On Georgian Identity and Culture

Nine International Presentations by Professor Mariam Chkhartishvili
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Today, interest to Georgia is great all over the world; meanwhile the relevant literature in English still remains out of proportion. The desire somehow to fill this gap has driven the author to the idea of collecting of her presentations on Georgian identity and culture made at various international scientific forums and publish them in one volume.
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Foreword

Today, interest to Georgia is great all over the world; meanwhile the relevant literature in English still remains out of proportion. The desire to fill this gap (of course, only partially) has driven me to the idea of collecting my presentations on Georgian identity and culture made, at various international scientific forums, and publish them in one volume. These are papers which were not brought out (for the reasons not depended on me) in due time, and, accordingly are accessible only for the very limited circle of academics.

The principal addressee of this collection is the Anglophone specialist reader; it is also intended for my Georgian colleagues who always show animate interest (and this is quite normal) to the papers having been discussed with international public.

Nine contributions have been arranged according to the dates of the presentations.

The texts are published in their original forms. It is for this reason that the present book lacks uniformity in chapters’ design: references are made in different manner, while in some papers they are missing.

According to Georgian worldview nine is sacral number. It expresses fullness. Thus, nine chapters of this publication are not accident. The volume containing nine papers for me, as the author involved in Georgian culture, is endowed with certain sufficiency. At the same time I am realize that not only nine, but also nine by nine and even incalculably nine by nine papers would not be able to comprehend all facets of Georgian history with due insights. Thus, for the present publication the number nine simply served as indicator to the reasonable concluding point.

Mariam Chkhartishvili
April 4, 2009
Chapter 1

Hagiographical Sources of the History of David-Gareji Rock-Cut Hermitage

Paper presented at the International Conference “Rock-Cut Monuments of East and South Europe” (Georgian Academy of Sciences, September 20, 1998)

The rock-cut monasteries take an important place in the history of Georgian monasticism. David-Gareji monastery complex is the most remarkable one. It was founded by St David Garejeli (St David from Gareji) in 6th c. The monastery greatly promoted the further establishing and disseminating of Christianity in Georgia. It became the sacred place of Georgians. At the same time David-Gareji was a powerful center of Georgian Christian culture bringing up many generations of famous cultural workers.

Although damaged by the course of time David-Gareji rock-cut monastery still exists and so the observation of the monument at the place is an effective way for reconstructing the history of the monastery. However, some of the facts can be established only by the written (the narrative or the documental) sources. In many cases they are simply irreplaceable.

The goal of the present study is to consider hagiographical sources of the history of David-Gareji rock-cut monastery, particularly the hagiobiography of the founder of the monastery the Life of St David Garejeli. Five wordings of scientific interest have survived today. Before comparing the text in question with one another let us depict in general outlines the background against which the figure of St David Garejeli has to be conceived.
According to Georgian church tradition the Christian mission begins in Georgia at apostolic era. The first preachers of the new faith were Jesus Christ’s immediate disciples Saint Apostles. But afterwards, let us recall the figurative saying of Ephrem Mtsire (Ephrem the Minor, Georgian philosopher, 11th c), “… the fields of the seeds of the holy apostolic teaching are many times seized by the weeds of idolaters”¹ and so it became necessary “the calling again” or, in other wards, the mission activities of St Nino, which resulted in official adoption of Christianity in Kartli (ancient designation of Georgia) Kingdom. The deed of St Nino was followed and actually crowned with the activities of the missionaries from Syria in 6th c. They are known as thirteen Assyrian fathers. The “Assyrians” established monasteries in many regions of Georgia and made monastic life and the process of Christianizing of the country very intensive. For this great contribution in ecclesiastical history the leader of the mission St Joan Zedazneli (St Joan from Zedazeni) was highly appreciated by the medieval Georgian historiography. Like the apostles equal St Nino the epithet “Illuminator” is used concerning his person.² The most notable disciple of St Joan Zedazneli was St David Garejeli.

As was mentioned above there are five wordings of the Life of St David Garejeli interesting from scientific viewpoint. The wording G₁, the oldest one, hasn’t been created earlier than 9th c.³ Due to the direct information of the sources we know

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¹ Ephrem the Minor. Report on cause of Georgians conversion and writings in which it is recorded. The text together with an introduction, glossary and index published by T. Bregadze, Tbilisi, 1959 (in Georgian), p.4.

² Kartlis Tskhovreba (Life of Kartli//History of Georgia). The text established according to all the manuscripts by S. Kaukhchishvili, Tbilisi, 1955, vol.1 (in Georgian) (further: Kartlis Tskhovreba I), p.207.

³ The wording G₁ notes the famous Georgian ecclesiastic St Hilarion Kartveli who had laid St David’s relicts into the specially prepared shrine
that first writings on St Assyrian fathers’ activities were composed already in their lifetime. Thus, the original wording G has not reached our time. The lost monument can be outlined after source-study investigation of all of the available wordings.

The full title of the wording G₁ is the following: Life and activities of our saint father David Garejeli. It is a brief composition without any introduction just beginning by the story on St David’s arrival in Gareji desert: “And our saint father David went to the deserted and waterless place to excruciate himself aiming to find the everlasting and constant joy and tranquility by the momentary hardship. Therefore he


Kartlis Tskhovreba I, p.207.

chose to excruciate himself outside [of the settlement], in the desert.ُ Therefore this desert is called excruciating in the outside”.

Several topics are considered by the hagiographer in sequence: (1) St David’s settling down in the desert Gareji; (2) driving out Satan; (3) establishing monastic community and cutting out a church; (4) granting grace by Lord to the desert; (5) St David’s dormition and transformation of the desert into a sacred place. Each of these topics can be divided into subtopics and episodes, which are put into a shape in accordance with requirement of hagiographical genre.

C. Kekelidze dated the wording G₁ by the first half of 10ᵗʰ c on the grounds of the language data.⁷ From E. Gabidzashvili’s viewpoint the author of the wording G₁ is a writer of the second half of 10ᵗʰ c Arsen the Catholicos. The scholar stresses that it is impossible to discern whether it is the first or the second half of 10ᵗʰ c on a basis of the language data, where as the composition in question corresponds to the other writings on Syrian missionaries belonging to Arsen.⁸

Indeed, to our present knowledge the language data can not be used as an attestation in such a case. However it is clear that the wording G₁ doesn’t belong to Arsen either. Though this

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⁶ Desert – u-dabn-o, unsettled place in Georgian. Tophonym “Gareji” is derived from “Gare-sja” = excruciating in the outside, e.g. in unsettled place.
⁷ Monuments I, p. 229.
wording was written in accordance with Arsen’s compositions, its style is completely different. Arsen’s writings are featured by source references, extensive didactic and emotional discourses, whereas the author of the wording G₁ is not tending to express his emotions; he merely describing the course of events in laconic manner without any indication to his sources.

The general analysis of hagiographical cycle in question leads to conclusion that Arsen’s compositions are less informative than were the original wordings. Arsen aimed to create a single whole reading on St Assyrians’ activities, wanting to show that “these earthly angels lived at the same time and were found up together like a gold chain”. ⁹ For this goal the writer had shortened the historical narrative of his sources and composed a didactic hagiographical writing formed as a dylogy. One chapter of the dylogy was dedicated to St Joan Zedazneli and some of his disciples, mainly St Shio and the other one to St Abibos Nekreseli (St Abibos from Nekresi) the only martyr among the St Assyrian fathers. Arsen showed his particular attention to St Abibos Nekreseli apparently because before his enthronement as the catholicos of Georgia, he was the bishop of Nekresi. ¹⁰ There are only passing references on St David Garejeli in the both of the parts. Later the incompleteness of information on St David seemingly had been considered as a lacuna and by this reason the wording G₁ had been produced.

