as noted earlier are the rulers of Shirvan. The Georgian treatment of Andronikos Komnenos as an honoured guest and military leader rewarded with land during his exile there might be more of an indication and certainly forms the closest analogy for David and Alexios, his grandsons.⁴⁴⁵

The nature of the Georgian forces and the terms under which they served poses an additional interesting question. Choniates characterises them as mercenary in nature.⁴⁴⁶ The Georgian sources seem to represent them more as a Georgian army of Tamar's, which could imply conversely that they were "regular" Georgian forces.⁴⁴⁷ This may not, however, be such a dilemma – it is perfectly plausible that Tamar put together the army and provided its initial funding, with the expectation that once under David and Alexios' command they would be fighting largely for pay. We may note with interest the apparent lack of any major Georgian political figure on the campaign – Tamar does not seem to have been personally represented via a *sp'asalar* or other appointee senior enough to merit record in the sources. This militates

⁴⁴⁵ KT, 234-235; *ᵈᶖ* II, 16-17.

⁴⁴⁶ Niketas Choniates trans. Magoulias, H.J., *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), 343.

⁴⁴⁷ KT, 300-301; *ᵈᶖ* II, 142.

against the idea that this was a “Georgian expedition” as opposed to a Megakommenian expedition with Georgian troops. In turn, then, this indicates against Georgian buffer state theories.

With these points taken into account, we can consider the known path of the invasion as a strong indicator of the brothers’ planned goals. Specifically, whilst Alexios remained in Trebizond, David and most of the Georgian forces moved down the Pontus at some speed, stopping only when reaching Heracleia Pontica in the summer of 1205 and ultimately being turned back by the Lascarids at that point.⁴⁴⁸ Both Byzantinists and Georgian scholars who have posited David and Alexios’ actions as being intended for the foundation of a new state among the Greeks of the eastern Pontus have failed to explain, were that the case, why on earth David ended up so far west so quickly. Trebizond was miles beyond the reach of any remotely effective counterattack from any of the players around Constantinople itself: had they simply wanted to take it, secure it, and sit there, they could have done so without interference.

The solution is a simple one: there was no plan to turn Trebizond into an independent state. The plan was to make either David or Alexios (probably the latter) the Byzantine Emperor, seated in Constantinople.⁴⁴⁹ Byzantine politics, even into the turbulent later parts of the twelfth century, were heavily focused on Constantinople as a legitimising mechanism. Whilst some Byzantinists point to Theodore Mangaphas of Philadelphia as an exemplar of a supposed provincial decomposition that they suggest included Trebizond “falling away”, more instructive cases might be those of Alexios Branas, who turned his armies back on Isaac Angelos’ Constantinople, or Andronikos Lapardas, a rebel against Andronikos I to whom the chronicler Niketas Choniates gives an actual discussion detailing his thinking on which part of the Empire would give him the

⁴⁴⁸ Choniates trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 343.

⁴⁴⁹ Some Byzantinists have made this suggestion but usually with little elaboration or as a side note to a provincial decomposition thesis: Bryer, A., ‘David Komnenos and Saint Eleutherios’, *Archeion Pontou* 42, 178; Karpov, S., ‘The Black Sea Region Before and After the Fourth Crusade’, in *Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences; La IVe Croisade et ses conséquences* (Paris, 2005), 285-286.

best approach to the capital.⁴⁵⁰ The fact that some rebellions stalled at a provincial level and thus led to those areas falling away need not lead us to then assume that those rebellions had intended to end up in that position. The greatest likelihood is that the rapid Megakomnenian advance along the Pontic coast was directly aimed at Constantinople itself.

We should not, therefore, see the foundation of the Empire of Trebizond as part of a “buffer state” strategy, or indeed as a conscious attempt to found a client-state at all. Rather, it was a direct attempt at intervention in Byzantine politics on the part of Georgia. Whilst Byzantium was far from Georgia, the benefits to Georgia of having a friendly Emperor could have been considerable. Whilst we should not over-state the value of trade, for example, we do know that Georgian traders did business in Constantinople, and this may have been a factor in an era where Byzantine deals in trade privileges were a major political flashpoint as per the various conflagrations between Byzantium and the Venetians or Genoese. Equally importantly, this was a matter of prestige: the Georgian claim to be King of Kings in the east and on a footing with the Kings of the Greeks in the west would have been bolstered significantly by a successful intervention in the latter’s political world. We should also not discount the *casus belli* given in the Georgian chronicles of Alexios Angelos appropriating funds sent for use at Mount Athos. Georgia’s westward religious connections were important enough to merit their inclusion in how Tamar was presented, and precisely because Georgian monarchs were often limited in their active promotion of Orthodoxy in the immediate political sphere it may have been important to them to show their generosity as donors and church-builders.

The impact of this interventionism was mixed. It did have a lasting impact, and could be written up by a Georgian chronicler as the successful creation of a new state indebted to Tamar for its existence. Compared to its probable original goals, however, it was actually a policy failure: the Megakomnenoi never did sit on the Constantinopolitan throne. Georgia and Byzantium interacted in a way that was defined by their distance as much as their potential closeness, and

⁴⁵⁰ For Lapardas’ rebellion, Choniates trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 154-155. For that of Branas, *ibid*, 207-213.

the outcome of the Trapezuntine campaign ultimately underlined that reality. The lack of mention of the campaign in the *History and Eulogy of Monarchs*, despite its significant geographical scale and what must have been a notable resource investment on Tamar's part, may hypothetically even reflect a mild embarrassment on the part of Georgian elites at the gambit's outcome, whilst the *Life of Tamar* instead opts to portray the expedition more in terms of elevating a fellow but subordinate ruler in status, fitting with the approach we saw Tamar and her predecessors take when it came to other nearby polities.

THE ELDIGUZIDS AND THE SOUTH-EAST

Beyond the borders of the Bagrationids' friendlier neighbours, the Eldiguzid dynasty was Georgia's primary strategic rival in the south Caucasus for much of our period. As noted in the section on terminology in chapter one, they are also often referred to as Ildeguzids or by a range of other variants on the name: here the Georgian ელდოგუზი is used as the basis for the orthography. The Eldiguzids are referred to as such after their dynastic founder, Eldiguz (Šams-al-dīn Īldegoz). They were hypothetically subordinates of the Seljuk sultanate, but enjoyed a large degree of independence – indeed in some senses and at certain times dominance – whilst still being, at least until late in our period, politically locked into the Seljuk system.

The dominance of the Eldiguzids was not yet established at the start of our period. Nakhchivan was an important initial centre for the dynasty. Eldiguz, who according to sources from the Muslim world started his career as a slave, solidified his power through the 1130s and 1140s before spending the 1150s embroiled in the political intrigues that led to him becoming atabeg of the Seljuk sultanate and able to act with the monarch's nominal authority.⁴⁵¹ We therefore do not see him coming significantly into conflict with Georgia during Demet're's reign, although he

⁴⁵¹ Luther, K. A., 'Atābakān-e Āḍarbāyḡjān' *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. II, Fasc. 8, (2011), 890-894; Bosworth, C.E. (trans.), *The History of the Seljuq State*, 96-101.

was likely securing his hold over Arran and Iranian Azerbaijan during this period. It is in the 1160s and the reign of Giorgi III that Eldiguz starts entering the Georgian material.⁴⁵²

Georgian interests to the south-east were likewise more minimal in the first parts of our period. As noted earlier, Demet're raided and intervened in affairs in Arran, but Georgia does not seem to have been engaging in affairs in for example Nakhchivan, as it was clearly doing by the 1190s.⁴⁵³ Georgia is effectively unmentioned in Stepannos Orbelian's chronicle of Siunik for this earlier period, which spends more time covering the reduction or extinction of several local noble and clerical families. In Demet're's reign Dvin and the Araxes valley seem to have been outside the sphere where the Bagrationids were effectively operating. We therefore see that the lack of Eldiguzid conflict was partly because the dynasty was still expanding its power, but also that Bagrationid power was not being projected far into the southeast. Indeed even when in Giorgi III's reign Georgian forces reached Dvin, this appears to have been a sacking rather than a serious plan to project power into the region.⁴⁵⁴

In Eldiguz' conflict with Georgia in the 1160s, there was never a sufficiently clear outcome for one side to meaningfully claim absolute victory. This may suggest either that the goals for either side in wars were somewhat limited, or that neither side genuinely had the resources for long-term extension of control as opposed to shorter term wars and punitive expeditions. It may have been the case, too, that the loss or dispersal of local senior nobility recorded by Stepannos Orbelian for Siunik might have been more widespread across some of these heavily raided regions. If this was the case, it might have made solidifying longer term control more difficult for anyone as a result of the lack of local connections available in the area: a situation where it was hard to know who local power-brokers were made it harder in turn for regional polities to secure influence in a region.

⁴⁵² KT, 232; յՅ II, 11.

⁴⁵³ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 204.

⁴⁵⁴ KT, 229; յՅ II, 6; Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol 2, 135.

A particularly useful example in discussing the Eldiguzid-Georgian frontiers is the career of Stepannos, a long-serving bishop of Siunik whose reign lasted from the 1160s onwards, coming after a period with high turnovers and gaps in appointments to the bishopric. His similarly named later successor, Stepannos Orbelian, notes in his chronicle that Stepannos was well liked by the Eldiguzids, and claims that he was given a charter by them – four of them, in fact, covering three generations of the family (Eldiguz himself, his sons Q'izil-Arslan and Muhammad Jahan Pahlavan, and the latter's son Abu Bakr). We see here a reflection of the Georgians' own operations in the Caucasus: co-opting the local nobility in any given area was an option of first, not last, resort, even where these links crossed religious lines. But Bishop Stepannos was not only given support from the Eldiguzid side: he was also granted land and recognition by the Georgian rulers.⁴⁵⁵

A question arises here of considerable interest – whether the Georgian-Mkhargrdzeli grants to Stepannos happened later and as a result of Georgia gaining power in the Siunik region, or whether Stepannos was able to position himself in the good graces, and operating across the borders of, the Eldiguzid and Georgian polities simultaneously. Unfortunately Stepannos Orbelian gives us comparatively little help in this regard. We can note that the interactions with the Eldiguzids which can be placed on some sort of chronology are specifically early in Stepannos' tenure, whereas interactions with the Mkhargrdzelis must have been relatively late, probably not before the 1190s when the Mkhargrdzelis reached their full prominence at Tamar's court. It is therefore possible that his varying relations largely reflect a pivot of Siunik potentates' alignment towards Georgian rather than Eldiguzid patronage, rather than necessarily a contemporaneous connection with both. We can note, however, that Siunik was probably not under Mkhargrdzeli control yet when Stepannos assisted in getting Liparit' the younger, the last heir to the Orbelis, smuggled away from Siunik to Georgia along with his mother. This operation definitively shows that Stepannos must have had some significant connections both inside and outside the Bagrationid polity. Cross-border actions, even ones

⁴⁵⁵ Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 179-180.

with clear political import, happened via lateral connections and not just at the level of the polities' leaders.

