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SUMBAT DAVIT^cIS-DZE AND THE VOCABULARY OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN THE ERA OF GEORGIAN UNIFICATION

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In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the medieval Georgian kingdom was one of the pre-eminent powers of the Christian East. A "Georgianized" branch of the Perso-Armenian Bagratid dynasty had overseen Georgia's transformation from a series of disparate principalities and noble estates (some of which were under the hegemony of external forces) to a unified polity. This essay investigates one aspect of the Bagratid unification: the evolving terminology used by the eleventh-century Georgian historian Sumbat Davit^cis-dze that reflects the accumulation of political authority.

THE PROCESS BY WHICH MEDIEVAL Georgia in the Caucasus was unified is poorly documented by extant sources.¹ Surviving evidence speaks largely of the political unification of the various Georgian districts in the eleventh century, at first through Bagrat III's simultaneous rule over K^cart^cli, Ap^cxazet^ci, and the neo-K^cart^cvelian enterprise in the southwestern domains and then through the systematic conquests of his successors.² But the literal gathering

of lands is only one dimension of a considerably larger puzzle. Was there, for example, a conscious program to institute a standardized form of the Georgian language throughout central Caucasia, and if so, who directed it? Moreover, what was the precise role of the Georgian Church in the push for unification? These two questions are not unrelated because the medieval Church was the purveyor and guardian of culture and language. The Church's participation should not be neglected for another reason: ecclesiastical jurisdiction was extended to some regions prior to the establishment of political hegemony. Central to any examination must be a consideration of how the eastern kingdom of K^cart^cli, the Iberia of Classical and Byzantine writers, came to form the nucleus around which an all-Georgian realm was constructed. The fact that the K^cart^cvelian dialect seems to have been the only one of the Georgian languages possessing a script has exaggerated the importance of K^cart^cli at the expense of its neighbors—among them, Kaxet^ci, Heret^ci, Tao/Tayk^c, Klarjet^ci, Shavshet^ci, Javaxet^ci, Suanet^ci, and Ap^cxazet^ci. In fact, nearly all pre-modern "Georgian" historiography, at least that which has come down to us, is written from the K^cart^cvelian perspective and expresses K^cart^cvelian concerns.³

¹ The terms "Georgia" and "Georgians" do not exist in the Georgian language and impart a sense of unity that was absent in much of the pre-modern epoch. When speaking of the period prior to the political unification of the Georgian domains in the first decade of the eleventh century, precedence has been given to the names of individual regions (e.g., K^cart^cli, Kaxet^ci, Ap^cxazet^ci), while after this time we may sometimes speak of all-Georgia (one meaning of the term Sak^cart^cvelo). So as to limit confusion, I employ the attributive "Georgian" for language and historical tradition, though even this imparts an undue sense of unity. On the designations for Georgia and its inhabitants, see the essays in *Sak^cart^cvelos da K^cart^cvelebis aghmnishvneli uc^cxouri da K^cart^culi terminologia* [Georgian and Foreign Designations for 'Georgia' and 'Georgians'] (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1993), with English summaries.

I wish to thank K. Church for his perceptive comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

² Scholarly literature devoted to the question of Georgia's political unification is voluminous. See esp. the lucid account by I. Javaxishvili, *K^cart^cveli eris istoria* [History of the Georgian People], vol. 2, reprinted in his *T^cxulebani* [Collected Works], vol. 2 (T^cbilisi: Sak^cart^cvelos ssr mec^cnierebat^ca akademi; T^cbilisi saxelmci^co universiteti, 1983), 92–163. See also M. Lort^ck^cip^canidze [Lordkipanidze], *Essays on Georgian*

History (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1994), 48–188, reprinted from her *Georgia in the 11th–12th Centuries*, tr. D. Skvirsky (T^cbilisi: Ganat^cleba, 1987). For cultural developments, see A. Surguladze, *K^cart^culi kulturis istoriis narkvevebi* (T^cbilisi: Xelovneba, 1989), with English summary, "Review of the History of Georgian Culture," 478–500.

³ The notable exception is *The Monument of the Erist^cavis* (*Dzegli erist^cavt^ca*), compiled in the early fifteenth century and

Only when these questions and others like them have been tackled will a more comprehensive image of the dynamic processes leading to Georgian unification emerge. In an effort to broaden the scope of inquiry, this essay concentrates upon one particular but previously neglected facet of unification: the inflation of medieval Georgian terminology describing local political authority, a phenomenon attesting not only to the Bagratid accumulation of power but also to the interconnectedness of eastern Georgia and the Byzantine commonwealth. This investigation is restricted to the eleventh-century history of Sumbat Davit^cis-dze,⁴ the only contemporaneous source specially devoted to the origins, development, and consolidation of Bagratid hegemony over the diverse Georgian lands.