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Thus, the wording $G_1$ was created after 10$^{th}$ c., but not later than 12$^{th}$ c when the metaphrastic wording $G_2$ (*Life and activities of our saint and divine father David Garejeli*) for which the wording $G_1$ had served as a basis source emerged.$^{11}$

The principal episodes of the wording $G_2$ are identical with episodes of the wording $G_1$. Besides, the wording $G_2$ contains a general discourse on Assyrians’ mission. The hagiographer begins with his regrets for the incompleteness of his sources and mentions that St David’s bodily parents are unknown, then the writer proceeds to St Joan Zedazneli and points that St Joan was St David’s spiritual father who “instead of milk and babies’ nutrition gave him hard and strong food that is divine learning and teaching”.$^{12}$ The wording $G_2$ has an introduction formed in accordance with requirements of metaprastic hagiography consisting of a bit of interesting information for us. There is mentioned Onophre the man who had ordered the text. He lived in 12$^{th}$ c.$^{13}$

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$^{12}$ Monuments III, p.173.

The wording G3 (Life of our saint and divine father David Garejeli the hermit\textsuperscript{14}) was created by Romanos the Metropolitan (1\textsuperscript{st} half of 18\textsuperscript{th} c) as the memorial postscript tells us. The wording G2 had served as a principal source for the wording G3. Besides this the hagiographer based his narration on the other writings of the cycle and on his own impressions received from his observation of the sacred place.\textsuperscript{15}

The wording G4 (Life of our saint father David Garejeli told briefly\textsuperscript{16}) also belongs to 18\textsuperscript{th} c. Its basic source is the wording G2\textsuperscript{17} or maybe similar to it the wording G3.

The wording G5 hasn’t any title.\textsuperscript{18} This text is inserted in Kartlis Tskhovreba. The interpolation had been made by the special commission of Georgian king Vakhtang VI in 18\textsuperscript{th} c.

As it has been mentioned above Arsen’s writings are less informative than probably were the original texts. Arsen composed adapted readings in which many historical details are omitted. The wording G1 is also shorter than the monument it had originated from. Even casting a cursory glance at the text makes it obvious. The wording in question contains no information on St David’s life before his coming to Georgia. It has been found out that the information about St David’s

\textsuperscript{14} The monument is handed down to us in one manuscript which is published. See Monuments III, pp.291-311.


\textsuperscript{17} ibid, p.242.

\textsuperscript{18} Kartlis Tskhovreba I, pp. 209-210. The Russian version of the “Life of St David Garejeli” was made by M. Sabinin in a base of various wordings and legends. See the complete account on Lives of Georgian Saints. Selected and translated from the original texts by M. Sabinin. St Petersburg, 1871, pp.123-140.
activities in Georgia isn’t complete too. The legend telling about St David Garejeli’s first settling down in Tbilisi on a mount Mtatsminda (the holy mount) points out to such conclusion. The city has been full of fireworshippers. From time to time St David came down and preached Christianity among the local population. The Fire-worshippers decided to get rid of the Christian preacher. For this reason they accused the saint father of liaison with a nun. However, the holy man supported by the Lord has been justified. Despite the morphological similarity of this episode to the stories widely spread in whole Christian world, there is no reason to doubt the truthfulness of the account according to which at first St David lived and acted in Tbilisi. This place on Mtatsminda even today is called as “Mama-Daviti” (father David). The original text doubtlessly reflected this event. On a ground of analysis of some frescoes of the monastery David Gareji G. Abramishvili has assumed that the painter’s written source contained information on St David’s activities in Tbilisi. Certainly it should have been more extensive monument than the wording G₁, perhaps just the original writing has been used by the painter.

There is mentioned in the wording G₁ that St David Garejeli liked to offer prayers alone. Once a “barbarous hunter” came upon him and being surprised to see a human in the

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* In the middle of sixth century Eastern Georgia was a sphere of political influence of Iran. Iranians urgently propagated ideology of fire-worshipping. As a result of this propaganda part of Georgians were converted to Masdaism.

19 P. Ioseliani, Description of Tbilisi antiquities, 1866 (in Russian), pp.41-42. This story with distinctive details has been recorded by M. Sabinin. See: “Paradise of Georgia”, pp.268-269.

wilderness, asked him: “Who are you?” As the hagiographer notes St David “answered in Armenian language”.21

The wording G₁ doesn’t give a reader any clue enabling him to answer the following question: why did St David speak to the hunter in Armenian, where and when did St father learn Armenian language. Undoubtedly the useful material should have been presented in the original text.22 So it can be concluded once again: the wording G created in 6th c was more extensive and informative monument than the adapted and shortened wording G₁.

For source-study investigations the most noticeable episode of St David’s hagiobiography is the divine hermit’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the second period of his living in the desert Gareji since the monastic brotherhood had been established the saint father decided to travel to Jerusalem in order to offer prayers in the sacred places. All the wordings having survived today don’t contain any details of this travel. Probably the details were not present in the wording G too. It is typical for hagiography. In most of the cases in the monuments of this genre “travel is indicated rather than described sometimes in such a way that the hagiographer appears to be moving the saint from one place to another as if he were moving a chessman”.23

21 Monuments I, p.244.
22 Partially for this reason St David Garejeli was believed to be the famous Armenian philosopher David Anakht. However, on a basis of chronological inconsistency (David Anakht’s activities are dated by 5-6th cc) this identification is disputed. See: R. Siradze. David Anakht and the problem of beauty of thought. – Literary-aesthetic assays, Tbilisi, 1987 (in Georgian), pp.160-161.
The literary character of the story about the fact of pilgrimage to Jerusalem of course isn’t a reason to doubt the truth of this account. In the monuments of Georgian hagiography one can find various testimonies on pilgrimages. The monks or ordinary believers were going on pilgrimage to sacred place far from Georgia. St David Garejeli wasn’t an exception. However, he acted in a strange manner. He reached Jerusalem but came back without entering the city. The St father didn’t want to tremble the roads walked over by Christ and only carried with him three stones to make this event memorable.

From the viewpoint of Kekelidze this episode indicates that St David was Monophisite. At that time Jerusalem was in the hands of the followers of Chalcedonian Christianity, so St David avoided meeting them.\(^24\) Though it seems this interpretation isn’t quite correct. The holy man expressed his modesty by his deed, showed that he had defeated the most dangerous evil, evil of pride. According to hagiographers St David was most humble and “didn’t allow himself to set food on the land where Our Savior’s feet had been stepped”.\(^25\) “Merciful God didn’t like to conceal hopefulness and faithfulness of this brilliant man and made his glory evident”\(^26\). After this God granted the grace of sainthood to David and also granted to desert Gareji one-third of the grace given to Jerusalem. The patriarch of Jerusalem inspired by the Lord sent his messengers and they took away two stones out of three and left to David only one as a sign of the divine will. They also conveyed to him the words of the Lord: “Go to your desert and take with you [the stone] and make the desert holy by your coming. Let everybody who will arrive in the desert and touch your bones with faith be healed in their souls and bodies and be

\(^{24}\) C. Kekelidze. On coming of Syrian ecclesiastics to Georgia, p.31.
\(^{25}\) Monuments IV, p.413.
\(^{26}\) Monuments III, p. 200.
absolved of the sins; and let this stone be in memory of this time”.