In Tamar's reign, the Eldiguzid clan became divided: after the death of Eldiguz' heir Muhammad Jahan Pahlavan in the mid 1180s, conflict broke out between Q'izil-Arslan, Pahlavan's brother, and Pahlavan's wife Inanj Khatun who wished to see her sons succeed her husband. Q'izil-Arslan was murdered probably not long after 1190, and Pahlavan's son Abu-Bakr succeeded him, followed by a conflict between Abu-Bakr and his brother Amir Miran.⁴⁵⁶ The late 1170s and 1180s therefore saw weakened Georgian-Eldiguzid interactions: Muhammad Jahan Pahlavan moved his focus south from the family's traditional base in Nakhchivan, and Q'izil-Arslan was too unstable in his rule to be making many serious attempts at projecting power. The possibility of a familial link being forged was greatest at this point, as reportedly a son of Q'izil-Arslan's was among unsuccessful suitors to Tamar.⁴⁵⁷ Interestingly we get a suggestion that the atabeg disapproved of his son's courtship on religious grounds: the individual incentive for advancement on the part of the son did not necessarily align with the preferences of the father or the polity.

Q'izil-Arslan's relative hostility to Georgia also seems to have included sponsoring Iuri Bogolyubsky's second attempt to return to power in Georgia, providing him with a base of support.⁴⁵⁸ From the atabeg's perspective this may have been treated as a comparatively inexpensive and indirect way to inconvenience his political rivals without staking significant quantities of his own wealth or prestige on the operation, though the fact that Iuri was defeated by a scratched-together local force led by an otherwise unattested noble suggests surprising under-preparedness: perhaps Iuri wrongly believed that he still had a significant support base in Georgia, which would further lend credence to the idea that Q'izil-Arslan's sponsorship of him was a low cost option while he focused his efforts further south.

⁴⁵⁶ KT, 254; յԹ II, 62.

⁴⁵⁷ KT, 246; յԹ II, 42.

⁴⁵⁸ KT, 254; յԹ II, 61.

The conflict of the 1190s between Miran and Abu-Bakr was much more focused on the Caucasus. Amir Miran had familial links with the Shirvan-shahs, and they jointly petitioned the Georgian monarchs for aid.⁴⁵⁹ Georgian forces won the resulting Battle of Shamkhor, but the victory and Amir Miran's rulership of Ganja were short-lived: he was dead, quite possibly murdered, not long afterwards, with Abu-Bakr once again taking control.⁴⁶⁰

This episode encapsulates a number of common themes of Georgian interactions with their neighbours in the twelfth century. Firstly, the Bagrationids' entry into the conflict was not entirely proactive, or on the basis of noticeable ideological or territorial claims: rather, it came via brokerage and family ties, networks of personal interaction. Second, the form of conflict was interventionist more than true territorial expansionism. The ideal outcome being aimed for may well have been Amir-Miran ruling in Ganja in a relationship similar to that they had with the Shirvan-shahs. Certainly Amir-Miran coming to petition the Georgian court suggests this, as does the fact that the Shamkhor campaign ended with the capture of Ganja rather than pressing further into Eldiguzid territory in a serious attempt to dethrone Abu-Bakr fully. Importantly, this further underlines that the case of Shirvan, and the state of religious and cultural differences bridged by that alliance, were not necessarily conceptualised as a unique allowance solely made possible by unusual familial circumstances. Further Muslim rulers within the realm of a Georgian *Shahanshah* were not only theoretically possible, but in this case seem likely to have been a policy goal actively pursued.

A proper assessment of the Eldiguzids' strategic objectives is somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, but we can provide a few notes here. They did contest control of territory with Georgia, but these contests were limited in scope: whilst the Eldiguzids were likely keen to curb extension of Georgian authority over their northern and western border regions, and Georgia was keen to see the reverse, it is hard to characterise any military exchange between the two as a full scale war of conquest. The one Georgian expedition that did head deep into Persia is

⁴⁵⁹ KT, 255; յԹ II, 63.

⁴⁶⁰ KT, 260; յԹ II, 76.

characterised as more concerned with sacking and raiding settlements than taking or holding territory. We should take the Eldiguzid-Georgian wars seriously, but there was no equivalent battle to a Didgori or Basiani in any of them – perhaps the most discussed single battle in our sources is Shamkhor, which was explicitly a Georgian intervention in an intra-Eldiguzid conflict. We should not, in short, expect that either side aimed their wars to be existential in nature.

Control of cities and influence with elites in the Caucasus were nonetheless clearly worth fighting for. Part of this may have related to resources thereby gained, though we do not find that the allocation of land to victorious armies and leaders to be a significant feature of how these wars are presented. Another aspect is that the Eldiguzids had important interests in other theatres to their southeast and southwest: their power in Persia was more secure when they did not have to watch their backs, and when Georgian raiding or capture of cities was not providing them with any political embarrassments.

There were probably also cases where war served short-term ends or maintained each side's positions rather than fulfilling broader strategic objectives. Loot seems to have been a notable feature of Georgian raids into Persia, and is mentioned numerous times at the end of campaigns against the Eldiguzids, so there may have been fiscal incentives either directly for each side's treasuries and their rulers' prestige or indirectly for rewarding subordinate leaders and their men. We certainly have some lavish descriptions of loot in the Georgian material.⁴⁶¹ Conversely, the stark pictures of depopulation in some Armenian texts about the middle part of the century suggest a rather less prosperous landscape.⁴⁶² It is consequently a little difficult to know how effective raids through already war-hit regions would have been for looting, although the productivity of some areas may have become rather decoupled from their sources of moveable wealth, focused in cities, fortresses, and monastic communities.

⁴⁶¹ KT, 299; յԹ II, 140.

⁴⁶² Stepannos Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 179.

We therefore see that conflicts may have been about a mixture of plunder, intervention in neighbours' affairs, to show strength to subordinates, and to put each state in the best possible position for securing control of local areas – and local elites, just as importantly. We can see this aspect of co-option of elites among both dynasties, which had some similar approaches to power dynamics. Eldiguz' embrace of Elikum Orbeli is of interest in this regard: the promotion of the son of an exile to be an important land-owner near Nakhchivan may well have been influenced by Elikum already being from an Armeno-Georgian family, thus improving his chances of having and making further connections in the mostly Armenian Christian area where he had been granted lands. Elikum's marriage to Khatun (or Xatun), a woman from Chahuk, then cemented his ties locally.⁴⁶³ Whilst not a perfect mirror of some of the Bagrationids' processes of elite co-option, it clearly sits within a similar framework to that in which Amir-Miran or even the Shirvan-shahs might have been envisaged from the Georgians' perspective, or Guzan T'aosk'areli might have been from that of the rulers of Khlat.

The Georgian material records no direct familial ties between the Eldiguzids and Bagrationids, but Ibn al-Athir claims that Atabeg Abu-Bakr eventually married a 'daughter of the Georgian king' as a way to stop Georgian raiding, an event he places in 1205.⁴⁶⁴ This poses certain problems as to which family member is being discussed: Tamar's sister Rusudan was a widow in 1205 and may be the most plausible option, but might have been somewhat old as a marriage prospect given she was likely born in the 1160s. Tamar's daughter Rusudan, conversely, was only eleven at the time. Whether this person indeed needs to be identified as one of the immediate family is not certain, that said: we can see for example a suitor of Tamar's being married to a woman 'who they called the King's daughter,' possibly a bastard of Giorgi III's though her parentage is unclear.⁴⁶⁵ A similar thing might have happened with Abu-Bakr. It is notable that this comes late in the period, when the Eldiguzids' star was noticeably in decline – Ibn al-Athir paints Abu-Bakr as a decidedly weak ruler, and the dynasty's less secure position in

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 203.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol.3, 113.

⁴⁶⁵ KT, 246-247; jg II, 44.

Iran coupled with Georgia's raiding and focus around Khlat in the southwest may have prompted a reassessment in favour of friendlier ties on both sides of the relationship. As aforementioned there were some indirect familial connections at earlier points, such as that between Amir-Miran and the Shirvan-shahs.

Just as we saw previously that in the courts of Georgia there was less practical resistance to non-Orthodox leadership than the sacralised nature of monarchy and warfare might have led one to initially imagine, when we turn to the Eldiguzids we therefore by no means see a relationship purely based on zero-sum or religiously fuelled conflict. From Rusudan's brokerage of peace in the 1160s to Abu-Bakr's marriage in the 1200s, the Eldiguzids and Bagrationids were able to communicate and negotiate a settlement that, if punctuated by brutal raiding, rarely truly threatened the core interests and territories of either dynasty. One of the two major wars that seems to have been fought between them, that over Shamkhor and Ganja in the 1190s, was indeed an intervention into Eldiguzid politics to reshape them in Georgia's favour rather than an attempt to remove the family from power. Lateral links such as those via Shirvan meant that the Bagrationids were able to intervene in internal aspects of the Eldiguzid polity and world, too, rather than simply treating them as a closed, rival polity.

One final reflection of the Eldiguzid influence on Georgia can perhaps be seen in Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's adoption of the title *Atabeg*, a notable political move toward the end of Tamar's reign – and also late in Abu-Bakr's, as they died at a similar time. By the decade of 1200-1210, the Mkhargrdzelis enjoyed a powerful position across much of Armenia, which included both Muslim and Armenian communities that had formerly been under Eldiguzid rule. The adoption of the Turkic title of atabeg should, therefore, not necessarily just be seen as an additional layer of power and titulature in a purely Georgian context, but also as a counterpoint and reflection of that of their Eldiguzid neighbours. By placing the Mkhargrdzelis on the same level as the Eldiguzids in name, the structure in Georgia, with a powerful atabeg at the side of the nominal monarch, reflected that which had been the case in the Seljuk political world until the

deposition of Toghrul III in the early 1190s. On the ground, in regions like Siunik where control might at times have been uncertain, it perhaps smoothed any possible transitions or gave the Mkhargrdzelis more of an edge in their own presentations of authority when it was clear that people could appeal to *an* atabeg, whether Zakarid or Eldiguzid.

THE ANATOLIAN BEYLIKS

The small principalities of easternmost Anatolia were variously opponents or tributaries of Georgia in struggles over land and recognition along the southwestern edge of the Bagrationids' immediate political world. In particular, the Sokmenid or Shah-i-Armen dynasty based in Akhlat, the Shaddadids of Ani, and the Saltukids of Erzurum were polities with whom Georgia had regular contact. Greater Anatolian powers like the Sultans of Rüm were occasionally drawn into the conflicts of the Caucasus, but this, as Peacock notes, was a rarity, and the smaller polities often looked eastward to the Seljuks of Iran as much as westward to their Anatolian kin.⁴⁶⁶

It was on its southern border that most Georgian territorial conflict took place during our period. After the restoration of the Shirvanshahs under Demet're, no Georgian ruler attempted to actually conquer the lowlands of what is now Azerbaijan to their east: raiding, defensive operations, and importantly intervention in local politics characterised Georgian operations there. To the south, on the other hand, Ani, K'ari, and Dvin in particular were all contested territory as we have seen.