Despite its brevity, Davit^cis-dze's *Life and Tale of the Bagratids* is a tremendously important work. Composed perhaps as early as ca. 1030,⁵ it survives only in select manuscripts of the medieval Georgian historical corpus titled *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba*, literally "The Life of K^cart^cli."⁶

written for the regional governors of the K^csani valley north-east of T^cbilisi: T^c. Zhordania, *K^cronikebi da sxva masala sak^cart^cvelos istoriisa da mcertobisa* [Chronicles and Other Materials of Georgian History and Writing], vol. 2 (T^cbilisi, 1897), 1–40; tr. [Russian] S. S. Kakabadze, *Pamiatnik eristavov* (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1979), English summary, 53–54.

⁴ Sumbat Davit^cis-dze, *C^cxorebay da ucqebay bagratoniant^ca*, ed. G. Araxamia (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1990), hereafter: SD. See also the earlier ed. by S. Qauxch^cishvili, *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba*, vol. 1 (T^cbilisi: Saxelgami, 1955), 372–86. Qauxch^cishvili's ed. has now been reprinted as *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba: The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, intro. S. Rapp, Jr., vol. 1 (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1998).

⁵ C. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth–XVth Centuries)," *Traditio* 1 (1943): 154–56, assigns Davit^cis-dze's history to ca. 1030, while Araxamia (pp. 10–32) suggests a date in the 1050s or 1060s.

⁶ Davit^cis-dze's tract is preserved in three manuscripts of *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba*: the Mariamseuli (M) variant of ca. 1640 (Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts, T^cbilisi, no. S-30); the so-called Mc^cxet^ca (Q) variant of 1697 (no. Q-1219); and the Mach^cabliseuli (m) variant of 1736 (no. H-2135). Davit^cis-dze's history is not found in the oldest extant manuscript of the corpus, the Arm/A redaction of the medieval Armenian-language adaptation copied in 1274–1311. Nor is Davit^cis-dze's work one of the early components of *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba* translated by R. W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles; the original Georgian texts and the Armenian adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Davit^cis-dze does not acknowledge his sources, although it has been established that he had multiple lists of princes at his disposal.⁷ The only surviving lists definitely exploited by the author—either directly or secondhand—are two of the *Royal Lists* incorporated into the independent corpus *Mok^cc^cevay k^cart^clisay*, literally "The Conversion of K^cart^cli," which derives from the tenth century.⁸

Little about the author is known except for his name, yet even this is remarkable because earlier Georgian historians did not customarily identify themselves in their works. Sumbat's own *praenomen* is the Georgian rendition of the popular Armenian Bagratid name Smbat, while his *cognomen*, literally "the son of Davit^c (David)," may indicate that he was a scion of the Bagratid house, i.e., he was the "son," or descendant, of King David. Davit^cis-dze's brief narrative is best known precisely for its articulation of the Georgian Bagratids' claim to be the direct biological descendants of the Hebrew King-Prophet David, through whom they professed to be uniquely suited to rule. However, the author also documents, rather obliquely, the migration of the Bagratids to Georgian domains, an event that occurred shortly after 772. For the most part, Davit^cis-dze does not comment about the socio-cultural, religious, linguistic, and economic problems associated with the drive for unity. Instead, he emphasizes that the Bagratids assembled a greater Georgian

⁷ E. T^caqaišvili, *Sumbat davit^cisdzis k^cronika tao-klarjet^cis bagrationt^ca shesaxeb* [Sumbat Davit^cis-dze's *Chronicle of the Bagratids of Tao-Klarjet^ci*] (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1949), 13–15, identified Davit^cis-dze's principal, but now-lost sources as *mokle istoriuli sagvareulo k^cronikebi tao-klarjet^cis bagrationebisa*, "short family historical chronicles of the Tao-Klarjet^cian Bagratids." Cf. Toumanoff, "Medieval Georgian Historical Literature," 155.

⁸ The second and third *Royal Lists* enumerate the kings from the fourth-century A.D. Mirian down to the ninth century: *Mok^cc^cevay k^cart^clisay*, ed. I. Abuladze in *Dzveli k^cart^culi agiograf^ciuli literaturis dzegebi* [Monuments of Old Georgian Hagiographical Literature], vol. 1 (T^cbilisi: Sak^cart^cvelos ssmec^cnierebat^ca akademiis gamoc^cemloba, 1963–64), 91–97; and *Shatberdis krebuli X saukunisa* [The Shatberdi Codex of the Tenth Century], eds. B. Gigineishvili and E. Giunashvili (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1979), 324–27. Araxamia, *Dzveli k^cart^culi sagvareulo matianeebi (cqarot^cmc^codneobit^ci gamokvleva)* [Old Georgian Family Chronicles] (T^cbilisi: Mec^cniereba, 1988), 22–27, demonstrates that Davit^cis-dze did not always blindly follow the information provided by the *Royal Lists*. Other unacknowledged sources of Davit^cis-dze include *The Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* and its brief continuation by Ps.-Juansher, collectively known as *C^cxorebay vaxtang gorgasalisa*.