What does it mean “one third of Jerusalem grace”? The wording G₅ gives the following explanation: going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem once equals to offering prayers in David Gareji three times. Thus, in the hagiographical sources is presented a very convincing interpretation of St David’s refusal to enter the city. It is obvious the pilgrim from Gareji desired to receive the divine grace. If we associated this episode with Christological disputes and explained the aforesaid deed of St David by his position in this dispute, we would rather oversimplify the idea of the composition.

The same episode is considered for determination the time of St David Garejeli’s activities in Georgia. In the wording G₁ is mentioned the name of the Jerusalem patriarch: Elijah (Elia). Elijah II was on a throne in 494-517. Thus, according to the wording G₁ St David’s pilgrimage in Jerusalem took place not later than 517. Moktsevay Kartlisay (Conversion of Georgia) records that St Assyrian fathers arrived in Georgia in the middle 6th c. All the other writings of the hagiographical cycle in question containing chronological data correspond to this account. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the wording G₁ on one hand and in another Moktsevay Kartlisay and writings on St Assyrian fathers. The data of second group of sources are accepted by most of the scientists. But the question why the wording G₁ is so inaccurate remains still undecided.

27 Monuments I, p.238.
29 Monuments I, p.94.
30 ibid, p.243; Monuments III, p.117.
31 D. Merkviladze, Syrian ecclesiastics in Georgia (St Assyrian fathers): Candidate dissertation, Tbilisi, 1996 (in Georgian).
Only comparing all the wordings of the *Life of St David Garejeli* we can solve this problem. Like the wording $G_1$ in the wordings $G_2$ and $G_4$ there is mentioned “Elia”. In the wording $G_5$ the name of the Jerusalem patriarch is omitted.\textsuperscript{32} The wording $G_3$ states “Makari” instead of “Elia”.\textsuperscript{33} From E. Gabidzashvili’s viewpoint it is difficult to explain why Romanos had made this alteration.\textsuperscript{34}

Romanos, it seem, is trying to correct the inaccuracy of the chronological data. Presumably he knew that St David’s contemporary was Makari (he was on the throne twice – in 554 for a few months and in 563-574) and not Elia. Consequently the redactor supposed that the Jerusalem patriarch being announced by God on St David had to be Makari. This logical argument seemingly pointed him to the need of changing the data presented in his source. But maybe in addition to the principal source Romanos got hold of a certain monument on ground of which he had made his correction. It seems incredible that he had chosen Makari among the other Jerusalem patriarchs being contemporaries of St David Garejeli only on the basis of the logical arguments.

Probably in the original wording $G$ the patriarch’s name wasn’t mentioned at all. Only later a certain redactor presumably inserted the name in the text though reproduced it by mistake as “Elia”. Then this mistake had been mechanically repeated until Romanos had corrected it.

Opiza the first Georgian monastery established by the king Vakhtang Gorgasali in the second half of 5\textsuperscript{th} c was a monastery of Byzantine type.\textsuperscript{35} As it is generally known Byzantine monasticism is less ascetic than radical Syrian one. For

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Monuments III, p.200; Monuments IV, p.413.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Monuments III, p.306.
\item \textsuperscript{34} E. Gabidzashvili, Romanos Eristavi and his unknown composition, p.85.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Kartlis Tskhovreba I, p.117-178.
\end{itemize}
Georgian Christianity was unusual the conception of solitary mode of life established by St Assyrian fathers. According to Kartlis Tskhovreba “all Georgians were astonished”\textsuperscript{36} by St Joan Zedazneli and his disciples.

St David Garejeli’s conceptualization of monastic life comes clear from his answer on the question of the barbarous hunter: “I am a sinful man... I pray His Mercifulness to pass my momentary life in tranquility and peace”.\textsuperscript{37} It is obvious that St David was longing for to the mystic position. Only by permanent inner tranquility and peace of mind he would have been able to achieve continuous feeling of divine closeness, existing with God. \textit{Unio mystica} with the Almighty was considered as a reward for certain mode of live. This was a sternway of life characterized by complete indifference to daily necessities. St David didn’t care for constructing his habitation, a natural recess in the rock served him as his abode. Having settled in this waterless desert he didn’t mind about a well and seemingly used a natural rain-water reservoir. It didn’t matter for him how to clothe himself or what to eat. If there was nothing even grass would have done for him though the St father didn’t refuse deer milk (he considered it as God’s mercy) and provision brought by the barbarous hunter who had been converted (Bubakar was his name).

St David didn’t make special effort to gather the monks. Even after monastic community had been established he continued praying alone and didn’t demand from the brothers to cut out a church in the rock. Bubakar made the church at his own expense. Human thoughts didn’t destroy St father’s overall peace and nothing prevented him from focusing his attention on God.

\textsuperscript{36} ibid, p.207.
\textsuperscript{37} Monuments I, p.234.
This way of salvation was very hard. Despite this St David had many followers yet in his lifetime. Many hermits having such radical position of life acted in Georgia later too. This can be concluded from the *Life* of St Grigol Khandzteli (St Grigol from Khandzta).\(^{38}\) However, the idea on which monastic movement leaded by St Grigol was based in 9\(^{th}\) c essentially differed from St David conception.\(^{39}\) This is evident even by the criteria according to which the saint fathers had chosen the places for their activities. St David liked udabno of Gareji because it was useless, barren, and severe, “without any means of life, food and water”\(^ {40}\). On the contrary St Grigol chose udabno of Klarjeti with wonderful climatic conditions, watering-places, forests.\(^ {41}\)

As we have mentioned above, “Gareji” is a place for suffering excruciating torments. “Gare” – outside, isn’t simply an unsettled place, this word is associated with widely spread in Georgian hagiography term “Gare-skneli”. According to hagiographers Christendom is surrounded by Gareskneli, unchristianized segment of the space, the residence of Satan. For shortening Satan’s time it is necessary to oppress him in the space. Therefore, all Georgian saints made efforts to diminish “Gareskneli” and expand the realm of Christians. Aiming this goal St David settled down in “Gareskneli” (//=Gareji), drove out Satan and transformed the udabno into a city, the residence of church. Not only “desert”, but also “cave” had a special meaning. In Christian tradition it is considered as a spiritual center where most probably the man can contemplate God.

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\(^{38}\) ibid, p.253.


\(^{40}\) Monuments I, p.230.

\(^{41}\) ibid, pp. 262-263.
St David lived like many other desert fathers, his way of life was similar to theirs. It is natural. All of them had the same ideals in common. However, they differed from each other as well. The biographer of St David tried to state the individual peculiarities of his hero. St David’s attitude towards Satan is very indicative. In the *Life* Satan appeared as a dragon which inhabited the cave located lower than the St father’s abode. The dragon recognized St David’s authority and according to his command left the cave at once, whereas St Joan Zedazneli’s struggle against Satan as well as those of many other desert fathers’ took a dramatic course. St Joan Zedazneli was severely opposed by demons. On the contrary St David Garejeli didn’t make special efforts to chase the dragon. He even took it under his protection until it’s leaving the desert and became very sad when God struck this evil creation by lightning. Concerning this topic it is impossible not to remember gospel’s maxim of loving foes and doing them kindness. Perhaps, for the unparalleled magnanimity and perfection Georgians have loved this Syrian ascetic. David from Gareji is one of the most popular among the other saints of Georgian church. Hagiographers are tireless in pronouncing a eulogy on him. They compare him to the Sun, which illuminated the Georgians.