The Shaddadid, Sokmenid and Saltukid Beys are notable through much of our period for their relative lack of characterisation, appearance, or naming in the Georgian chronicles, even compared to other Muslim dynasts like the Eldiguzid leaders. This shallow visualisation of them perhaps speaks to a relatively lower level of discourse and engagement: with the contested cities of Armenia and rugged T'ao between them, there was perhaps less pressure for Georgian rulers to seriously engage with the dynastic politics of those polities, whereas Shirvan was far

⁴⁶⁶ Peacock, A.C.S, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th Centuries', *Anatolian Studies* 56 (2006), 129.

closer to Tbilisi, less risky to engage with or visit, and had already seen much more direct political and military contact by the start of our period of study. Whilst the Muslim sources record some level of vassal status on the part of the Saltukids, for example, we do not see Georgian records of Saltukid rulers petitioning at their court or Georgian intervention on the Saltukids' behalf, implying a considerably looser relationship than was in place with Shirvan.

The Shaddadid dynasty were rulers of Ani, and reclaimed the city between 1125 and 1130 when it was surrendered by the Georgian noble, Abulet, who David IV had left in charge after capturing the city.⁴⁶⁷ The new Shaddadid ruler, Fadlun, is portrayed by Vardan Areweltsi as successful though short-lived: he died in 1130. The dynasty appears to have gone through a number of rulers, for Fadlun's brothers Xushsher and Mahmud succeeded him in short succession and then when we come next to the city in Vardan's account, in 1161, Giorgi III takes it from another Fadlun, who had succeeded his own brother Shatat. Eldiguz had another candidate, a son of Mahmud, to rule the city during his war with Giorgi III: the Georgians took the city again in the 1170s and again in the 1190s, and it is unclear under what circumstances it was lost between these later captures or whether the Shaddadids remained present. In any case, compared to other dynasts in the region this family are perhaps the hardest to discuss regarding their relations with Georgia precisely because they were of necessity fundamentally reactive: in Giorgi's reign it is clear that Shaddadid fortunes were dependent on more powerful Muslim rulers adopting their cause. Unlike in some other cases, we interestingly do not see Georgia trying to simply absorb or co-opt the Shaddadids: but as Muslim rulers over a majority Armenian Christian area, they were perhaps never the sort of secure option for local rule that, say, might have been true of the Shirvan-shahs.

The Sokmenid or Shah-i-Armen dynasty featured in a range of Muslim armies opposing the Georgians through the course of the twelfth century: the dynasty, based in Khlat (or Ahlat/Akhlat), occupied a wide swathe of Armenian territories to Georgia's south, and built

⁴⁶⁷ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 69.

marriage alliances with the Eldiguzids, though they went into significant decline after the mid 1180s.⁴⁶⁸ The Georgian chronicle also suggests that they harboured some exiles after the Orbeli rebellion, which may be a sign that there were more lateral connections between the Sokmenids and the Georgian nobility than our texts initially indicate, but certainly suggests that the Sokmenids were seen as sufficiently hostile to Georgia that they would not simply hand such individuals back again.

The Sokmenids were also the backers of the only significant attempt at what might be considered a 'local' revolt by a notable Georgian nobleman in the period, when Guzan T'aosk'areli attempted to defect along with his lands in the south-west of Georgia. The Sokmenid investment in this may not have been very great, for the otherwise little known Zakaria Asp'aanisdze of Pansakert was able to defeat Guzan with local forces. Even though Georgian chronicles written from the centre may have included minimal characterisation of the beyliks and diplomacy, networks of people at least in the border regions clearly included significant lateral contact between Georgian nobles and their Muslim neighbours in order for such an attempt to be possible.

The Saltukids of Erzurum, according to Peacock, had a rather friendlier trajectory with Georgia, shifting between uneasy allegiances through the middle of the century and absenting themselves from some of the anti-Georgian alliances – in one case very much at the last minute.⁴⁶⁹ Ibn al-Athir notes that in Giorgi Lasha's reign a post-Saltukid ruler of Erzurum wore ceremonial clothes gifted by the Georgian rulers, and specifically suggests fear as a motivator, noting that nobody could contest Georgia's power. Certainly Saltukid policy seems to have been some of the least confrontational among the powers of the region: they forged a marriage alliance with the Sokmenids whilst avoiding openly confronting Georgia, reducing their overall risk of significant war with either the Eldiguzid/Shah-i-Arman alliance or with the Georgians. We should question Ibn al-Athir's claim that the Saltukids were simply motivated by fear

⁴⁶⁸ Peacock, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries', 133.

⁴⁶⁹ Minorsky, V., *Studies in Caucasian History* (London, 1953), 90.

somewhat more, however. It might well have been true that fear was among their motivators, but the idea that nobody could contest the Georgians at this point has its limits. To return to our previous example, Guzan, who as a Georgian noble might have had as good an idea of Georgia's capacity as anyone, clearly felt that it was plausible that he would be able to pull an entire chunk of the south-west out of the Georgian orbit successfully. Whilst both Muslim and Georgian writers, for different reasons, spend some time claiming the impregnability of Georgian arms, the calculations of contemporaries suggest that by no means everyone at the time shared that viewpoint.

There seems to have been an intensification of connections by the later end of the period: a Muslim prince given the name Mut'apradin in the Georgian chronicles, who was one of Tamar's suitors, is identified as a grandson of Saldukh.⁴⁷⁰ The Saltukids were therefore willing to contemplate much closer ties to Georgia in the 1180s – but, on the other hand, seem to have then hosted Iuri as he prepared for his rebellion not many years later. Peacock suggests that there was an 1193 attack on the Saltukids in retribution for Iuri's rebellion, led by David Soslan and Giorgi Lasha.⁴⁷¹ The expedition may have been in celebration of the birth of Giorgi Lasha but was certainly not commanded by him, as he cannot have been more than three or four years old at that time. The presumed motive of retribution for supporting Iuri is nowhere suggested in the text, and it is not even entirely clear that the attack in question was directed at Erzurum, for the text seems to suggest the fighting actually happened at the gates of K'ari: if this is the city usually referred to as such then it was *en route* to Erzurum, certainly, but not part of the Saltukid domains. The presence of a Saltukid, Nasreddin, among those opposing the Georgians does nonetheless lend some significant credence to Peacock's case that the Saltukids had fallen out of the Georgian orbit, and quite rapidly too if one of their number had indeed been a suitor of Tamar's just a few years earlier.

⁴⁷⁰ Peacock, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries', 130; KT, 246-247; ქს II, 43.

⁴⁷¹ Peacock, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries', 131; KT, 252; ქს II, 58.

For the most part in the 1190s, we hear little of the Saltukids, whose ruler Melike Mama Hatun is sadly under-recorded given the potential interest of Tamar's Georgia having a neighbour likewise ruled by a woman. The Georgian chronicles give a final mention of the dynasty from around the time of Basiani, at which point the last Saltukid was deposed by Rukn ad-Din, the Seljuk sultan of Rum, who replaced him with his own brother. This sort of direct familial-integrationist move contrasts with the Georgian co-optionist systems we have discussed above. Whilst a subsequent Seljuk attack was famously defeated at Basiani, Erzurum appears to have remained in Seljuk hands thereafter, as at least for the remainder of the decade Georgian (or perhaps more accurately Mkhargrdzeli) raiding and ambitions were more focused on the former Sokmenid domains around Khlat.

The Sokmenids had collapsed somewhat after the mid 1180s, but the Mkhargrdzelis' expansion in Armenia in the 1200s brought the Georgians increasingly into contact with their former domains. Ivane's embarrassing capture during a siege of Khlat itself led to him agreeing to marry his daughter to the city's ruler of the time, Melik Ashraf.⁴⁷² Here we again see the importance of lateral cross-border connectivity between nobles below the highest level, with the ruler of Khlat forging a familial connection with a direct enemy who was not a co-religionist. Zakaria was still alive at this point, and was probably the senior of the brothers given his position as amirsp'asalar, so Ivane did not yet have the implied weight of power of the atabeg's position: despite this, a familial link with the Mkhargrdzelis would have provided Ashraf with a measure of additional protection from further attacks and, just as importantly, the possibility of connectivity into the Georgian world, providing him with new diplomatic options through these individual connections. The fact that this was desirable over and above marrying someone who shared Ashraf's faith, and was possible to negotiate (albeit from Ashraf being in a position of great strength), indicates both the degree of shared culture across the blurred edges of Bagrationid hegemony and the high value placed on such connections. We can also note the relative freedom of action Ivane seems to have had: there is little sense that this was truly a

⁴⁷² Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 82.

Bagrationid war, so much as the Mkhargrdzelis displaying significant capacity to wage war themselves on those outside the Bagrationid hegemony.

When it comes to assessing Georgia's relationship with these dynasties, the various beyliks face some of the same questions as we see with a polity like Shirvan, though with rather different parameters: to what extent these were rulers tributaries or vassals of Georgian monarchs, and to what extent they were strategic opponents of the Bagrationids, are still the core historiographical questions. In general, Georgian historiography has tended to show the beyliks as fundamental opponents of Georgia forced at times into unwilling tributary relationships: the aforementioned study by Andrew Peacock shows a somewhat more complex picture in which Erzurum in particular was drawn progressively into alignment with Georgia whilst the Sokmenids tended to align with the Persian Seljuks and Eldiguzids as strategic rivals.⁴⁷³

The involvement of these dynasties and their subordinates in the Caucasus was complex, and not necessarily driven entirely by simple contests over territorial control. Territory did certainly change hands, in some cases repeatedly, but local leaders and rulers alike clearly made calculations as to when it was worth retaining territory and we see clear cases, including more than once in the case of Ani, when it was deemed not to be. Even for a family like the Abuletisdzes, for whom Ani was likely their most major possession, retention in the face of overwhelming pressure could be assessed as too great a risk.⁴⁷⁴ Meanwhile, in the case of the capture of K'ari in 1206, the town's Muslim governor was simply granted lands elsewhere in exchange for the city.⁴⁷⁵ As with other wars in this period, plunder was treated as a major issue in the chronicles. We should question to what extent this made war fiscally worthwhile, or if it merely offset its costs: the exceptional treasures discussed in the chronicles might have been more important for prestige than for offsetting the likely high costs of maintaining an army. The benefits of loot are noted as being spread among more than the nobility, however, and practices

⁴⁷³ Peacock, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries', 130-131.

⁴⁷⁴ Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 69.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibn al-Athir trans. Richards, *Chronicle*, Vol. 3, 123-124.

such as selling captives appear to have been common, features which may imply a more heavily loot-driven set of motives for fighting.⁴⁷⁶ Pastoralist mounted Turks could, Peacock suggests, have been pointed at the Caucasus in part to keep them from causing any disturbance in Muslim rulers' own lands.⁴⁷⁷ There were, therefore, a range of factors and calculations driving war and land exchanges, and in some cases a risk-averse approach to ongoing potential costs.