realm and that their kings were the most legitimate monarchs in Caucasia.⁹

When the Bagratids settled permanently in the southwestern Georgian territories in the late eighth century, Kartvelian royal authority already had been in abeyance for over two hundred years.¹⁰ At the instigation of the Kartvelian aristocracy, sometime in the sixth century, the Persian Great King dismantled the monarchy, thus duplicating the demise of Armenian kingship in 428. Persian troops were garrisoned in the chief Kartvelian cities of Tbilisi (modern Tbilisi) and Mtskheta already in the 520s.¹¹ If the testimony of the Georgian historian Ps.-Juansher¹² is to be trusted, it would seem that weakened Kartvelian kings endured for a few more decades. On this basis of this important evidence, C. Toumanoff concluded that the monarchy was not finally dissolved until ca. 580, though it had been crippled decades before.¹³

So as to limit Persian and then Islamic meddlings along their shared frontier (of which Caucasia was part), the Byzantine emperors appointed “presiding princes” beginning ca. 588. These presiding princes were of limited capabilities, however, and as a matter of political expediency they sometimes recognized the suzerainty of neighboring Islamic rulers. Yet, on the whole, connections with Byzantium were becoming more frequent. With the en-

couragement of Constantinople the Kartvelian Bagratid Ashot I “the Great” seized the principate in 813. Seventy-five years later, in 888, local royal authority was resuscitated by his kinsman Adarnase II.

The Bagratids’ expansionistic agenda broadened incrementally and in 1008 Bagrat III succeeded in joining for the first time the thrones of Kartli and Abkhazeti (the core regions of eastern and western Georgia, respectively) as well as the pivotal southwestern Armeno-Kartvelian borderlands. Triumph over the Seljūq invaders, who were one part of the same wave of Turks who captured the Byzantine emperor at Manzikert in 1071, emboldened the Georgian monarchs even more, and they began to envisage themselves as equals of the Byzantine *basileis* (sing. *basileús*, βασιλεύς, “emperor”) within the purview of greater Caucasia. The consolidation of Georgia and especially with the final—and hugely symbolic—liberation of the former royal capital of Tbilisi from the Muslims in 1122 compelled King Davit II (r. 1089–1125) to discard Byzantine honors once and for all, thus removing any implication that the Georgian monarchs were subordinate to the emperor.¹⁴

In the course of his account of Georgia’s political integration, Sumbat Davit’s-dze employs a carefully selected vocabulary to describe the accumulation of power by the Bagratid dynasty. As a consequence of the relatively late manuscripts at our disposal, it must be borne in mind that we simply do not know whether this terminology accurately reflects the early Bagratid period or whether it was contrived by Davit’s-dze himself so as to emphasize growing Bagratid superiority. In either case, the terms investigated here are plausible for the period and none of them constitute obvious anachronisms.

Genealogical treatises are notorious for their incorporation of legendary and even patently false information, especially for the generations of remote antiquity.¹⁵ Memories about the distant past were not so clear, and sometimes the requisite traditions simply did not exist. Sometimes, common ancestors were invented so as to explain later relationships. In his description of the origin of the Bagratids, Davit’s-dze follows this familiar pattern. Through his erroneous identification of the distinct Guaramid princely dynasty as essentially Bagratid, the author has either committed a serious error or has intentionally manipulated the past. Despite their distinctiveness, Toumanoff’s brilliant genealogical research has established

⁹ For analyses of Davit’s-dze’s tract, see: Javakhishvili, *Dzveli kartuli saistorio mcerloba (V–XVIII ss.)* [Old Georgian Historical Writing, Fifth–Eighteenth Centuries], reprinted as vol. 8 of his *Tsxulebani* [Collected Works] (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos ssmec’nierebat’ akademi; Tbilisi saxelmci’o universiteti, 1977), 195–97; C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown U.P., 1963); idem, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature,” 154–56; and S. Rapp, Jr., “Imagining History at the Crossroads: Persia, Byzantium, and the Architects of the Written Georgian Past” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Michigan), introduction and ch. 6.

¹⁰ According to Georgian tradition, the Kartvelian monarchy was established in the early Hellenistic period and was subject to the Seleucids of Mesopotamia.