42 ibid, pp.208-209. We can draw a parallel between the “Life” of St David Garejeli and the other monuments of Georgian or non-Georgian hagiography. The story of Serbian Saint Peter of Koriša’s struggle against demons we can cite as an indicative example. See: D. Popović, the cult of St Peter of Koriša. Stages of development and patterns, Balcanica XXVIII, Belgrade, 1997, pp.201-202.

43 L. Mirianashvili interprets this episode in interesting way: St David had merry upon dragon because he saw the root of harm not in dragon itself, but in the evil capturing it. According to the author this episode has to be considered together with links of well-known account on St George’s struggle against the dragon. See: Gareji Mountains and a man, Georgians, 1997, pp.11-12.
Chapter 2

Catholicism and Identity: Georgian Case

Paper presented at the International Conference “Catholic Missions in Georgia” (Pontifico Instituto Orientale, June 13, 2002)

Since Reformation crisis, resulting in the emergence of Protestant churches, Catholicism presents as a marker for in-groups grounded on collective cultural (ethnic, national) identities. The role of this Christian denomination played in Western societies is well known. What was an impact of Catholicism in Georgia, in the country of established Orthodox Christianity?

The Georgian ethnic identity was formed in pagan period long before the conversion took place. The adoption of Christianity in the twentieth of the 4th c as an official religion only reinforced already shaped identity. As a result of incorporation into the Christian Church, which represents supranational unity, self-awareness of ethnies (the term offered by Prof. A.D. Smith) became especially salient. The rendering of Biblical Books into Georgian helped to unification of the language. This in its turn promoted the process of in-group consolidation. As early as 2nd half of 5th c the Georgian Church became autocephalous. The consolidation along the religious lines was continued further and expressed in schism between the Georgian and Armenian Churches in the first decade of 7th c. Later on the Georgian identity fused with Orthodoxy. The ethnonym Kartveli – the Georgian – had gained the sense of confessional term.

Georgians kept close interrelation with Rome before and after Schism of 1054. The considerably remote religious center with worldwide respect and authority and with no direct and immediate political claims concerning Georgia was very
attractive for Georgian policymakers both in periods of collaboration with Byzantium and rivalries alike.

Especially interesting for observation these interactions are after the Schism. Of course, Georgians were very well informed about this crucial event, however, they preferred to act in this way, as they had not noticed it at all. They were tended to look at issue of Church unity from the higher positions than European countries. They continued to respond appeals of Popes, expressed desire to participate in Crusades. As it attested by historical sources the eminent King of United Georgia David the Builder (11-12th cc) collaborated with crusaders. In the most decisive battle against the Turks at Didgori in 1121 David included in his troops 100 (according to other sources 200) crusaders and didn’t matter that this soldiers were not Orthodox. The limited number of European participants makes us to conclude that their presence in this battle was not intended to solve any military task, but had an ideological meaning. By this gesture King David wanted to show his devotion to the international duties, express the growing political ambitions of Georgia. David wanted to show, that Didgori Battle wasn’t a particular struggle of Georgians against the Turkish invaders, but the part of the general world range battle between believers and non-believers.

The Catholic missionaries began their activities in Georgia in the 13th c. Since this date during the many centuries the Roman and Georgian ecclesiastics and civic authorities changed with each others letters, ambassadors. Georgians – high nobility and lower social strata alike – welcomed the Catholic missionaries, representatives of various orders.

The establishing of Catholic missions in East was ordinary policy of Rome. In different epochs this policy was filled with different sense, had changed immediate objectives and intensity. After the fall of Constantinople its task was to pick up the Byzantine legacy, after Reformation Rome tried to find
the compensation there for losses in Northern and Central Europe.

But what were the goals of Georgians?

First of all, they desired to achieve an international recognition. Secondly, they wanted to break informational isolation. In the letters of the Georgian Kings to Popes we often find the narrations about Georgians military activities against the non-believers. The information of such kind had quite definite objectives. Georgian policymakers longed to place their struggle into the context of European history, to coordinate their efforts with activities of West European Christians for obtaining moral and material assistance from out of the country.

The time of Catholic missionaries’ activities in Georgia is coincided with very hard period in the life of Georgian people. It was the epoch of political fragmentation, cultural decay. The letters of Georgian laity and clergy to Popes, catholic missionaries’ reports depicted vividly this sad reality. Georgians begged to send physicians, ecclesiastical items, and church painters, because they lacked all these living necessities. This condition was a result of permanent Turkish and Persian invasions. The links with the progressive European culture was ruptured. In situation like this Catholicism was viewed by Georgian political elite as only possible channel for receiving cultural achievements from abroad. “Those who longed to help fatherland were in hurry to become Catholics, Europeans” – noted concerning the aspirations of those times Georgian historian Niko Berdzenishvili.

As I have already mentioned the devastation of Georgia was caused by permanent inroads of Muslims. However, the danger to be swept was coming not only from the military activities against Georgians. Not less dangerous for the in-group’s persistence was considerable peaceful Armenian expansion. During Middle Ages (and this is also reality of
contemporary Georgia) Armenians constituted quite palpable portion of the country population. The history their non-military occupation is rather long, and out of scope of my presentation. I do not intend to deal with this issue now. I will limit myself with a few notes concerning the presence of contesting Armenian in-group in Georgia.

First of all, I would like to point out that Armenians were economically rather powerful stratum of Georgian society. Being pressed by the hard living conditions some Georgians accepted Armenian Christianity which allowed them to enjoy privileges in certain sphere of social activities and some kind of financial support. Usually, Georgians’ entrance into Armenian Church caused deethicization of Georgians. Since the abolishment of native state institutions, the Armenian ecclesiastics being the main coordinators in the process of ethnic consolidation considered Orthodox Georgians as their potential flock. Apart this, at the Georgian court Armenians possessed quite firm positions, and this situation became customary in the period under the consideration.

Armenians were scattered over the globe and as merchants were mobile across the political frontiers. For this reason they were used by Georgian Kings as mediators between them and other countries. Armenian merchants were Georgian’s ambassadors, even spies. The appearance of Catholic missionaries changed the already established social order, because this connoted the direct contacts of Georgians with Western World. That meant drastic changes in Armenians’ position occupied by them during many centuries in Georgian state. Just by these claims may be explained the very sad facts of Catholic missionaries’ fanatic persecutions that were organized by Armenian ecclesiastics in Georgia. Thus, it is clear that Georgians positive attitude towards the Catholicism was an expression not only anti-Muslim, but also anti-Armenian disposition of Georgian community.
By means of Catholicism Georgians even tried to keep balance between Western and Russian influence in Georgia.