Relations with the beyliks were by no means a matter of eternal conflict, though. The movement of exiles from Georgia to Shah-i-Armen, and the presence of a servant of Tamar's Georgian mech'urch'letukhutsesi in Erzurum, suggest that there may have been considerably more lateral connectivity than appears in our sources.⁴⁷⁸ It is not clear at any point that the Georgians made any significant attempt to bring Erzurum or Khlat fully under their control – possibly excepting Mkhargrdzeli pressure late in our period – or that this would have been desirable for the Bagrationids were it possible, considering their attitude to Shirvan which was far closer to Georgia's political centre. Familial ties were few but far from unthinkable, and seem to have been treated as desirable by numerous actors despite barriers of culture and religion. It is notable that late in the period, when the Mkhargrdzelis were able to put pressure on Khlat, we also see them for example holding court in Dvin, such that they may have become better able to move the centre of gravity of their operations south and away from Tbilisi. Even then, a mixture of raiding and pressure to accept nominal subordination tended to characterise relations better than wars of conquest: methods like the simple, forcible step of Rukn ad-Din in deposing the Saltukids of Erzurum seem to have remained largely outside the Georgian set of military and diplomatic tools.

⁴⁷⁶ KT, 292; 294; յԾ II, 125; 128.

⁴⁷⁷ Peacock, 'Georgia and the Anatolian Turks in the 12th and 13th centuries', 135.

⁴⁷⁸ KT, 248; 236; յԾ II, 48; 19; Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Vardan Areweltsi's Compilation of History*, 71.

Georgian social and political relations with the Rus, at least as far as our source material notes them, appear as relatively minimal in Caucasus sources in our period. Rus sources themselves need more examination, but for example the Kyivan Chronicle, part of the Hypatian Codex which covers most of our period, effectively leaves the Caucasus unmentioned.⁴⁷⁹ This should not be taken to mean that wider traffic and interest was likewise minimal, and indeed the details around out one major element of connection – Tamar’s first husband, Iuri Bogolyubsky – suggest that connections may have been stronger than the chronicle material tends to make visible.

Iuri was not in Georgia, nor so far as we know did he have any familiarity with the country, when he was suggested as a husband for Tamar: at the time he was staying with a Kipchak ruler named Sevinj.⁴⁸⁰ The suggestion was made by Abulasan, who held the title of emir of Tbilisi: when the decision had been made, a merchant (‘great merchant’ in the text, but it is unclear what this title might mean) named Zankan Zorbabeli was sent to present the idea and bring Iuri back to the Georgian court. The choice of a merchant for this purpose is of considerable interest, as it suggests active northwards connections at least based upon trade, such that someone with experience of those connections was an appropriate broker.

We can absolutely assume, too, that there was more regular contact taking place and Zorbabel’s mission was a more formal endpoint to the process: it seems vanishingly unlikely that Iuri had a merchant turn up out of the blue with a marriage offer, and indeed the likelihood of an upcoming marriage for Tamar would have been obvious for quite some time by this point. This is an interesting and important example of cross-border connections not solely being the preserve of the monarchy such that senior nobles could act to broker connections in their own right. We can reasonably suggest that either Abulasan had pre-existing connections with Iuri

⁴⁷⁹ Makhnovets, Leonid (trans). ЛІТОПИС РУСЬКИЙ за Іпатським списком, Izbornyk Virtual Library, <http://izbornyk.org.ua/litop/lit.htm>, accessed 01 Feb 2023.

⁴⁸⁰ КТ, 243; дж II, 36.

and his family, or with Sevinj, or both: the social capital acquired by brokering such a marriage was no doubt valuable, although it perhaps came with consequent risks if the marriage or alliance faltered. Abulasan does not appear among lists of Iuri's rebels, that said: we cannot easily connect the names most clearly connected to Iuri's rise to power to the later faction supporting Iuri's rebellion.⁴⁸¹ We should therefore not consider that there was a distinct 'pro-Rus' faction in any particular sense (and indeed Iuri himself was in effective exile at Sevinj's court, so the extent to which connections around him necessarily mapped onto connections to Rus more generally among the same individuals is not clear).

Beyond the particular case of Iuri, there is little to note. As mentioned earlier, Rus of some sort seem to have been a part of the Shirvan-Derbent war in Giorgi III's reign, but whilst the Shirvani poets suggest a significant force we have little to suggest any wider relations or diplomacy beyond the specific incursion. These may have been, as Hasan terms them, freebooters: the distance from any significant Rus polity certainly suggests that they were not directly part of any of them.⁴⁸²

One other possible case of elite interaction is raised in Toumanoff's aforementioned discussion of Tamar's relationship to the Komnenoi, where he on the basis of Russian material that the second wife of Iziaslav II of Kyiv was a Georgian, perhaps even Tamar's aunt Rusudan marrying a second time.⁴⁸³ This, he proposes, supports his proposition that otherwise unknown Georgian princesses may easily be 'discovered' despite not appearing in the Georgian material itself. Lordkipanidze mentions the same apparent marriage, though she suggests it was to a sister rather than a daughter of Demet're.⁴⁸⁴ However, the Kyiv Chronicle, in Makhnovets' Ukrainian translation, contains for the crucial year of 1154 only a marginal comment by the translator claiming that the identification of the unnamed wife as Rusudan is possible because of

⁴⁸¹ KT, 248-249; ȝᲔ II, 49-50.

⁴⁸² Hasan, *Falaki-i-Shirwani*, 37.

⁴⁸³ Toumanoff, "On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Thamar", 305.

⁴⁸⁴ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 104.

unspecified material from the *Georgian* sources.⁴⁸⁵ Certainly no such confirmation exists within the Kartlis Tskhovreba. The Kyiv Chronicle would be the most likely source to contain this information, given Iziaslav ruled the city. As such, this identification should be considered speculative for the time being and cannot be taken as a serious exemplar of Rus-Caucasus relations.

Georgian-Rus relations were, then, limited, but show us some interesting features of how the Georgian court could connect with the surrounding world. First, connectivity was not limited to the state or monarchy, and could provide power to other members of the upper nobility. Second, connections were more to individuals than states: we have seen cases as with the Shirvanis where marriage may have been important in cementing alliances, but as far as we know the marriage to Iuri served no such purpose, and the personal prestige that resulted from his and recommendation via Sevinj and Abulasan was in turn sufficient. This chain of personal connectivity did not only transmit information, it constructed power in the form of presenting Iuri as a plausible marriage candidate.

BYZANTIUM AND THE WIDER WORLD

A number of Georgian connections beyond the Caucasus and the peoples most immediately in reach are recorded in our material. Georgian culture, by the twelfth century, was not confined to the Caucasus, with Georgian traders appearing in the Greek world and Georgian monastic communities in Jerusalem and on mounts Sinai and Athos just some of the outposts of Georgian interaction with the world more widely. Georgian monarchs had a long history of connections outside their immediate vicinity, especially with the Orthodox Christian world more generally through both religious and marital links.

We can note two essential, and different, wider world conceptions in Georgian texts from this period. On the one hand, there is that found in the chronicle material: this tends to be very

⁴⁸⁵ Makhnovets (trans), ЛІТОПИС РУСЬКИЙ за Іпатським списком, Year 1154, <http://izbornyk.org.ua/litop/lit17.htm>.

limited in nature, with few reports of anything from far afield and even the deaths of Emperors and Sultans becoming blurred or skipped over. The focus is on active events, and the connectivity mentioned is often religious in nature. Perceptions of peoples beyond the Caucasus and its surroundings are limited. For example, the mention of 'Franks' as fair-weather sailors in part of the Georgian Chronicles is presumably fairly generic to western Europeans, and likely refers to the Venetians and Genoese who the Georgians would have had some trading contact with via Byzantium as much as, or more than, the actual French who arrived on the edge of the Georgians' world via the Crusades during this period but were probably rather less noted for their sailing.⁴⁸⁶

In literary texts, however, the span of the world is presented in a very Persianate style, and wider in its conceptions, stretching from Yemen to Khazaria and Rome to China. At first glance, one could imagine this framing, used in texts such as the *Knight in Panther Skin* and *Amirandarejaniani*, as irrelevant to reality, a mere flight of semi-fantasy: after all, the main characters in those texts are not themselves explicitly Georgian, so this setup could be seen as a fantastical past. There is likely something in this reading, but it may not be the entire truth either. We should note the Orbelis' presentation of themselves as descendants of a Chinese exile, for example, a family tale repeated enough in Stepannos Orbelian's work that we can have little doubt that it carried some currency at the time. We have seen how aspects of the ideals of gender and rulership in these texts may have held currency for Georgians, and it should not be too much of a stretch to imagine that their geographic perceptions were, if not the everyday understanding of the world, still an idiom that could easily be drawn upon. This Perso-centric worldview thus still had, we can tentatively suggest, a real hold upon the imaginations of twelfth century Georgians.

The specific mention of Byzantium in this section is particularly necessary as a result of the occasional perception that twelfth century Georgia was in some sense still a Byzantine

⁴⁸⁶ KT, 303; *ძგ* II, 146.

periphery in our period: whilst it is true that certain aspects of Byzantine imagery were utilised by Georgian rulers, and that lively religious and economic contacts continued, it is important to emphasise the extent to which Georgia and Byzantium were outside one another's direct political reach by this point. Already long gone, by the 1120s, were the days when Byzantine armies would even dream of operating in the Caucasus: the Anatolian plateau's rulers had been independent and Turkic for a generation, and protecting the coastal economic engines of the Byzantine state from inland encroachments was such an overwhelming strategic objective for the Komnenoi that interventions in the largely unthreatening politics of the Caucasus moved fast into the world of unaffordable luxury.

Neither Georgian nor Byzantine sources throughout our period have much to say about the other: occasional mentions of trade, and the fact Eustathios of Thessalonike was able to identify a certain hat style as distinctively Georgian, suggest that connections were frequent.⁴⁸⁷ Religion was an important aspect of long-distance communication too, as we see for example from Tamar sending gifts to Mount Athos, which is given in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* as a *casus belli* for the 1204 Trebizond campaign.⁴⁸⁸ However, despite the evidence for religious and trade connectivity, political links seem to have been fewer, with Georgia's marital connections reaching about as much into the Islamic world as the Byzantine in the twelfth century. Despite the evidence for trade and religious links, political and elite personal links seem to have been fewer. There was at least one, and very likely there were two or more, marital links in the 12th century, hence the connections between Andronikos' family and the Bagrationids - as by far the Georgians' largest nearby co-religionist power, however, the surprise should perhaps be that there were so few.⁴⁸⁹ Elite Georgian-Byzantine marriages were in the event no more common than Georgian-Alan ones, or indeed Georgian-Muslim ones (though this latter of course covers a far larger block of Georgia's neighbours).

⁴⁸⁷ Eustathios of Thessalonike trans. Melville-Jones, J., *The Capture of Thessalonike* (Sydney, 2006), 83.

⁴⁸⁸ KT, 300; *ქს* II, 142.

⁴⁸⁹ See Toumanoff, "On the Relationship between the Founder of the Empire of Trebizond and the Georgian Queen Tamar".