¹¹ Following Procopius, many specialists in Georgia believe that the monarchy was abolished in the 520s: e.g., A. A. Bogveradze, “Rannefeodal’nye gruzinskie gosudarstva v VI–VIII vv.,” in *Ocherki istorii Gruzii*, vol. 2 (Tbilisi: Mec’niereba, 1988), 141–44.

¹² Scholars typically refer to this historian, who flourished about 800 A.D., as Juansher Juansheriani. For Ps.-Juansher as the author of only the brief continuation of *The Life of Vaxtang*, see Rapp, “Imagining History at the Crossroads,” 112–35 et seq.

¹³ Toumanoff, *Studies*, 360–82.

¹⁴ Rapp, “Imagining History at the Crossroads,” esp. ch. 7.

¹⁵ See R. P. Lindner, “What Was a Nomadic Tribe?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1982): 689–701.

that the Guaramids and K^cart^velian Bagratids were actually related through marriage. Furthermore, both families secured aid from Constantinople and the Bagratids occupied many of the former Guaramid estates once they themselves had come to power.¹⁶

As described by Davit^cis-dze, the early “Bagratids”—that is to say, the Guaramids—were Jews who had migrated to Caucasia from the Holy Land.¹⁷ This probably reflects the fact that the historical Bagratids had migrated from elsewhere, although not from Palestine but from neighboring Armenia just after 772. Davit^cis-dze maintains that the first “Bagratid” to command authority was Guaram, i.e., the Guaramid Guaram I (r. 588–ca. 590). He is styled merely as *erist^cavi*,¹⁸ a compound of the Georgian words *eri*, “army” (later “people”), and *t^cavi*, “head,” thus “head of the army.” *Erist^cavis* were regional governors who, at least in theory, ruled in the name of the monarch; they are roughly equivalent to the Armenian *naxarars*. During the lengthy *interregnum* extending from ca. 580 to 813, the *erist^cavis* were the most powerful K^cart^velian figures, and although a presiding prince claimed ultimate supremacy over all of them, in reality contemporary K^cart^veli was a loose federation of such principalities. The *erist^ca[v]jobay* is a very old Georgian institution,¹⁹ and it is not surprising that Guaram should have actually held the position of *erist^cavi* or that he should have been understood by Davit^cis-dze to have occupied it. At the same time, Guaram’s brothers who settled in Armenia—a circuitous admission that the Armenian and Georgian Bagratids were related—are said to have ruled as *mt^cavaris*, i.e., “princes.”²⁰ The author makes the same assertion for Guaram’s siblings who made their residence

in the eastern “Georgian” regions of Kaxet^ci and Heret^ci.²¹ Through the vocabulary employed by Davit^cis-dze, Guaram was depicted not only as a Bagratid but also as being superior to any Armenian Bagratid. Although he was surely apprised of the subordination of some early K^cart^velian Bagratids to their relatives in Armenia, Davit^cis-dze remains silent on the matter.²²

The ascendancy of the proto-Bagratids/Guaramids was made possible by the fall of the former Chosroid (Xosro[v]iani) dynasty which had been founded by Mirian III (r. 284–361), the first Christian king of K^cart^veli. Like other Bagratid-era historians, Sumbat Davit^cis-dze does not habitually speak about the pre-Bagratid (especially pre-Guaramid!) monarchs.²³ After all, the old dynasties did not promote Bagratid legitimacy. However, Davit^cis-dze does recollect the deteriorating state of affairs under the Chosroids, thus setting the stage for the coming of the Bagratids:

And since the time when the descendants of Gorgasali diminished the royal authority [*mep^cobay*], until [the arrival of the proto-Bagratid brothers], the *aznauris* had ruled [*up^clebay*] over K^cart^veli. But the end of the rule [*up^clebay*] of the *aznauris* in K^cart^veli came about as the result of their [own] wicked deeds.²⁴

²¹ SD, ch. 3, 40 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 373.

²² E.g., see the testimony of the tenth-century Armenian historian Yovhannês Draxanakert^ci, 36.14–16:

The great curopalate of Iberia [i.e., K^cart^veli], Atrnerseh [i.e., Adarnase], honored in every way the peace treaty and alliance with [the Armenian] king Smbat. With great veneration he wisely submitted himself to the king like a son to his father, or more evident than this, like a servant willingly overwhelmed by the awe of his master in moderation, he always turned his eyes to him with utmost attentiveness and entrusted Smbat even with his life. Being greatly pleased by this, king Smbat summoned him and treated him with kindness. Subsequently, he crowned Atrnerseh king with great glory . . . he set him over the land of Iberia, and granted him the second place in his realm. After his promotion to the royal rank, Atrnerseh displayed no insolence . . . (*History of Armenia*, tr. Rev. K. H. Maksoudian [Atlanta, 1987], 150–51).