In spite of this from the very beginning Georgian policy makers put the process of spread of Catholicism in certain limits. They didn’t want to be parted from Orthodox World in full and were afraid of drastic changes in dogma, in liturgy. Georgian society was customary Orthodox society with traditional perceptions and already established links with Orthodox centers. We have to bear in mind the Russian factor too. Orthodox Russia with its claims on Third Rome appeared as powerful factor in Caucasus in definite epoch and after this had been permanently stayed in outlook of Georgian politicians. Russia offered the alternative way for integration into European culture and, thus, made difficult to make final decision in favor the Catholicism. Georgians wanted to help to collaboration of Catholic and Orthodox Worlds. They hoped to play a role of mediators. Correspondence between the Georgian King Teimuraz I (17th c) and his contemporary Catholicos Zakaria with Pope is an eloquent illustration to it. The Pope appealed to them to change the faith. Teimuraz and Zakaria replied him with the great respect presenting the expanded information about the life of Georgia and their activities against the Muslims, however, didn’t give the direct answer concerning the issue of changing the creed. Meanwhile, both of them repeated over and again that Georgians were converted in era of Constantine the Great and since this epoch managed to keep their faith unchangeable. From this remark became obvious that Georgians didn’t view the collaboration with Rome as conversion of the entire country to Catholicism. The ambassador of Teimuraz Niciphor introduced himself to the leaders of European countries with the representative of Constantinople. Nearly simultaneously the contacts with Catholic West Teimuraz conducted the negotiations with Russia. And he was not an exception among the Georgian
political leaders. He informed with proud the Pope about the support he had offered to Catholic missionaries in constructing of church. However, in parallel with this statement asked him to send the artisans for repairing of “their” churches, i.e. Orthodox churches. Thus, the policy of Georgian Kings of the period in question is quite complicated, because the political situation they had to act was complicated.

But, what was the ground for making of positions closer?

The most attractive feature of Catholicism for Georgians was Papacy, an institute of a single supreme religious authority. Georgians appreciated the opportunity to be included in wider cultural and political communion. By means of this they hoped to persist to the danger of cultural isolation and avoid the perspective of ethnical dissolution. Catholicism was the most suitable for this purpose. Georgians eager to be incorporated into the European community, but they did not apply Protestant countries. Unitarian undivided Europe – this was what Georgians needed. They viewed Catholicism as an ideology of undivided Europe and institute of Papacy – as the guarantee of this unity. Georgians accepted easily the main requirement of Catholicism concerning the obedience to Popes as the duty of all Christians.

Despite this, the unification of Roman Catholic Church with the Georgian Church never had taken place. There are plenty of reasons to it. I will list only the most significant ones. The barrier in a way of unification undoubtedly was the missing of time. It was too late for new conversion. By the time of the Catholic missionaries activities in Georgia the Georgian identity had already sharply defined; religion (Orthodox Christianity) and ethnic consciousness were entwined. The task of separation of these two ethnic markers required great spiritual effort and important funding. Meanwhile Georgia never received any military or financial support from the Catholic West in situation when lack of money was simply
dangerous for Georgian people as ethnic community survival. To illustrate it I intend to concern the following episode from the biography of Georgian King Erekle (18th c). According to the missionaries records the King received from the Armenian ecclesiastics certain amount of money and in return for this allowed them to begin persecution of Catholics. The extremely severe condition drove Georgian leader to the actions like this. Erekle regretted himself and even found it necessary to offer apology to the missionaries. A little before the Georgievsk Treaty (agreement of 1783 between Georgia and Russia goaled on mutual support and collaboration) Erekle tried to obtain financial assistance from the West, however, was unsuccessful. Even the number of the Catholic missionaries sent in Georgia was limited. Thus, the plan of unification of Roman-Catholic and Georgian-Orthodox Churches failed. It was the direct result of halfway policy carried out by Rome in Georgia.

The great obstacles in the way of unification of the Churches put the immediate neighbors of Georgia who did not like spread of European influence there. Persia, Russia, Ottoman Empire tried to prevent the collaboration of Georgians with Roman-Catholics. Sometimes they acted directly, but more often through the Armenian ecclesiastics. As I have already mentioned, Armenians had their own interests in Georgia. In order to preserve Catholicism in Georgia, Rome decided to back the Armenian-unitors who were acceptable for all above listed countries. As it well known this branch of Catholicism is characterized by use Armenian in liturgy. Georgian Catholics were included in this flock. The simultaneous change of two main identity markers (confession and language) entailed their exit from Georgian in-group or in other words deethnicization of Catholic Georgians. This was the saddest result of history of Catholicism in Georgia. I think that just the memory of this experience makes Georgians opponents of confessional pluralism within Georgian ethnic
community. They are afraid that religious diversity will cause fragmentation of the ethnic body. Meanwhile Georgians mostly are proponents of political pluralism and shared positive attitude towards the other ideas of open society.

However, history of Catholicism in Georgia has another side as well. Therein we do not view policymakers. Ordinary Georgians and Catholic missionaries – faithful, devoted and educated persons – stand face to face. The envoys of Rome in Georgia lent their support to local population suffered from permanent foreign invasions and inner disorder. Catholicism gave to Georgians an opportunity to touch the progressive European culture. In turn, Georgian civilization became subject of interest for the West.
Chapter 3

Informative Value of Georgian Hagiographical Sources for Study of Ethnicity

Paper presented at the International Conference “The Urgent Problems for the Study of Historical Sources: Theoretical, Methodological and Computer Aspects” (Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, October 1, 2002)

The interrelation between ethnic groups, nations is a major factor of current world development. We are witnessing of ethnization of politics. It is partially for this reason (besides of its properly academic interest) that many scholars, representatives of various fields of sciences and humanities, are involved in study of phenomena of ethnicity, ethnic identity. Historians also contribute to the investigations in this sphere. However, the problems concerning source base of this issue is not still elaborated with due attention. According to the vastly spread scholarly opinion modern nations are formed in result of a long historical development. Thus, it is clear that historians need medieval sources, but which sources, this is a question.

Medieval author had not conceptualized phenomenon of ethnicity, ethnic identity. Accordingly we do not expect him providing us direct information on the subject. We have to seek indirect evidences in the cultural texts of remote past. This task requires preliminary delimitation of the key concepts in field. The clear-cut definitions of terms are always necessary precondition for successful searching.

Today the term identity refers to the same social event, that earlier was expressed by the terms self-understanding, self-definition. According to the opinion spread in special literature identity is ‘the images of individuality and distinctiveness
(“selfhood”) held and projected by an actor and formed through relations with significant ‘others’.

There may be distinguished identities of various kinds. One of them is an ethnic identity. Members of ethnic in-group share an idea of common origin and perceive themselves culturally distinctive, unique. Identity means boundaries. The ethnic boundary markers are religion, territory, language, customs, collective name, common destiny and so on. Thus, we have to find how the medieval authors viewed these dimensions.

For this purpose as it seems to me one should analyze first of all narrative sources, medieval historiography and hagiography. We can say that in regards of informative validity hagiography is essentially the same phenomenon as medieval historiography, however, the letter as the former are endowed with some genre peculiarities. Just these peculiarities in comparing with proper historiography are features that make hagiographical writings especially valuable for study of phenomena under the consideration.

As I have already mentioned religion is one of the boundary marker of ethnic identity. The hagiography was aimed to reinforce this marker. Thus, it had not only influenced the process of ethnic consolidation, but also reflected it.

Secondly, the existence of a homogeneous cultural space, penetrable cultural channels within the in-group are very important for formation of ethnic identity. Hagiography is a very genre that is intended for general public, for various strata of medieval society. This makes cultural elite and lower section of population closer to each other favoring the process of

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circulation of ethnic sentiments within the society. Cultural elite is a bearer of ethnic ideas, creator of conception of ethnic election that is decisive factor for ethnic survival.

One of the boundary markers is a language. As it was mentioned hagiography is intended for general public. Usually the various manuscripts, different wordings and versions, copies of texts are available. The said facts stimulate unification of language through out the in-group.