Indeed, observing the prosopographical and chronicle evidence, a number of the Byzantino-Georgian interactions and individual movements in our period underline the lack of close contact rather well. Firstly, we should note that Byzantium was the choice for exiling Iuri after the collapse of Tamar's first marriage: this immediately suggests that on some level it was seen as *distant*, as a large part of the point of exile is precisely to remove someone from the immediate strategic environment. The choice of Byzantium rather than, for example, the Eldiguzid or Seljuk court speaks to the fact that Georgia was beyond Byzantine reach: there was, by implication, nobody in Constantinople who Iuri could usefully appeal to for political support. Likewise, Andronikos Komnenos' time spent in the Caucasus was during a period when he was in effective self-exile and had no desire to be within reach of his cousin Manuel I Komnenos. The distance was the point.

So much for Byzantine reach – and as for Georgian reach in the reverse direction, we have already seen in our section on Trebizond that ultimately Georgia at the height of its power did attempt one major intervention into Byzantine politics, and that it failed. The exact tactical and military reasons for this will probably never be fully decipherable from our sources, but the long distance between Georgia and Constantinople certainly put some limits on Georgian assistance. It is telling that Byzantine counterattack, sometimes cited as the fear Trebizond could buffer Georgia against, never came even as far as the eastern Pontus: during the remaining Byzantine centuries, Trebizond too moved beyond easy geopolitical reach of the Empire's mother city.

A final note on Georgian-Byzantine relations should go to the question of recognition, political culture, and titulature. Twelfth century Georgians were far from unfamiliar with conceptions of Rome and Imperium, interactions with Emperors being after all deeply ingrained in their own history. We do however, in this period, find the term "King of the Greeks" being used for Byzantine monarchs among the Georgians.⁴⁹⁰ This puts the Emperor far more on a level with the

⁴⁹⁰ KT, 246; jg II, 42.

Georgian monarch (who is, we may remember, shown as the monarch of *multiple* peoples: the Abkhaz, Kartvelians, Kakhis, Rans, etc). This view of their relative elevation does suggest a relatively central view of Georgia's place in the world compared to what we might expect from earlier practices of taking Byzantine-given titles. We also, perhaps, see something of a pivot back towards feeling the need to engage with the Persianate world in 12th century presentation with Byzantine influence receding, something for which Nikolaishvili also argues regarding Georgian royal presentation in this period.⁴⁹¹ The Georgian rulers of the twelfth century were no longer *Kuropolates*, but they were *Shirvanshah* and *Shahanshah*.⁴⁹²

Outside the immediately political sphere, Georgian connectivity was emphasised by Tamar's chroniclers, especially that going south and west to Christian holy places such as Mount Athos, to which Tamar sent donations, and Jerusalem, from which Tamar summoned Nikolaoz Gulaberisdze to head up the church council at the start of her reign.⁴⁹³ We get some suggestion of Tamar's reach in Muslim source material, too: Saladin's biographer, Baha ad-Din ibn Shaddad, records Tamar attempting to ransom the True Cross from Saladin and on a separate occasion intervening with him to attempt to secure pilgrimage sites in Jerusalem.⁴⁹⁴ The former attempt was unsuccessful, and the response to the latter is unmentioned: these were long distance negotiations where neither side could apply significant pressure. This is not to say that they were politically unimportant, however: as discussed in earlier chapters, displays of piety had important political functions, and this form of piety-as-diplomacy showed, even if unsuccessful, the capabilities and ability to forge power connections that the Bagrationids had at their disposal.

We see few individual connections further east, suggesting that Georgian connectivity into the wider world was significantly assisted by the presence of Georgian monastic communities or other co-religionists: relations with Muslim rulers and polities mostly tended to focus on direct

⁴⁹¹ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 163.

⁴⁹² Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 114.

⁴⁹³ KT, 288; JG II, 117.

⁴⁹⁴ *The Life of Saladin by Beha ed-Din*, trans. Wilson, C.W., et al. (London, 1897), 335, 384.

neighbours, although the sheer scale of even the weakening Seljuk domains meant that there were few other high-level rulers within obvious diplomatic range who lay to Georgia's east. Khorasan is mentioned as the end-point of Zakaria and Ivane Mkhargrdzeli's eastward campaign late in Tamar's reign, though this may well be an exaggeration on the part of the chronicler: Vardan Areweltsi mentions what is almost certainly the same expedition but only claims it went as far as Ardabil, which given the lack of named places for the easternmost section of the Georgian account is probably more plausible.⁴⁹⁵ This does not generally mean that we should see Georgia as inherently culturally west-facing, for its immediate connections to the Eldiguzids or Shirvan were as we have seen some of its most intensive, and culturally it drew in a range of spheres upon Persianate models.

Georgian political relations with the wider world were, in conclusion, not high in their intensity, although Georgia was deeply enmeshed in cultural connections with neighbours to east and west alike and there can be no doubt that trade and religious contact significantly shaped Georgia through our period. The smaller number of long-distance political contacts recorded is likely in part a result of what our chroniclers choose to record – long-distance letters could well have been exchanged without ever reaching our surviving chronicles. It may also be the case that the twelfth century Bagrationids tended not to adopt political strategies in which emphasising long distance connection was politically important: between an increasingly distant Byzantium, and Muslim neighbours with whom Georgia had strong connections but little ability to appeal to generic shared bonds, the people whose opinion it made sense for the Bagrationids to court were in their throne rooms and on their borders, rather than in far-flung capitals. The Georgian mental world-view was expansive, drawing on a mix of Christian, Greek, and Persian models and ideas that could shape different situational perspectives, and thereby different forms of appeal and strategy based on wider contacts. What we know of these, however, suggests that Georgian monarchs may have considered these very much in terms of their impacts on matters more tangible and closer to home.

⁴⁹⁵ KT, 274; JG II, 107; Vardan Areweltsi trans. Bedrosian, *Compilation of History*, 83.

CONCLUSIONS

From this series of regional views of the political world around Georgia we can see a number of consistent strands in how the Bagrationids approached wider politics. These commonalities are, importantly, explicable as consistent reactions to similar pressures, and as products of the socio-cultural lenses available to the Bagrationid rulers. We should, nonetheless, reject the idea of a 'grand strategy' narrative in which the Bagrationids had particularly consistent aims and objectives. Instead, we should favour the idea that they had some (but not complete) consistency in the external pressures they were placed under and the tools that they had available to deal with them.

The first and primary approach in the Bagrationids' toolkits involved co-opting neighbours into their social and political milieu, or intervening in their affairs to provide neighbours who would be more willing to be aligned with them. This was largely an opportunistic process from which the benefits centred around security, legitimacy, and prestige as much as around resource control or particular expansionist goals. Some of those prestige-built relationships in turn permitted larger draws upon resources than a costlier process of trying to 'expand' in a conventional sense might have permitted, whether tribute from Shirvan or the large Alan-Ossetian and Kipchak contingents that fought in the Bagrationids' wars. Being able to effectively achieve whatever goals they set for themselves tended to mean ensuring this web of personal connections and alliances was effectively maintained.

War was also a key part of all the Bagrationids' strategies, but not necessarily always in the same way. It certainly broke out not infrequently during the mid and late 12th centuries, and raiding was likely an endemic problem. The ability to wage war was predicated on the ability to raise troops, which was not done directly and so was also predicated on the ability to retain the loyalty of those who raised those troops. Acceptance of nominal Bagrationid rule by more surrounding rulers and the consequent increased personal prestige likely helped secure acquiescence internally as well: a wider base of rulers under the canopy of the Bagrationid

throne increased mutual security. War tended to serve these aims, with raiding offering loot and battle prestige and intervention offering more rulers with whom the Georgian monarchs could build relationships. On occasions, wars were used to more directly reward subordinates with land, especially with the rulerships of Ani and K'ari at different times, but this seems to have been a secondary effect in cases where a new local ruler was needed, not a primary driver for conquests.

The lack of general, consistent records of any specific diplomatic relationship – as a result of relations with other polities being better recorded when they were at issue, and of the very personal way that relationships were often built in our period – mean that we have worse records of peace than of war. Marriage is one of the largest visible elements in peaceful diplomacy, and we certainly see the high value and expenditure placed on the need for marriage ties, as well as the potential for them to cross religious boundaries. Both these things indicate that marital links were seen as high in value, likely because they not only suggested a general likelihood of mutual support and provided considerable reflected prestige, but also because the bride (in cases where she was the one moving, which was most of them) came with existing and ongoing diplomatic connections and the ability to help broker a better future relationship with her family. Tribute and mutual recognition activities such as shared hunts were also part of peacetime activities with neighbours: the extractive scale of tribute is difficult to determine, but probably less important than the recognition and prestige it offered as a way to display the continued maintenance of a given connection.

None of these tools were used in an entirely consistent way, both because the external threat perceptions and the internal capacities and aims of the Bagrationid rulers as actors varied. Even for a very simple objective such as the avoidance of civil war, the personal situation and inclinations of different monarchs could lead to different strategies. Tamar's high reliance on the Mkhargrdzelis, for example, meant actors on the political stage who had very strong links across Armenia and a high level of capacity to act on behalf of the Georgian monarchs, which in

turn led to it making strategic sense to have much of Armenia treated as a single principality under those actors to an extent that had not been the case in the reigns of Giorgi III or Demet're.

Part of the reason that the Bagrationids' tools of diplomacy were effective externally as well as internally was that there were significant shared cultural elements between themselves and their Muslim neighbours. Structures of vassal rulership and nominal overarching authority were not uncommon across the nearby parts of the Muslim world, and we may note from Stepannos Orbelian's text that Eldiguz was reportedly prepared to enfeoff Elikum Orbeli even as a Christian vassal.⁴⁹⁶ Some assumptions and challenges around aristocratic behaviour, marriage, and the operation of power were very much shared between Georgia and its neighbours, even if formal structures of power did not match up entirely: this, in turn, in part resulted from the extent to which shared culture permitted personal connectivity and less directly articulated forms of power brokerage.

Our discussions through this chapter have suggested that any firm delineation between foreign and internal policy is essentially anachronistic, as is any concept of a Bagrationid grand strategy with regard to territory or policy. What the Bagrationids and their neighbours had instead were certain features of their situation, and of the tools available to them, which meant that different shorter-term goals were approached in more or less similar ways. Rather than a strategy we can therefore speak of an overarching logic of power as a way of understanding how elite decisions were made and shaped life in the 12th century Transcaucasus, and in the next and final chapter this is what we can attempt to draw together.

⁴⁹⁶ Orbelian trans. Bedrosian, *History of the State of Sisakan*, 203.

9. REASSESSING GEORGIAN POLICY THROUGH PROSOPOGRAPHY

In the preceding chapters of this thesis we have considered case studies from a number of areas. In this chapter, we will conclude these assessments by drawing together an overall wide-reaching analysis of the implications of these smaller studies for the wider question of policy. This will focus on the broad questions of what the 12th century Bagrationids were trying to achieve, within what major system dynamics, and how they used the tools available to them to do so.

In conventional narratives, the overall structure of Georgian internal dynamics is very clear: the monarchy, as a single proactive actor that is synonymous with the polity, was continually attempting to increase its power. Power, in turn, is framed largely as a matter of direct authority over people and resources: higher ability to direct manpower, higher state revenues, and strengthening central authority are seen as key indicators. The two other major actors represented in conventional narratives are the church and the aristocracy, largely shown as reactive forces that were fundamentally antagonistic to increases in royal power on the grounds that it came at their expense. As Met'reveli puts it, "The high-born feudal lords always.. tried to secede and oppose the king. The kings... tried to consolidate the central state machinery."⁴⁹⁷ The Georgian monarchy is being seen as synonymous with, and primarily desirous of, a more advanced machinery of the "state".