²³ The eleventh-century *Chronicle of K^cart^veli* (part of *K^cart^velis c^cxovreba*) is the only medieval Bagratid history to engage seriously the pre-Bagratid past; it opens with an account of the pre-Bagratid princes Iovane and Juansher (late eighth and early ninth centuries).

²⁴ SD, ch. 4, 40–41 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 373.

¹⁶ Toumanoff, *Studies*, 192 et seq.

¹⁷ Movsês Xorenac^ci [Moses Khorenats^ci], *History of the Armenians*, I.22, tr. R. W. Thomson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 110–11.

¹⁸ SD, chs. 3 and 6, 40–41 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 373–74.

¹⁹ *Erist^ca[v]jobay* denotes the rule or institution of an *erist^cavi*. The claim (ca. 800) of the author of *The Life of the Kings* (the first text in *K^cart^velis c^cxovreba*; see notes 4 and 6) that the first K^cart^velian king P^carnavaz (r. 299–34 B.C.) invented the network of *erist^cavis* is a gross back projection of the institution. See *K^cart^velis c^cxovreba*, ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 1: 24 = tr. Thomson, 34–35.

²⁰ SD, ch. 2, 40 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 373. The word *mt^cavari* (from the root *mt^ca*, “mountain, peak”) is attested already in the fifth-century *Martyrdom of Shushaniki*. See Toumanoff, *Studies*, 92 (esp. n. 132) and 388–89 (for the title of *mt^cavari* among the presiding princes).

This passage admits that royal authority, *mep^cobay*,²⁵ had existed in K^cart^cli prior to the arrival of the Bagratids. Here, “Gorgasali” is the sobriquet of the famous Chosroid king Vaxtang I Gorgasali (r. 447–522). As mentioned above, the K^cart^cvelian monarchy was abolished in the sixth century, within fifty years or so of Vaxtang’s death. Davit^cis-dze states that in the absence of kings the *aznauris*, or aristocracy, filled the political void.²⁶ These *aznauris* are supposed to have ruled as *up^calis*, or “lords.” The honorific *up^cali* was generically attached to any sort of noble or even a priest or monk. Jesus Christ was the ultimate *up^cali*. But the association of *aznauri* and *up^cali* suggests that an *aznauri*’s authority was less than that of *erist^cavi*. Therefore, Guaram’s elevation as *erist^cavi* was an improvement in position over the *aznauri* lords. Moreover, Davit^cis-dze does not use the word *up^cali* or its abstract form *up^clebay* to define the rule of the Bagratid princes or kings—these terms were consciously restricted to the pre-Bagratid epoch. It should be observed that the passage above also reports the domination of Caucasia by Persia. Persian suzerainty is described with the verb *up^clebdes*, i.e., “they ruled [as lords].” It is possible that the use of the same word of authority for both the *aznauris* and Persians was intended to impart the sense they were not the rightful lords of the K^cart^cvelians.

Although Guaram had been “selected” (by his brothers?) as *erist^cavi* of K^cart^cli, his position was further enhanced with a Byzantine honor. The emperor Maurice (r. 582–602) is said to have bestowed the coveted title of *kuropalatês* (κουροπαλατῆς) upon Guaram.²⁷ So that he might preside over the K^cart^cvelians and dispense the will of the Byzantine emperor, the *kuropalatês* took up residence in Mc^cxet^ca, the ancient royal capital of K^cart^cli located at the confluence of the Aragwi and Mtkuari (Kura)

²⁵ *Mep^ce* lacks grammatical gender and is most precisely rendered as “monarch.” In Old Georgian, nouns are made abstract by means of the suffix *-obay*, e.g., *mep^cobay* = “kingship, royal authority.”

²⁶ By the twelfth century, the *aznauris* constituted the lower nobility (they were outranked by the *didebulis*, i.e., “those possessing greatness,” thus “grandees”).

²⁷ SD, ch. 6, 41 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 374. On the Byzantine honor bestowed upon the K^cart^cvelian / Georgian Bagratids, see Rapp, “Imagining History at the Crossroads,” 486–88 and 560–68. The highest Byzantine dignities adopted by Georgian monarchs were *sebastos* (σεβαστός) and *panhypersebastos*, though by the end of his reign, Davit^c II (r. 1089–1125) styled himself as *basileús* (!). For *kuropalatês*, see esp. R. Guillard, “Curopalate,” *Byzantina 2* (1970): 187–249, reprinted in his *Titres et fonctions de l’Empire byzantin* (London: Variorum, 1976).