As we have already mentioned too, hagiography is a historiography, more precisely it is a biographical historiography. The emotional activation of past, the examples of devoted eminent personalities, heroes instead of plain impersonal historical narrative have its decisive role in making of ethnic identities. The need in holy authority itself is an eloquent testimony of forcible process of inter-group consolidation. Hagiography assist to creation of sacral common past, intensifies process of sharpening mnemonic dimensions of in-group solidarity.

Now let me display concrete materials. In particular I intend to concern the Life if Saint Nino. At the end of my presentation I am going to concern briefly the Lives of Georgian Athonite fathers too and make some necessary comparisons. I think it is necessary to explain reasons why the above mentioned monuments were chosen as the representative examples for our presentation.

The Life of St Nino is a biography of Illuminatrix of Georgians. It was created shortly after the conversion. As may be listeners are aware, it was customary in Georgian historiography to date this monument by the 9-10\textsuperscript{th} c. From the beginning of 1980s this opinion was challenged. Nowadays many specialists in field accept an opinion according to which the original version of the Life of Saint Nino was compiled in
the 4th c;³ however some scholars are still proponents of traditional solution of the problem. I have no opportunity (it is out of scope of recent study) to concern this subject in detail. However, I find it necessary to note that the results of the present investigation provide the additional arguments in support of the opinion according to which the Life of Saint Nino is a monument of the 4th c.

The creation of a trans-ethnic unity of the Christian Church brought peoples closer to each other. As a result of religious homogeneity cultural barriers between them became penetrable. Thus, the problem of more clear-cut self-delimitation faced all ethnical entities incorporated in Christendom. The Christianization was something like the process of globalization in modern era when ethnic peculiarities are accentuated in a framework of a unified world culture⁴. From this fact is follows that in this monument we can expect availability of information useful for ethnical studies.

11th c is a time of emergence of united feudal Georgian state of Sakartvelo. This fact reflected essentially new stage of internal consolidation; in its turn the existence of national political institutions maintained and helped the strengthening


⁴ See: Hastings’ (A. Hastings, ‘Special peoples’, Nations and Nationalism 5, 3, 1999, 394) remark concerning the decisive role of Christianity in process of nationhood construction: ‘Christianity stimulated the emergence of nations and the national model of the modern world’.
of inter-group bonds. Thus, our expectation to obtain evidences on ethnicity also in Lives of Athonite fathers are quite sound.

Firstly let me concern the Life of St Nino.

Perception of the inter-group bonds.

According to the Life Georgian in-group was conceived as an imagined unity, which besides the living members included the forbears, ‘fathers’ as well as an unborn generation, ‘sons’.

The compiler of the Life depicts vividly the King Mirian`s emotions concerning the information about the Lord’s Tunic being brought to Georgia. The King was overwhelmed with great joy when he learnt from the local Jews that their forerunners had brought the Lord’s Tunic from city of Jerusalem to Georgia. King Mirian considered this fact as a testimony of God’s favor towards the Georgia, as an expression of God’s will to rescue Georgians from the bondage concerns him:

“At those times, when, Thou, o, Lord, sent us you garment through these Jews from the Holy city of Jerusalem to this city of the strange seed, this city at those times was ruled by our fathers”.

Thus, King Mirian is joyful because he identifies himself with the forbearers. The one and same imagined community makes the ground for such identification.

As it was mentioned above the Life begins with an episode of farewell with the dying Illuminatrix. The believers are

5 I. Abuladze (ed.). *The monuments of old Georgian hagiographical literature* [dzveli k’art’uli agiograp’iuli literaturis dzeglebi]. Metsniereba, Tbilisi, 1963, vol.1, 87. I refer to the old Georgian original text pointing page numbers according to latest academic publication. Hoping to enlarge the circle of the readers with a direct access to the historical source I also refer to its modern Russian translation. See: *The Conversion of Georgia* [Obrashchenie Gruzii]: Translation from old Georgian into Russian by E. Taqashvili. Investigation and commentaries by M. Chkhartishvili. Metsniereba, Tbilisi, 1989, 26).
asking her about her life. Answering this question the Saint stresses that all events that took place refer not only to those people who immediately participate in the conversion, but also their offspring.

“Then Saint Nino began to speak and said: “My Ladies, pious and God’s obsequious women, I see you all as those of the first women in faith and with love towards God. And you are eager to know the ways of my life, of a poor bondwoman, and I will tell you. My soul comes to my throat and I am falling asleep forever. Keep ready the writing necessities and put down the story of my poor life, so that your progeny too will be aware about your faith and kind welcome and those of divine miracles which you were enable to witness”.6

Judging by the fact that the compiler’s denoting of this unity as a strange (unfamiliar) seed (natesavi) one can conclude the following: the members of the community under the consideration conceived their inter-group bonds as kinship-based and this community possessed a collective name though, designation strange seed is not a proper noun.

The reason of this must be seen in a specific composition of the Life, namely in the presentation of the history of Kartli from the position of an outsider. However, afterwards the reader is provided with the proper name of the community as well. It is Kartli. The ethnie Kartli had served as a core for Georgian nation. The ethnonym Kartveli (Georgian) as well as Sakartvelo (Georgia) derived from this ethnic term. Kartli means a set of Karts.

Territorial associations.

According to the Life the land of Kartli was resided by representatives of many ethnie. However, only the members of Georgian in-group are considered as the masters of the

territory. Despite the fact that Jews are inhabitants of the royal city of Mtskhet`a too, from viewpoint of King Mirian it is a city belonging exclusively to the *strange seed*.

The land of *Kartli* is a specific spot of the earth, clearly defined territory. After the separation St Nino’s parents who devoted the rest lifetime wholly to ecclesiastical activities, St Nino served a pious woman named Sara. According to the compiler’s appraisal this woman knew the *Scripture* better (Old and New Testament alike) than anyone in Jerusalem both among her contemporaries and her forerunners. When St Nino learnt from her that the Lord’s Tunic was entombed in Georgia, she expressed an animate interest to this country where the sacred thing was interred. Sara defines the country as follows:

“That country borders with the highlands of Armenia. That is a heathenish country. The Greeks and the Persians dominate over that country”.\(^7\)

Sara was Armenian; therefore it is not surprising that she viewed Georgia via Armenia. Presumably it was implied that about Armenia Sara informed St Nino previously. Thus, the presented definition of the land of *Karili* is rather concrete. This territory had its sacred center. It was the place where the Lord’s Tunic was interred. 

*Unique culture.*

Before conversion the members of the Georgian in-group had an allegiance towards the pantheon of Gods headed by God of Gods Armazi. Armazi was a subject of veneration of a *strange seed* exclusively.

Let us, consider the relevant place of the writing. On her way to Mtskhet`a St Nino stopped in the town of Urbnisi, she

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saw people worshipping strange Gods. They venerated fire, stones and wood as Gods. Then one day a great number of people set out from that town. They went to the great royal city of Mtskheta for purchasing and selling items and venerating their Gods. St Nino accompanied them. When they had reached the city, they stopped at the Mogueti Bridge and the holy woman saw fire worshippers. And on the following day there was a sound of trumpet and the King Mirian came forth presenting a terrible sight for eyes. Astonishing very much by worshipping rituals St Nino asked one Jewish woman what was this. The woman answered with disdain:

“The God of Gods of theirs Armazi, that is nothing but an idol, orders them”.\(^8\)

On the other hand the participants of this festal day were extremely careful not to be tempted by Jews or fire worshippers and avoided to contact them.

The linguistic considerations appeared to constitute a fundamental pillar of self-identification of the Georgian community in epoch of conversion. The *Life* provides interesting information concerning the language dimension of Georgian identity.