In "foreign" affairs, which are – as we have seen in the previous chapter, perhaps erroneously – treated as being essentially different in kind to domestic ones, Georgia's policy is often portrayed as an expansionist, zero-sum narrative with the Muslim emirates surrounding it as primary antagonists. There are variations as to the primary Georgian motivation. Lordkipanidze portrays Georgia's wars as struggles of liberation, portraying the Seljuks and other Turkic

⁴⁹⁷ Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 122.

leaders as essentially foreign oppressors; Met'reveli uses similar terminology.⁴⁹⁸ Gabashvili meanwhile focuses on trade as the core goal, suggesting that dominance of the Trebizond to Tabriz trade route was a primary and consistent driver of southwards expansion.⁴⁹⁹

In previous chapters, we have seen some of the problems with both of these primary narrative pillars. As we saw though the discussions of diplomacy in chapter eight, Georgian rulers did not attempt strategies that would have extended consistent authority over defeated places and regions, such as expanding or regularising systems of governance beneath them. Nor do suggestions that the high nobility wanted to secede at all, let alone consistently, seem to have any strong basis in our sources, as we saw in discussions of courtiers and *eristavis* in chapters six and seven: contests that occurred were over who controlled central power more than the balance between central and local power.

We have also seen some of the fault-lines and groupings in Georgian society that a more traditional analysis of the Bagrationid polity as proto-state tends to neglect. The minimal practical attention given to religion and conversion, and the wide array of intersecting ethnic and religious groups that increasingly made up the Bagrationids' courts, problematise attempts to read the story of the twelfth century Transcaucasus as simply that of a greater, expansionist Georgia. Georgian monarchs were presented in their chronicles and titulature as rulers of multiple peoples, not of a singular country. The often neglected role of gender, especially outside the singular case of Tamar, is also instructive. We can suggest that the cases we have do suggest the possibility of a meaningful, if not formally constituted, discourse and accompanying reality of feminine power upon which Tamar was able to draw and through which vital political functions took place. Practical actions that might have been taken by formal officials, from investigating possible royal marriages to matters of war and peace, were in practice accomplished by individuals who already had the necessary connections, and these were in

⁴⁹⁸ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 107; Met'reveli, *The Golden Age*, 98.

⁴⁹⁹ Gabashvili, 'International trade coordination of Christian and Islamic worlds on basis of numismatic materials, Xth-XIIIth CC.', 163-165.

some cases specifically those individuals whose identities tended to lead to them having stronger cross-cultural ties and higher mobility.

THE NATURE OF POWER IN HIGH MEDIEVAL GEORGIA

To draw together a fresh analysis of how these areas fit together, we need not only these prosopographical perspectives on how the people of the Georgian court fitted together, but also a more nuanced idea of power itself. We can propose to divide the concept into three different features of power: these are power as *freedom* of action being different to power as prestige and thereby *extent of impact* of action, which is in turn different to power as consolidated social position and thereby *security* of action. These elements can stand independently: a ruler with a huge army but a deeply divided and unhappy court and powerful interests to appease might have a very high extent of impact, but low freedom and security, in using their power.

Conversely, a leader of a tiny “independent” state might have very high freedom of action but at a low impact and security, perhaps to the point where it made sense to accept a nominal relationship with a larger neighbour. All such power, in our period, was focused on the inarticulate network as much as the articulate title: the broker as much as the office-holder. Elite and royal policy was both constrained and expressed through this system.

A fundamental structural characteristic of Georgian power emerges in part from this networked approach to power: that it was a polity built on co-option far more than coercion or conquest when it came to power brokers across the Caucasus. In contrast to Lordkipanidze’s belief that Georgia was constantly attempting to draw together and centralise governance, we see little serious attempt at this in practice.⁵⁰⁰ Whether an *eristavi*ate nominally “inside Georgia” or a client state nominally “outside” it, Georgian monarchs tended to have a revealed preference for obtaining recognition, alliance, and some tribute extraction from those directly beneath them but attempting relatively low intervention in their cultural or political affairs. This was

⁵⁰⁰ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 109-110.

punctuated by essentially opportunist intervention in the structures of these subordinate leaders. The goal was, even if freedom of action was limited by the need to maintain these relationships, to ensure security of action first and extent of impact second. The tendency was thereby to extend *sovereignty* but not necessarily to extend *Georgia*, its institutions or structures.

This tendency is probably the closest thing that Georgia had to a 'grand strategy' – and it reveals in particular the role of inarticulate power as core to how the polity operated. Rather than attempting to heavily centralise what we might think of as the conventional trappings of state power – taxation, justice, and military organisation – Georgia perhaps more effectively centralised the social nexus of the Caucasus' elites at the Bagrationid court. It is worth considering, too, the importance of power unexercised: the broad claims made by Georgian monarchs and their chroniclers about the scope of their capabilities need neither be treated as representing rigidly literal bounds of state power, or as mere pompous fabrications, but rather as staking out scope and legitimation for potential action.

In this light, we should take seriously the Georgian monarchs' expression of their role as Mepe Mepisa or Shahanshah, as kings of kings. In a revealing statement, one part of the Kartlis Tskhovreba claims that in Tamar's reign 'Landowners... became aznauris, aznauris became didebulis, and didebulis became rulers'.⁵⁰¹ In other words, there seems to have been a culture of expressing the superiority of leaders not by how high above their contemporaries they were, but by the power and status of those who acknowledged their authority. Authors similarly exalted rather than deplored their claim that the "aznauris and their serfs wore similar clothes" as showing the wealth of Georgia rather than fearing the erosion of social boundaries.⁵⁰² Acknowledgement of superiority by the great, as opposed to autocratic erosion of other power sources, was key to displaying and therefore to maintaining and using power. This adds to Latham-Sprinkle's conception of royal power in the medieval Caucasus as being essentially

⁵⁰¹ KT, 242; jg II, 34.

⁵⁰² KT, 203; jg I, 369.

formed by action rather than allegiance to a conceptual state external to the individual monarch: the active approach to power made the participation of other highly notable actors more valuable in turn.⁵⁰³ These factors are reflected in the literary culture of the period: a Georgian nobility that increasingly had to rely on co-option of power as it expanded was one to whom the models of power in the Persianate epics spoke well. In turn that Georgian elite culture spoke with those voices, a movement of which Rustaveli was the culmination.⁵⁰⁴

This focus on networks of power should not wholly exclude all the traditional conceptions of Bagrationid aims and requirements. The Georgian monarchs certainly did need material resources to maintain their position, and controlled a sizeable military, taxation, and chancery infrastructure. Taxation in Tbilisi was levied differentially according to faith as discussed earlier in chapters six and seven: this was not an unsophisticated series of systems. The court around which these were maintained and run was, indeed, sufficiently important in this political setup that provincial leaders were courtiers as much as governors.

What we should perhaps rethink, compared to traditional narratives, is where the central infrastructure sits in its importance to the Bagrationids, and what measures taken to protect and improve it might look like. For example, our chronicle material stresses justice and peace as drivers of prosperity in Tamar's reign.⁵⁰⁵ The largest sections given to revenues and wealth are often discussions of war loot, too, rather than taxation.⁵⁰⁶ Silgadze notes that the Knight in Panther Skin, too, stresses war loot and good conditions for merchants as the drivers of prosperity.⁵⁰⁷ Given these attitudes in our sources, looking for expansions of central systems geographically to dominate additional land and extract money via taxation may be a case of searching in the wrong place – rather, the emergent strategy for revenues may have been one of keeping raids and enemy forces as far away from the economic engine rooms of the polity as

⁵⁰³ Latham-Sprinkle, 'Treason and Sovereignty in the Medieval Caucasus', 51.

⁵⁰⁴ Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, 81-82.

⁵⁰⁵ KT, 299-300; ქს II, 140-141.

⁵⁰⁶ See e.g. KT, 273-274; ქს II, 105-106.

⁵⁰⁷ Silgadze, A., 'Some Aspects of Economic Ideas in Shota Rustaveli's "The Knight in the Panther Skin"', *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 12, No. 1 (2018), 163.

possible, rather than trying to expand the scope of where taxation was taken. We also know little about the importance of demesne revenues, taxation, and loot to the Bagrationids through the course of this period. The theory that land expansion was an effective way to capture economic resources, an idea that been posited for the conquests of both Shirvan and Ani, requires an assumption that taxation was the optimal driver of revenue increases and scaled well with increased capture of land and settlements.⁵⁰⁸ This, however, is not well supported from our sources and may be unwarranted.

The most successful aspect of this nexus of power, from the ruling family's perspective, was the concrete assumption that a Bagrationid had to be at its centre, the heart of familial power-as-security. We see no significant practical challenges to this idea through our period, in any of our source material. Q'utlu-Arslan may have imagined a Bagrationid reduced to a figurehead, Ivane Orbeli may have wanted a different Bagrationid occupying the throne, Iuri Bogolyubsky may have considered that his marriage to a Bagrationid gave him sufficient legitimacy to be a claimant, but almost none of the century's rebels actually stepped outside the box of treating the family as necessary for legitimacy. The few cases of 'breakaways' we have seen required a degree of remoteness from Georgian power centres, so that alternative powers could be appealed to and intervention from the centre was seen as less likely. Both Guzan T'aosk'areli and the leaders of the Caucasus mountain rebellion, as we saw in chapters seven and eight respectively, fatally miscalculated on this point.

This system of power was not static, though smooth patterns of development that can be pointed to are few. The extent to which Bagrationid Georgia really expanded over the course of the century is limited: Ani, Dvin, Ganja, cities contested or points of intervention in David IV's reign, remained points of contention until close to the end of our period as we saw in chapter eight. A significant expansion late in Tamar's reign, driven by the Mkhargrdzeli conquests in Armenia, might have brought Ani and Dvin more firmly into the Bagrationid sphere had it not

⁵⁰⁸ Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 121; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 120.

been for the significant disturbances to come with the arrival of Mongol forces in the following decades, but this is speculative. We can find other long-term shifts, however: we can tentatively suggest from the prosopographical evidence, in agreement with Nikolaishvili's work on methods of royal legitimation, that the Bagrationid court in Tbilisi by the end of the twelfth century had increased the connectivity and diversity of its upper echelons to a degree. This included more prominent roles for non-Orthodox elites, more examples of possible marital connectivity with Muslim neighbours, and more of our examples of women's power in the Caucasus (even excluding Tamar herself) coming from the 1180s onwards than the pre-1180 period.⁵⁰⁹ Over the course of the century, too, Bagrationid personal ties to the Aegean world faltered – we can therefore perhaps suggest that during the 12th century Georgia tended to realign itself eastwards over time, with a sizeable number of Muslim marriage candidates and indeed arranged marriages going on during Tamar's reign, though again this is relative and we do have Georgian-Muslim marriages occurring under earlier rulers.