Down to the eleventh century the holder of the K^cart^cvelian *kuropalatê* commanded the preeminent position of rulership. Its title even adorned the *intitulatio* of Bagratid kings like Adarnase II and Bagrat III. A number of different Byzantine dignities, like *magistros* (μαγιστρός) and *patrikios* (πατρικιός), were held by other high-ranking Bagratids. The Georgian term *mamp^cali* (from *mama*, “father,” and *up^cali*, “lord”) was also employed.²⁸ Not all of presiding princes after Guaram I were able to secure the title of *kuropalatês*, and in such cases their rule was characterized in terms of local conceptions of authority, i.e., they were *erist^cavis* or even *mt^cavaris*. For example, Adarnase I (r. 627–37 or 642), the Chosroid prince of Kaxet^ci, who was installed as presiding prince by the emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41), is said to have governed as a *mt^cavari*, “prince.”²⁹ Guaram II *kuropalatês* (r. 684–ca. 693) allegedly held sway as *erist^cavi*³⁰ while Ashot I *kuropalatês*, the first authentic Bagratid prince to rule K^cart^cli, is reported to have ruled as *mt^ca-vari*.³¹ In these last two cases, the verbs *erist^caoabda* (“to rule [as *erist^cavi*]”) and *mt^cavrodda* (“to rule [as *mt^ca-vari*]”) are synonymous and Davit^cis-dze intended no variance of authority.

Ashot I, the first K^cart^cvelian Bagratid to seize power, was murdered in 830 during an Arab (“Hagarite”) invasion.³² Davit^cis-dze relates that upon Ashot’s enthronement as presiding prince, “the authority [*q^celmicip^cebay*] of the Hagarites became stronger. . . .”³³ But Ashot’s own authority is expressed twice by the same term: “. . . God granted [Ashot] victory and gave him authority [*aq^celmicip^ca*] over Shavshet^c-Klarjet^ci,” and “. . . the authority [*q^celmicip^ceba*] which had been granted to him by God was

²⁸ The Byzantine emperor-scholar Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (*De administrando imperio*, ch. 46, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R. J. H. Jenkins, rev. ed. [Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967], 214–15) is familiar with the title *mamp^cali* in the corrupted form *mampalis* (μάμπάλις) and erroneously translates it as *panagios* (πανάγιος), “all-holy.” It should be noted that Constantine is an exceedingly important source for the early Bagratids in K^cart^cli (chs. 45–46). He knows, for example, about the Davidic clamorings of the family.

²⁹ SD, ch. 14, 43–44 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 375–76.

³⁰ SD, ch. 15, 44 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 376.

³¹ SD, ch. 16, 44 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 376.

³² SD, ch. 20, 46 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 377, relates that Ashot was martyred in *k^coronikon* 46, i.e., 826 A.D. (the *k^coronikon* is the medieval Georgian era; this is the first date supplied by Davit^cis-dze). However, Toumanoff has shown that Ashot’s demise actually occurred in 830: “Chronology of the Kings of Abasgia and Other Problems,” *Le Muséon* 69 (1956): 83–85.

³³ SD, ch. 16, 44 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 376.

confirmed by the will of the kings of the Greeks [i.e., the Byzantine emperors].”³⁴ The use of the word *q^celmcip^c-ebay* (from the root *q^celi*, “hand”; modern *xelmcip^ceba*) intimates that Ashot’s authority and legitimacy—and those of his immediate successors³⁵—were, at least in Davit^cis-dze’s mind, equal to those of his Muslim antagonists. Moreover, in Old Georgian *q^celmcip^ce*, “sovereign,” is a less-impressive designation than *mep^ce*. Therefore, Davit^cis-dze has effectively, and probably intentionally, denied proper royal authority to the caliphal Muslims. The application of *q^celmcip^cebay* to Ashot, the first genuine Bagratid to govern K^cart^cli, endows him with an authority just below that of a proper monarch but higher than that of his princely predecessors. It is worth noting that the kings of Armenia are styled as *q^celmcip^ce*. By implication, their authority was far less than that of their Bagratid relatives ruling in the Georgian domains.³⁶

Sumbat Davit^cis-dze does not draw special attention to the inflation of titles of authority, and the elevation of the first Bagratid king is no exception. During his skeletal notice about Gurgen I *kuropalatēs* (r. 881–91), he first mentions “Adarnase, king of the K^cart^cvelians.”³⁷ The next reference to Adarnase and the nascent monarchy discloses Adarnase’s death in 923 and the transmission of kingship to his son Davit^c II (r. 923–37).³⁸ Adarnase restored the K^cart^cvelian monarchy in 888, and in accordance with pre-Bagratid convention, he was styled as *mep^ce k^cart^cvelt^ca*, or “king of the K^cart^cvelians.” In the same period, Davit^cis-dze also refers to the first *erist^cavi* of *erist^cavis* (*erist^cavt^c-erist^cavi*), which represents a further stratification of the institution. Henceforth, at least in theory, the *mep^ce* wielded ultimate control over his domains, while his ostensible agent, the *erist^cavi* of *erist^cavis*, directly supervised the affairs of the several *erist^cavates*. Of course, by this time the *erist^cavates* were held hereditarily by powerful aristocratic families who sought to increase their own domains at the expense of other nobles and the monarchy. Thus the effectiveness of the king depended largely upon smooth relations between the Crown and the semi-independent local governors.