On her way to Georgia St Nino being extremely frightened by her apostolic mission, offered up prayers. The following phrase is remarkable:

“Oh, Lord, I am a woman, stranger and ignoramus, unaware of their language, how can I come up to them, and what can I say to the strange seed?”\(^9\)


Right away after her arrival to Georgia St Nino headed for the quarter of Jews “for the Jewish language”\textsuperscript{10} – explains the compiler. The holy woman stayed here for a month to learn about the life of the country. Thus, reader is shown that the Illuminatrix could not contact Georgians directly because of the language barrier. St Nino recollects:

“And then Shroshana, a sister of mine, came to me accompanied by a woman who knew Greek and she asked (with help of this woman) about my life”.\textsuperscript{11}

These examples, emphasizing language difficulties that St Nino faced in the first period of her activities in Georgia, make obvious that the language of the \textit{strange seed} was conceived as a specific one. Thus, a linguistic dimension characterized the Georgian in-group identity as well.

\textit{Common destiny}.

An idea of common destiny usually appears in ideologies of internal solidarity. The appropriate materials can be obtained in the \textit{Life} as well.

As it has been already said the compiler exhibits a picture of a poly-ethnical society. The representatives of all these ethnies took part in the process of conversion of the country; however, their participation in this process is regarded only as a fact of an individual biography. Solely Georgians dealt with the conversion as an ethnie. Sidonia recalls:

“A Persian Khuara, a noble, fire worshipper, a maternal uncle of Queen Nana, became ill. He suffered from an evil soul greatly and was due to die”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} I. Abuladze (Ed.). \textit{The monuments of old Georgian hagiographical literature}, vol.1, 117; E. Taqaishvili and M. Chkhartishvili, \textit{The Conversion of Georgia}, 37.

The Queen and the King begged St Nino to help Khuara. St Nino cured Khuara (only by her prayers without any medicine) and rescued him from devil. Khuara and his family members became followers of St Nino. Of course, this is a story of solely Khuara’s life and it does not deal with whole Persian ethnie’s history.

The case with the Jews is more eloquent. The same Sidonia reports: the newly converted King decided to construct a church. The builders were unable to erect one of the pillars. St Nino with a few disciples of hers (Sidonia being among them) stayed near the pillar by night offering up their prayers. The other sisters went to sleep. Only Sidonia was awake. St Nino continued praying. Terrible visions arose before Sidonia’s eyes. First the rivers overflowed their banks and the flood damaged greatly the city. Then the city was attacked and captivated by Persian troops. Sidonia was extremely terrified because the sword bearers were killing everybody around. However, she cheered up when hearing the following command:

“The King of Kings Khuaran Khuara orders you: do not touch the Jews!”

The image Persian troops are an allusion to Satan’s troops. Thus, we are shown the battle between Satan and Christianizing community. It is a struggle for the space. After the construction of the church is completed Satan will have to drive away. Despite the fact that among St Nino’s disciples are Jews they stand aside of this struggle presumably because they are non-members of the Georgian in-group.

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The above-mentioned facts allowed us to conclude that in the epoch of the Life creation Georgian society was self-designated kinship-based spatially delimited in-group the members of which regarded themselves culturally distinctive and believed in their common origin and destiny. Undoubtedly first of all the compiler expresses perceptions of ruling clans, but as the writing was intended for the general public (for liturgy) in certain estimation it reflects the aspirations and worldview of subordinated classes too. It is a striking fact that in this monument of old Georgian literature are presented actually all dimensions qualified by A. Smith as ethnic. 14

Aiming to depict the certain background against which the results of the present study would be convenient to view, as was announced from the very beginning would like to concern another monuments of Georgian hagiography compiled in period long after the creation of Life of St Nino had taken place. In particular, I intend to deal with the Life of Iovane and Eptvime Athonites by Giorgi Athonite and the Life of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli (Athonite) author of which is Giorgi Mtire. Specialists often point out the patriotic aspirations of these monuments. However, data of these writings had never been arranged according to the topics of ethnic studies.

As I have already mentioned in the Life of St Nino there was depicted the kinship-based community. The same is seen in the Lives of Athonite fathers. Georgians are designated as natesavi – seed (in sense of genos). However, in Life of Ivan and Uptime Taconites by Giorgio Taconite and the Life of Giorgio Mtatsmindeli (Athonite) we have the next stage of ethnic self-understanding. There is depicted not simply community, but collective personality. Very often in these texts one can find the pronoun ‘we’, that mostly refers to all Georgians and not only to the monastic brethren. Besides, we are witnessing of appearance of ethnic stereotypes. ‘We’, e.g.

Georgians, according to these writings are innocent, frank, while others, for example Armenians, are liars as well as Greeks.

On a base of the same sources, it is obvious, that Georgians in the 11th c like their compatriots in the 4th c perceived their in-group as an imagined community. The Athonite monks tried to preserve and multiply achievements of fathers and to pave the way for future generations. It is noteworthy to point out, that the religion and ethnic loyalties are actually equated: betrayal of Georgian ethnic interests means betrayal of Christ, participation in His Crucifixion.

Above Georgian monks carrying out their activities abroad the Georgia expressed positive attitude towards the native customs and appreciated ethnic peculiarities even in Christian liturgy, e.g. in most general sphere of the ecclesiastical life.

According to the Lives of Athonite fathers the Georgian in-group had it collective name – Kartveli – and it was associated with quite defined territory of Sakartvelo – containing various regions. This territory was not conceived as mere spot of earth, but the dwelling place of the community viewed as living personality.

Just within this context one has to consider the concept of apostolic origin of the Georgian church presented in these monuments. In Middle Ages attachment to the definite Apostle was expression of identity. Apostolic name served for ethnic in-group as emblem, as its ‘visiting card’.

Language is also one of the most significant ethnic boundary markers. If the author of Life of St Nino limited himself by pointing out the uniqueness of Georgian language, the compilers of Lives of Athonite fathers show the in-group’s members’ special care for developing of the language.

In the Life of St Nino Georgian identity was defined in relation with Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. The same picture is depicted in Lives of Athonite fathers, however, with particular
changing. The confrontation with Jews had lost its urgency, because of weakening of Judaic-Christian polemic. The attitude towards the Greeks despite of identical faith is rather negative. Armenians are considered as enemies. And this sentiment is based on religious discrepancy.

In addition of these facts the Lives of Athonite fathers contain one remarkable novelty in comparing with the Life of St Nino. I mean the evidence concerning Georgian system of education. As it well known the native system of education helps to the process of circulation of ethnic and national sentiments and for this reason has the great influence in merging of ethnic and national identities.

Thus, the ethnic self-consciousness is quite salient as in the Life of Iovane and Eqvtime Athonites and Life of Giorgi Athonite. However, the perceptions of the particular boundary markers are not identical. The perceptions of main ethnic boundary markers by the hagiographers show eloquently that there had passed quite long period since the Life of Saint Nino creation until the emergence of Lives of Athonite fathers. And it has not surprising if one recalls the large gap of time existing between the the writings under the consideration.

The analysis of Life of St Nino – the most ancient monument of Georgian hagiography – against the background of Lives of Athinite fathers has shown obviously that the information obtained in this type of the sources is very valuable for ethnical studies.