These features of the system dynamics within which the Bagrationids operated form a better starting approach to considering strategic, social and cultural activities than starting with a flat conception of zero-sum grand strategy aims. We can now move on to thinking about the tools different actors in this system had at their disposal, and how they used them.

POWER AND PEOPLE

Many of the Bagrationids' options for action could only be used opportunistically. Through the court events discussed in chapters five to eight, we rarely see any Bagrationid monarchs removing and replacing officials by fiat, and instead observe that such events occurred only when death, exile, or rebellion allowed them to. In a certain statist conception of power politics, this would make such options weaker: if the aim of the monarch-as-state is domination, such a reduction of agency is a negative, and – as Met'reveli suggests – restrictions on royal rights or

⁵⁰⁹ Nikolaishvili, *Byzantium and the Georgian World c.900-1210*, 163.

granting of favours could only be a reluctant concession to formidable elites.⁵¹⁰ This takes too narrow a view of the individual act, however: not only people, but actions, existed within wider frameworks, and how such relations were observed likely mattered considerably in practice. Given the Georgian monarchs' conception as kings of kings, maintaining and expanding power required the acquiescence of a wide range of figures. The choice was not between autocracy and weakness through lack of agency, but between autocracy and *strength* that could be obtained through wider co-option and recognition of power. Actions such as giving Ivane Mkhargrdzeli the title of *atabeg* fit into this conception: elevating and empowering subordinates was a key signifier of effective power and authority, not a recognition of its absence.⁵¹¹

The aims of particular monarchs should be thought of in somewhat shorter-term frameworks than are traditionally used: the search for goals that can be said to meaningfully cover an entire monarch's reign, let alone an entire century or dynasty, is often to make the mistake of condensing the historical past down to a speed far slower than that at which its inhabitants experienced it. Tamar's aims in the 1180s to early 1190s were dominated by internal disputes and concerns over dynastic instability, for example, and her actions towards Trebizond and Ganja which were some of her most significant militarily were opportunistic rather than being the result of a longer-term strategic programme. In her father's reign, Demna coming of age in the 1170s created a specific crisis through that decade which had not been present in the 1160s.

This is not to say that longer-term tendencies did not exist: the lack of a 'grand strategy' is far from the same as a lack of wider trends or developments. As mentioned earlier, security was the first order of business for Bagrationid rulers, with the major threats being largely from within the family. This can be thought of less as a matter of actively decided policy, and more as part of a set of prerequisite requirements for rulers. Improved security here does not simply mean safety from rebellion, however. Rebellions, as we saw in chapters six and seven, relied on personal ties between leaders who had access to significant manpower resources – particularly

⁵¹⁰ Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 122.

⁵¹¹ KT, 275-276; *ძგ* II, 110.

the *eristavis* and *sp'asalars* who acted as the interface between the court and regional supplies of manpower. So, too, did any other effective deployment of military manpower: we therefore see the importance of prestige-building and connection-building activities, such as hunting, gift exchanges, raiding, and engaging with religious affairs from multiple traditions. An emphasis on external connections was as important for showing the court that their ruler was accepted as legitimate by the wider world as it was for showing the wider world anything about the Bagrationid court. A system built on effectively co-opting elites required a large quantity of effort to be put into that continuous process. It is, again, important to note that this is neither a sign of huge decentralisation of power nor of royal weakness. The Caucasus, with its mixture of rugged terrain and high ethno-religious variance, was a region where a tightly authoritarian mono-ethnic state would have been far more limited in its capacity, and effective promotion and co-option of the people and thus resources necessary for a larger and better protected polity was ultimately by far the easiest route to project strength and provide stability.

Thus, as the prestige of the Georgian court likely expanded after David's conquests the 1120s and with the Bagrationids' increased ability to project power around the region, it was usually the path of least resistance for Bagrationid monarchs who already explicitly titled themselves as monarchs of multiple peoples to try and ensure their rule was respected rather than risk destabilisation through attempts to create a more 'integrated' system.

Land was a primary source of wealth across much of the medieval world, so it may be surprising that we do not see a great deal of evidence of the Bagrationids directly rewarding Georgian leaders with land through conquest. This, however, is where the prosopography of leaders and the importance of connectivity discussed in chapter six can be clearly seen: there was a definite tendency to reward and select leaders with effective personal connectivity to certain roles, and to prefer co-opting elites with ties in an area over and above trying to expand the core of Georgia's system dynamics. From the Trebizond expedition, to the Mkhargrdzeli dominion in Armenia, to supporting Amir Miran in Ganja – the idea that these places could be given to 'their'

leaders, under the auspices of a Bagrationid hegemony, was quite explicitly celebrated by Tamar's chroniclers.⁵¹² This was a world where connection, including connection below the levels that we can access via our sources, mattered, and the offer of connectivity down into particular social and cultural groups meant that the diversity of identity in their court had significant utility from the perspective of Bagrationid rulers.

The Bagrationids did, nonetheless, have much to offer their subordinates even excluding land. In parts of our period, significant economic destruction at the hands of Turkmen and other armed forces was a major threat: even for a warrior elite like that of Georgia, the promise of stability was far from irrelevant as an idea. Stability at home made it easier to conduct raiding expeditions in the converse direction, as well, and so obtain loot (which may have been as important for prestige as economic values, as for example in the practice of capturing city gates).⁵¹³ The court itself, too, may have been part of the social promise that helped buy nobility into the Bagrationid system. Much like their rulers, the *eristav* families were probably in part effective in their positions through virtue of both local and external recognition, and the wider social and prestige circles available through participation in that court structure provided an additional incentive to embrace the overall system.

Our picture of the Bagrationids and their options within the social-political framework needs to be complemented by a more nuanced picture of the other actors in the system. We cannot maintain the view that the Georgian nobility were in a continuous struggle with the state for supremacy: Georgian monarchs continually received support from many key elites, even in situations where they were opposed by a more nominally pro-nobility position such as that of Q'utlu-Arslan. From the prosopographical view outlined throughout this thesis, we can reconsider core drivers behind the behaviour of the Bagrationid polity's nobility.

⁵¹² KT, 303-304. ԺԶ II, 147.

⁵¹³ E.g. Kirakos Ganjakets'i trans. Bedrosian, *Kirakos Ganjakets'i's History of the Armenians*, 106.

Much like their monarchs, elites in the high medieval Transcaucasus probably had stabilising preferences for the most part, and this, rather than attempts to maximise their own influence and obtaining additional political rights as suggested by some previous scholarship, should be treated as the foremost driver of their activities.⁵¹⁴ Elite pressure on Tamar early in her reign, for example, was first and foremost to marry – that is, to ensure long-term stability for the dynasty – which we should therefore treat as a policy preference of the court elites. This does not preclude rebellions, especially on behalf of someone who was seen as a stronger or more legitimate candidate as Iuri or Demna respectively may well have been. Our modern association of stability with peace should not lead the two to be confused: stability from the perspective of elites could and probably did involve endemic raiding to provide loot and prestige for the warrior nobility. This was far from a golden age for a lot of people in the more war-ravaged parts of the region, for whom the sacking of settlements and the selling of defeated captives were serious risks in warfare.

Some elites may also have had other avenues of competition, but these were often specific rather than generic in nature: identities and connections could form such a point of competition where offices or looser roles that involved communication or regional connections were limited in number. So, for example, we see the Grigolisdzes assert their rule over Hereti after the Orbeli rebellion as another Heri elite family, or the Mkhargrdzelis becoming heirs to the Orbelis as another family capable of maintaining the Orbelis' connections across Georgio-Armenian physical and cultural boundaries. We can better explain these contests if, instead of seeing them as generic attempts to increase a family or individual's power, we see them as certain families having the capacity to compete for specific roles in which they already had the social links necessary to maintain. Patterns in office-holding and patterns in inarticulate power and social networks tend to provide good explanations for one another.

⁵¹⁴ Met'reveli, *Golden Age*, 117; Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the 11th-12th Centuries*, 130.

This continues to hold true when we consider connections between polities: the prosopographical evidence suggests not only that elites were willing to move to other courts and polities at times of crisis and exile, but that they tended to have active and pre-existing links beyond Georgia. These links could allow them to present particular courses of action internally from which they could gain prestige by proximity, as with Abulasan's promotion of Iuri as a candidate to marry Tamar. They could also decrease the stability costs of taking certain actions: a noble under the Bagrationids with better links at the Eldiguzid or Shah-i-Armen court was in a better position to take riskier actions within Georgia and still have the potential for welcome at neighbouring courts, and might have been in a better position to avoid the attentions of raiders and other enemies.

The collective interests of Georgian society and surrounding societies in the Caucasus did not create a shared agenda. Indeed, even bonds of family, whilst often important for building shared goals and bases of support or power, could come under strain in a system where competition was often limited to specific sets of aspirations open to certain families. It was probably generally easier for non-royal noble families to reach accommodations on how to operate and use those links, as the Mkhargrdzelis and Orbelis seem to have done, whereas the higher pressure on royal power and importance of central authority made coexistence within the Bagrationid family far more difficult. Events such as Abulet acting to stop his son's plot against Demet're, or the presence of Jaq'elis on both sides of Iuri's revolt, or Q'izil-Arslan's son attempting to court Tamar against his father's wishes, do tell us that familial bonds and interests were not an insurmountable barrier to action. Indeed, in some cases it may have both benefited individuals trying to maximise their expected outcomes and compete for position with other family members, and also benefited families' interests as a whole in terms of ensuring stability and position, to have members on both sides of internal conflicts.

The most interesting features of actors and their tools of power are often less about what certain individuals could theoretically attempt to do, from war to marriage to agreements and

treaties to raids: rather, they are about under what circumstances certain actions became practically available. Identities and personal connections in particular had significant impacts in defining the hands of cards that any given actor was dealt, nobility and monarchs alike.

PROSOPOGRAPHY AND POWER

When producing the sorts of analyses presented in the previous chapters, the influence of the prosopographical database work is sometimes more implicit than explicit: it involved not only obvious elements like production of maps or read-outs of categorisations, but also simply stronger access to individuals by category, a necessity for providing completeness in sections like the discussions of gender or the *eristaviates*. The ways of thinking about the period discussed above were produced in part by for example proposing and considering different systems of formally categorising individuals, whether better considering the *amirsp'asalar*s of the period in light of their ethnic affiliations or looking at collected office-holders, rebels, or other key social groups. The process of data construction through identification and disambiguation of individuals and their connections was also key to some of the discussions given on how those connections likely shaped policy at various times.

The prosopographical method which has underpinned the above reassessments has certain inherent features that result from its focus on groups of usually elite individuals. It tends to highlight, and thereby focus upon, the impacts of faction and network and identity: it conversely risks losing the importance of institutions, of the broader mass of the population, of ideological positioning, and of the material capacity needed to create and deploy power. A number of elements throughout the discussions in the previous chapters have been developed to counter some of these methodological issues. These include, for example, the integration of literary source material to better consider some ideological elements. Additionally, considering the importance of geographical elements and structure in how command and leadership were translated between social and spatial worlds, and connecting that to the prosopographical

material, helped to enrich the prosopographical data and led to useful conclusions regarding the aristocrats and the development of rebellions over the course of this period.