The status of *mep^ce* is assigned by Davit^cis-dze with great exactitude. As was appropriate for his Bagratid

sponsors, the first king mentioned by Davit^cis-dze is the King-Prophet David.³⁹ Armenia’s monarchy is mentioned twice: first with respect to the brothers of the proto-Bagratid Guaram marrying into the Armenian royal family, and second in reference to the renowned Arshakuniani (Arsacid) dynasty.⁴⁰ But it should be emphasized that Davit^cis-dze does not allude to a single Armenian Bagratid king. For him, the legitimate Bagratid monarchs were those who ruled in the Georgian domains.

Davit^cis-dze is familiar with other non-K^cart^cvelian monarchs. This holds true even within Caucasia itself. Following the establishment of the kingdom of Ap^cxazet^ci ca. 795, Davit^cis-dze occasionally styles its rulers as *mep^ce*.⁴¹ Davit^cis-dze knew that the K^cart^cvelian and Ap^cxaz thrones would be joined to form a single *Georgian* one, so it was not in the author’s interest to deny the Ap^cxaz rulers their authentic royal status. The solitary reference to the “sovereigns” of Klarjet^ci is more difficult to comprehend. There was no tradition of royal authority among the Klarjet^cian line of the Bagratids, though the head of that branch was the important *erist^cavi* of Klarjet^ci.⁴² What is significant, however, is that the Klarjet^cians are not assigned their own *mep^ce*, or king.

The monarchs of adjacent empires (outside the confines of Caucasia) are assigned the generic title *mep^ce*. The Great King (the *shāhanshāh*) of Sasanid Persia⁴³ and the Byzantine emperor are both accorded this title.⁴⁴ It is possible to see Davit^cis-dze’s gradual inflation of the Bagratids’ status as an effort to show that Bagratid authority eventually matched that of other polities. This is particularly striking in the last folios of his history, in which the army of King Giorgi I (r. 1014–27) clashed with that of the Byzantine emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025). Throughout the account, both rulers are styled generically as *mep^ce*, thus imparting to both an equal title and, by consequence, equal authority in their respective realms.

The ongoing gathering of lands and the centralization of political authority encouraged further titular innovation.

³⁴ SD, ch. 17, 44–45 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 376.

³⁵ SD, ch. 21, 47 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 378, for Bagrat *kuropalatēs* being granted authority [*q^celmcip^cebay*] by God; and ch. 22, 47 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 378, for the *q^celmcip^cebay* of Gurgen *kuropalatēs*.

³⁶ SD, ch. 54, 53 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 382.

³⁷ SD, ch. 32, 49 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 379.

³⁸ SD, ch. 38, 50 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 380.

³⁹ SD, ch. 1, 39 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 372.

⁴⁰ SD, chs. 5 and 70, 41 and 59 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 374 and 386.

⁴¹ SD, chs. 28 and 52, 48 and 52 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 379 and 382.

⁴² SD, chs. 55, 53 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 382.

⁴³ SD, ch. 11, 43 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 375.

⁴⁴ Medieval Georgian historical literature customarily refers to the Byzantine emperor as “the king of the Greeks,” *mep^ce berdzen^ca*, from *berdzeni*, or “wise [man].” Byzantium, “Greece,” was called *Saberdznet^ci* by the Georgians.

Thus, Gurgen I (r. 994–1008),⁴⁵ the father of Bagrat III, took the title of *mep^cet^c-mep^ce*, or “king of kings,” upon his accession:

And this Gurgen had a son Bagrat, who was the nephew by his mother to the kings of the Ap^cxaz, Demetre and T^ceodose. Until the enthronement of Gurgen, Bagrat was king in Ap^cxazet^ci and therefore Gurgen was called king of kings.⁴⁶

Thus royal authority was splintered, although the senior *mep^ce* was endowed with the title “king of kings.” This division of authority was a mechanism by which the monarch designated his successor during his lifetime, thus providing for a smooth transition of power as well as the continued dominance of the dynasty.⁴⁷

With Gurgen’s son Bagrat III the graduation of the *intitulatio* attained its zenith in Davit^cis-dze’s *History*:

