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## **Kingship and frontiers in Medieval Georgia**

The paper examines correlation between the political geography and political concepts in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian kingdom.

After the *didi turkoba* or the Great Turkish invasion of the 1080s, like the major part of Asia Minor and Caucasia, Georgia was threatened by nomadization. In the life-and-death struggle against the nomadic Islamic world Georgian kings achieved incredible success - during the reign of Davit the Builder (1089-1125) not only did the process of unification of Georgian historical lands come to an end, but the idea of Caucasia's political unity was accomplished too. Davit's deeds were successfully carried on by his successors, Demetre I (1125-1156), Giorgi III (1156-1189), and Tamar (1189-1207/13), and at the turn of the 12th-13th centuries a major part of Christian Caucasia became united within the Georgian Kingdom.

Documentary and historiographical texts described frontiers of this reinvigorated polity as following: "from Nikopsis (i.e. present Novomikhailovskiy) to the Sea of Derbend and from Ovseti (i.e. Alania) to Speri and Aregats", or "from Nikopsis to Derbend", or in more complicated way "from the Pontic Sea to the sea of Gurgan (i.e. the Caspian Sea), from Speri to Daruband, and all the lands on this side of the Caucasus Mountains, as well as Khazaria and Scythia on the other side".

Expansion of the Georgian monarchy was reflected in the royal titles as well: "the king of the Abkhaz (i.e. western Georgia), Kartvels (i.e. Tao-Klarjeti and Shida Kartli), Rans (i.e.

Hereti), Kakhs (i.e. Kakheti), Somekhs (i.e. Lore-Tashiri), Sharvansha (i.e. Sharwan) and Shahansha (i.e. Ani), of the all East and West”.

As S. Vryonis pointed out “the efforts of the Comnenoi and Lascarids to extirpate the nomads never attained the success the Georgian monarchs achieved”. As a result, authority and political image of twelfth-century Byzantium was severely shaken in contemporary Georgia. However, Byzantium remained venerated as a cradle of Orthodox civilization and a model of great power, so Georgian monarchs sought to justify their equality to the Byzantine emperors. Byzantine statehood came to be perceived as a model basis for building up Georgian Pan-Caucasian monarchy, and imperial symbols and political ideas were adopted by the royal court.

This successful Reconquista added two important aspects to the traditional royal imagery: 1. New Constantines and 2. Second Solomons.

Liberation and protection of Christian nations and championing in Holy War against the Moslem rulers was an important aspect of the multifaceted concept of *Constantine*-ism. Wars for the Caucasus, and especially battles for Ani formed a core of this imagery. Military and religious achievements were consolidated with international acts, and Muslim rulers recognized Georgians as protectors of Christians. Presenting Georgian monarchs as Constantine the Great demonstrates that the Bagrationis were seen by their contemporaries as rulers of the *oecumene* fighting for all Christianity who freed believers from the infidel Seljuks (‘devils’) and took them back to the divine kingdom.

The *oecumene* was limited with northern section of the Middle East, stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian. The court chronists underlined the very fact that the Georgian kings

“established the borders (of their realm) in the east and north”, and “owned the lands from one sea to the other”. This remarkable geographical feature had astonishing parallel in the Old Testament where righteous king Solomon had had “dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72:8). This fact inspired official ideologists of the time to reshape existed model of Biblical kingship and claim Georgian Bagrationis to be both the descendants of the Biblical King David and Second Solomon, that is, the masters of the universe, the “kings of the entire East and West, North and South”.

Thus, ideological constructions were closely interwoven with territorial evolution of the Georgian kingdom in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This makes me conclude that the historical geography is the key to understanding political and ideological transformations of the time.