To some extent, parts of this method then move away from certain traditions of prosopography. In particular, areas like career-line analysis or analysis of land-holding have had fewer uses in this study than originally hoped, largely as a result of the patchy nature of the data on these areas. Collective study was nonetheless fundamental, especially for example being able to collect the biographical details of women through our period for studying their relationships with power. The relatively small numbers of individuals involved in most of the case studies in this thesis, and the frequently patchy detail on how their careers developed outside brief windows of presence in our sources, did nevertheless make certain approaches typical of some prosopographies comparatively difficult to handle with the source material that was available for this project.

On the other hand, integrating an event model into the prosopography database made it much easier to consider how the prosopographical details of individuals might have defined their actions around key historical events in the period, and how their connections with one another might have helped define those events. This is particularly interesting when considering less articulated and formal mechanisms of power, such as the lateral personal connections beyond Georgia that were a factor in determining royal marriages and rebellions alike.

Some aspects of the prosopographical systems used for this thesis may yield further results in future. The identification of chronological boundaries used in date-sorting, for example, was a relatively late stage of the project, and with further work additional bounds might be found leading to a more complete assessment. Aspects of the spatial data could also be more interestingly utilised either with additional source data, or with further enrichment by for example incorporating visualisations and data on likely roads and routes around the Caucasus which could shed additional light on how certain chains of events may have unfolded. Whilst

this thesis made significant use of these forms of data enrichment, necessary constraints of time and scope meant that many more possibilities undoubtedly remain.

Whilst certain avenues of analysis proved more fruitful than others and there are some undoubted limitations on this type of modelling approach, then, contingent issues of the order, time, and scope of this particular project contributed to those limitations as well as deeper issues of source and structure. The person-prosopon model, and the specific selection and disambiguation criteria developed here, did provide an effective underlying system for moving to the more actor-driven analytical perspective on the period outlined in the earlier parts of this chapter. By providing holistic assessments of the material about certain persons, the process of building the model helped show and confront where disambiguations were needed and helped produce a reading upon which an analysis of the actors being discussed could be based, to an extent that a more granular index prosopography would not have supported on its own. Future possibilities for extending these analyses may yet offer considerable additional insights beyond those presented within this thesis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are still a great number of incomplete elements in our picture of medieval Georgia that could be filled in, even when one takes into account only the areas for which we know additional resources exist to be exploited. Charter, numismatic, and epigraphic evidence could lead to some significant reassessments of some of the points discussed above in the coming years. Integrating these into the data systems could lead to additional insights into areas such as land-holding and familial and local connections, and give us a clearer picture of the impacts of family ties and geography on the social structures of the period. Many of the areas worked on in this thesis provide some stepping off points for those further discussions by providing reframings and a different model for understanding actions and social developments throughout the high medieval Caucasus.

The exposure of evidence in the Prosopography of High Medieval Georgia, too, has the potential to provoke reassessments of the evidence that is currently available. The challenges of translating and structuring information from manuscript to database, passed through multiple hands, are sizeable ones: but this format can also, by making claims at the person level, provide a more granular baseline than narrative histories against which manuscript and text specialists can gauge the particular works for which they have expertise: such a data collection has not hitherto been available. With the public launch of the PHMG database, it has the potential to both provide an argued, contextualised view of the period for other scholars – a further utility of the model – and, thereby, move discussions forward and support revisiting of any more specific points and issues that arise.

More perspectives are as important as more evidence, too: this thesis has used prosopographical evidence to sketch out rough studies of gender and race among the peoples of the high medieval Caucasus, for example, but specialists in these areas with the ability to apply both the ideas from modern critical schools of analysis and effective close readings of the Georgian texts are sorely needed. Better analyses of the word choices used when discussing ethnicities, the most appropriate ways to discuss racialisation and how it compares to Byzantine, Persian and Arabic conceptions thereof, or the use of terms around gender and sexuality through the texts, could all add significantly to our understanding of why people in the 12th century Caucasus acted as they did.

Whilst there is much, then, still to be accomplished in this area, we can reach some final broad analytical points from this reassessment that draw together the conclusions reached earlier in this chapter. These lie both in reassessing the high medieval Caucasus' socio-political structures and in suggesting some new paradigms through which to view our period. First, prosopography's capacities to de-centre solely articulated histories of power and de-centre the assumed goals of abstract state and class entities have considerable utility for looking at this period. Modern assumptions of a state attempting to maximise control and homogeneity within

its subject populations do not apply well to high medieval Georgia, where we can better explain the actions of its monarchs through actor-level goals of maintaining stability, prestige, and recognition. Rather than approaching other elite actors who formed and operated the machinery of governance as representatives of simple elements in a class structure, too, we must consider, as this thesis has shown, how shared features of class and identity between actors could provoke conflict as much as provide shared aims. Prosopography's capacity to provide and collect actor-level micronarratives is critical to such assessments.

Leading on from this, our second analytical conclusion should be that inarticulate power, connection and identity are inextricably entangled with articulate power and sovereignty in the high medieval Caucasus. This should not mean the neglect of the latter or ignoring the considerable contests around and importance of office-holding, but rather should mean a recognition that the processes through which articulate forms of power were obtained and utilised frequently relied upon other aspects of an office-holder's profile. Suitability for offices was in part determined by connection and identity not just as a result of caution, or nepotism, but because those connections and identities could be of genuine importance in the conduct of that office. Roles outside the formal offices were also vital for formal procedures, especially when it came to contacts beyond the polity where the inarticulate power of connectivity held by elites, notably including women, was crucial in shaping the policy options and outcomes for the Bagrationid polity as a whole.

Third and finally, we should treat models of action and chronology as a crucial counterpart to assessments of rhetoric and ideology. We can better understand the claims made by contemporaries in charters and chronicles by considering what they did, and what they did not, do throughout our period, and vice versa. Our models of what medieval state-structures like those of high medieval Georgia did in theory have far more utility when reinforced or challenged by discussions of what the actors who formed them did in practice; our maps and conceptions of the borders and boundaries that confined and divided high medieval Caucasians'

worlds need to be considered in light of the tension between the clarity of rhetoric and the cacophony of individuals trying to live and grow within those frameworks. Such an approach allows us to build more nuanced assessments of the ways in which complex ethnic and faith identities, and ambiguities around them, shaped the social structures of Bagrationid elites. It also lets us literally redraw the map of the high medieval Caucasus, thinking more about the places and actions and – critically – varied connections that defined interactions far more than nominal and variable territorial lines.

These concluding points, and the preceding discussion in this chapter, do not form a final set of ‘answers’ to our initial given question of how medieval Caucasian society worked. Indeed, it is not a question that will ever obtain a final and correct answer: building and improving models of the past is the act of trying to catch echoes from which to rewrite a song. Such an act is both obviously futile and, yet, valuable beyond measure. Through cycles of virtuous error and imperfection, scholarship can build with each idea and phrase a better understanding of not just what happened in the Caucasus’ past, but how and why it did so, and in a region where past and present understandings of society are so often invoked and woven together, that cannot help but matter. Prosopographical studies provide perspectives through which we can better explain the actions and pressures that shaped people’s lives – and not just the lives we can see in these prosopographies, for these calculations of policy and prestige fed on into the dues paid by a *glekhi* on a monastic estate, the expectations upon the Georgian-Ossetian families who armed their men for service in Bagrationid armies, the tax relief enjoyed by a Muslim merchant in Demet’re I’s Tbilisi, the ruins of a home in Dvin after its brutal sacking by Giorgi III’s forces.

“Let her hold in her hands the ends of the world, and reign from sea to sea,” the History and Eulogy of Monarchs has its *didebulis* say of Tamar.⁵¹⁵ Through prosopography, we can add some depth to how we see the line. Those ruler’s hands – her lions’ claws – were many and belonged to a wide array of men and women, bound together in often tense and tempestuous ways by

⁵¹⁵ KT, 239; *ḡ* II, 26.

office and law but equally by rhetoric, self-interest and strong social bonds. From the Black Sea to the Caspian, the Georgian court formed the largest knot in the region's social fabric, a tying-point that allowed monarchs to maintain their power and allowed elites to wield wider influence by utilising their connections and affecting the course of policy. The sum of their collective, and sometimes antagonistic, actions shaped their world as they and their interests and expectations were shaped by it: and in collecting and collating the turn and form of the patterns we can still see, we can get a better sense of how these people interacted with the people, places and events around them – and how we, therefore, should better remember and think about the world of high medieval Georgia.

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APPENDIX - ABSTRACTS

ENGLISH

This thesis takes a digital prosopography approach to studying the society and politics of Georgia in the 12th and early 13th centuries, a period covering the reigns of the monarchs Demet're, David V, Giorgi III, and Tamar. Using a graph database, people, places and events across this period were catalogued and placed into a structured data model to allow for comparisons and testing of assumptions about their status and roles in this period. This approach, with its focus on a systematic digital close reading of Georgian chronicle texts, highlights the positions of individuals' identities and connections for social and power relations across the Caucasus. Given the often state-focused nature of Georgian historiography, this alternative approach allows for a re-evaluation of the contribution of features such as ethnicity and gender to shaping elites' interactions with other political actors, and the thesis argues that these identity factors could create specific channels for brokering relationships and thereby provide access to important political resources. More widely, the thesis offers a perspective on the period based on interpersonal and cultural connectivity, and an expansive politics of recognition, more than some prior assessments that tend to focus on state structures and direct territorial expansionism.

DEUTSCH

In dieser Arbeit wird ein digitaler prosopographischer Ansatz zur Untersuchung der Gesellschaft und Politik Georgiens im 12. und frühen 13. Jahrhundert verfolgt, einem Zeitraum, der die Regierungszeiten der Monarchen Demet're, David V., Giorgi III. und Tamar umfasst. Mithilfe einer Graphdatenbank wurden Personen, Orte und Ereignisse aus dieser Zeit katalogisiert und in ein strukturiertes Datenmodell eingefügt, um Vergleiche und die Überprüfung von Annahmen über ihren Status und ihre Rolle in dieser Zeit zu ermöglichen. Dieser Ansatz, der sich auf ein systematisches digitales Close Reading georgischer Chroniktexte konzentriert, hebt die Bedeutung der Identitäten und Verbindungen von Personen für soziale Beziehungen und Machtbeziehungen im Kaukasus hervor. Angesichts der oft staatsorientierten georgischen Geschichtsschreibung ermöglicht dieser alternative Ansatz eine Neubewertung des Beitrags von Merkmalen wie ethnischer Zugehörigkeit und Geschlecht zur Gestaltung der Interaktionen von Eliten mit anderen politischen Akteuren, und die These lautet, dass diese Identitätsfaktoren spezifische Kanäle für die Vermittlung von Beziehungen schaffen und dadurch Zugang zu wichtigen politischen Ressourcen bieten könnten. Im weiteren Sinne bietet die Arbeit eine Perspektive auf den Zeitraum, die auf zwischenmenschlichen und kulturellen Verbindungen und einer expansiven Politik der Anerkennung beruht, mehr als einige frühere Bewertungen, die sich eher auf staatliche Strukturen und direkten territorialen Expansionismus konzentrieren.