This king of kings Gurgen, son of Bagrat [II “the Simple”] king of the K^cart^cvelians, passed away in *k^coronikon* 228 [1008 A.D.], and was survived by his son, Bagrat [III] king of the Ap^cxaz [and a] great *kuropalatēs*, and he occupied his ancestral land of Tao and he ruled as absolute master [*t^cwt^cmpqrobeli*] over all Caucasia, from Jik^cet^ci to the Gurgeni [Sea, i.e., from the Black to the Caspian seas]. And Adarbadagan and Shirvan became his tributaries [*maxarke*], and the sovereigns [*q^celmcip^ce*] of Somxet^ci [Armenia] acted according to his will. Owing to his wisdom and strength, he made the king of the Persians more of a loyal friend to him than his own household, and the king of the Greeks [i.e., the Byzantine emperor] harbored a constant fear of him.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ This Gurgen I, of the Line of K^cart^cli (Iberia), is not to be confused with the aforementioned Guaram I, who was of the Line of Tao/Tayk^c. I have adopted the dates and ordinals proposed by Toumanoff.

⁴⁶ SD, ch. 52, 52 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 381–82. Thomson (tr., p. 307, n. 52, Georgian text) says that the reference here to Giorgi as *mep^cet^c-mep^ce* “is the first occurrence of this title”; however, the source, *The Chronicle of K^cart^cli*, was written after Davit^cis-dze’s history though it was placed before Davit^cis-dze’s tract in all extant manuscripts of the corpus. Therefore, the reference to Gurgen as king of kings actually constitutes the first mention of this title in *K^cart^clis c^cxovreba*.

⁴⁷ Cf. C. Toumanoff, “The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia,” *Traditio* 7 (1949–51): 204–10.

⁴⁸ SD, ch. 54, 53 = ed. Qauxch^cishvili, 382. The lack of the term Sak^cart^cvelo, which in the eleventh and twelfth centuries came to denote the all-Georgian realm, is striking in this passage.

T^cwt^cmpqrobeli,⁴⁹ a conflation of the reflexive *t^cwt^c* (“self”) and *mpqrobeli* (“master,” “ruler”), is rendered in English as “autocrat” or “absolute ruler.” Bagrat’s depiction as *t^cwt^cmpqrobeli* implies that he ruled only through his own devices, though in reality the contemporary Bagratids were still intimately connected to the Byzantine court. By Davit^cis-dze’s time, however, the Georgian monarchs openly opposed Byzantine aggression in Caucasia and endeavored to prevent Constantinople from annexing the area. Bagrat’s dominion was relatively large, though the declaration that he was the autocrat of the land between the shores of the Black to the Caspian seas is the Bagratid equivalent of Wonderland. This extraordinary passage must be greeted with skepticism, for although Bagrat definitely became the first king of a united K^cart^cli and Ap^cxazet^ci, it is not clear whether he ruled even this relatively restricted area, let alone the entire isthmus, in the capacity of an absolute ruler.

More likely, Davit^cis-dze projected the limits of what he imagined an ideal greater Georgia *should* be. The imagined past thus became the blueprint for a desired future. It should be noted that subsequent Georgian monarchs took the title of “autocrat” and that, at least in some cases, it reflected political reality, as under Davit^c II and his great-granddaughter T^camar. Significantly, Davit^cis-dze identifies the rulers of the Byzantines and the Persians as mere *mep^ces* while Bagrat is made to be both a “king of kings” and “autocrat.”

By the early eleventh century, then, there was a single *mep^cet^c-mep^ce* and a corresponding *erist^cavt^c-erist^cavi* standing at the head of Georgian society. It is significant that, at least according to Sumbat Davit^cis-dze, the ranks of the K^cart^cvelian *mt^cavari* (“prince”) and *erist^cavi* (“governor”) were inflated to *q^celmcip^ce* (“sovereign”) and then *mep^ce* (“king, monarch”). At various stages, all of these positions were augmented with Byzantine honors. When writing about his own time, Davit^cis-dze endowed the Georgian monarchy with royal titles which were at least equal to those of Byzantium and the various Islamic enterprises. The continued presence of Byzantine dignities, however, proves that Georgia’s reliance upon the emperor persisted even during Davit^cis-dze’s lifetime in the first-half of the eleventh century.

⁴⁹ *T^cwt^cmpqrobeli* is based upon the older word *mpqrobeli* that is considerably less emphatic (it lacks the prefix *t^cwt^c*, signifying self-legitimacy); cf. *mp^clobeli* and *t^cuit^cmp^clobeli*. In numerous ninth-century sources, *mpqrobeli* denotes both the act of mastery and of protecting. On the evolution of the title *t^cwt^cmpqrobeli*, see Rapp, “Imagining History at the Crossroads,” 579–80.

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[Footnotes]

¹⁵ **What Was a Nomadic Tribe?**

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