Thus, I find possible to generalize the conclusion grounded on the study of particular monuments of Georgian hagiographical literature because of general character of hagiography itself: as it is well known, despite the wide variety of hagiographical stories, within the whole Christian world the monuments of this genre were compiled according to the requirements of common samples and literary paradigms originated from Scripture.
Chapter 4

Georgian Identity: Stages of Development

Paper presented at the Seminar of Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (European Institute, London School of Economics, May 4, 2003)

Dear colleagues!

First of all, I want express my gratitude to the organizers of the Seminar for giving me the opportunity to present my paper here. My special thanks to Professors A. Smith and J. Hutchinson. The inclusion of my name in list of the seminar speakers was made possible thanks to their recommendations. And thank you very much for attending this session.

Of course, Georgian identity is not terra incognita for this audience. You all are informed about its present and, perhaps, to a lesser degree concerning its past. The information you have, however, is superficial or, to be more correct, one-sided. Until very recently only non-Georgians’ investigations on the subject were available. While studying a group identity, the opinions of outsiders are always important and valuable, but rarely manage to give the whole picture. There are few Georgian Anglophone authors and the majority of them are representatives of political sciences and more concerned with current events and recent history. For this reason, their approach very often lacks chronological depth and does not allow the reader to view the historical background of a phenomenon and perceive its development over long span of time.

As a historian, I will try to present the history of the Georgian identity from its very beginning until the present. The facts I intend to present may be familiar for you. But even so, I think, my presentation will be of certain interest for you: you
can observe how a representative of the Georgian in-group, i.e. me, conceives hers identity.

My presentation is based upon local and foreign sources of various types and epochs and special academic literature in history, linguistics, ethnology and so on. However, I will avoid references to them because of the massive period of time they cover (from millennia B.C. until nowadays) of historical processes. I will omit some personal names and toponyms intentionally. Data of this kind will detract from the point of my speech – a general overview of Georgian identity development.

The territory of historical Georgia, i.e. the territory occupied by the Georgian in-group in antiquity and the middle ages (which is a considerably broader area than one occupied by the modern Georgian state) was very conducive for ethnic group formation. This was a harmonizing combination of mountain (rich pastures) and plane (well irrigated) environments, creating favorable conditions for intensive agriculture and cattle breeding. Some of the rivers were suitable for inland navigation – the most effective form of communications in ancient and medieval times. In short, everything was in place for the emergence and maintenance of a self-sufficient economic system. In addition, the area in question was well isolated from the outside world: natural barriers, (mountain ridges from north and south, sea from west) protected the indigenous population from being dissolved physically or assimilated culturally by others. The archaeological data attest to the spread of a homogeneous culture within this territory over a long period of time (at least from second half of II millennium B.C until I millennium B.C.).

The first records of historical processes in the area are found in ancient Eastern and Greek historical sources. Assyrian and Urartian cuneiform inscriptions of 12-8\textsuperscript{th} cc B.C. mention
Diaoch and Colcha, which, were pre-state (due to becoming state) political bodies at the time. From the 8\textsuperscript{th} c B.C., chronicles dealing with the inhabitants of the territory of historical Georgia contain writings of Greek authors. The western and southwestern regions of the territory are associated with Argonauts’ adventure account (II half of 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennium B.C.). They mention Cholchians and their country Colchida extended from the Black Sea coast far to the east.

From the 4\textsuperscript{th}-3\textsuperscript{rd} cc B.C. for the designation of ancient inhabitants of Georgia, Greek authors used another ethnic term: Iberians and their country, Iberia. This country was situated far from Black Sea, beyond the mountain ridge Lichi. Despite the fact that Georgian medieval historiographers were well informed about the writings of classic authors, they mention neither Colchians, nor Iberians. Instead, the term used is Kartli, which is designation of a country as well as the collective owner of this territory (the self-name of modern Georgians, Kartveli, derives from the same stem). It is obvious that Colchians and Iberians are names given to the in-group by outsiders, while Kartli is the self-name of the group. The linguistic analysis of Kartli and Colchi lead us to conclude that the latter is a variation that emerged as a result of phonetic modifications of the former, more precisely, both issued from a common ethnic designation developed in different linguistic environments. In Georgian, Iberia or Imeria means the country beyond the mountain ridge. I think this was term used by Georgians lived western part of the country (i.e. Colchians by Greek authors) to designate their compatriots residing beyond the Lichi ridge. Supposedly, the Greeks borrowed this term, which afterwards was conceived as an ethnic name. In this respect, is very characteristic that today this term (Imerians) is referred to western Georgians. Their compatriots lived in east Georgia view them as residents of the same country, however beyond the Lichi ridge.
The term *Kartli*, as well as its Greek equivalents was a designation encompassing various sub-identities. The historical toponymy of Georgia and Greek sources point out plenty of communities and their self-names. These communities (ethnic categories?) were very mobile. The trajectory of their motion is rather striking: from northern to southern, from western to eastern extremities. The interrelations of new settlers with host population, as one can assume, were not always peaceful. Medieval Georgian historiography describes one such clash between two main Georgian political entities in 4th-3rd cc BC. It is told that the king of *Arian-Kartli* (a country in the southwest Georgia, territory of ancients Colchis), Azo, supported by Alexander the Great after the decline of the Acamenide Empire invaded the territories in northeast and conquered the main city of Mtskheta, and captured and killed the head of the community, Samara. Azo established his authority relying on his kin brought by him from *Arian-Kartli*. According to medieval annalist Leonti Mroveli, this was blood-thirsty man who cruelly persecuted the local population. He established a cult of his native Gods. Longing to unify the kingdom, he abolished regional partitions; the northern neighbors were laid under his tribute. This situation continued for a quarter of a century. The whole population was disgusted with Azo’s manner of ruling. Parnavaz – the nephew and heir of the slain Samara had grown up by this time, having been raised in hiding in the mountains. He with his allies arranged a rebellion against Azo, won and forced him to flee Mtskheta. After a year passed by, Parnavaz overran Azo’s homeland, *Arian-Kartli*, killed Azo and established his authority over all territories occupied by Georgian speaking population. Parnavaz, unlike Azo, achieved success without undertaking bloody measures. He knew that it was impossible for him be constantly at war with the Arian-Kartvelians. He granted great privileges to representatives of Azo’s kin, gave them opportunity to
participate in ruling of the kingdom. This consensus amounted to artificial kinship – Azo’s kin were incorporated into Parnavaz’s house. This social synthesis found eloquent expression in the pantheon of gods created by Parnavaz. The newly invented ‘God of Gods,’ Armazi (it was considered as Parnavaz himself), was erected in the center, while Gatsi and Gatsa - idols brought from Arian-Kartli – stood at either side of it. Parnavaz changed the forms of interrelation with neighbors as well. He established a peaceful relationship with them by means of dynastic marriages. Thus, as a result of social contract between two main political bodies, the first Georgian monarchy by center in Mtskheta emerged. This state, ruled by an autocratic king was divided into 8 administrative units. Regional governors were king’s officials and their main responsibility was collecting of taxes for the royal treasury. Soon, Parnavaz managed to accumulate all goods and strengthened his authority. Medieval Georgian annalists consider this a time of great prosperity.

Parnavaz knew the importance of language in integrating the different regions and in establishing a clear-cut identity. This political apparatus needed an official language. For this, Parnavaz choose Georgian. He strengthened the role of the language with two measures: first, he prohibited the use of other languages, then he introduced (invented?) the Georgian alphabet (the original Georgian script, so-called Mtavruli) and recorded initial events in the life of the newborn social body in the historical chronicle. The fragment of this chronicle is available in later composition “Conversion of Kartli” as introductory part to the compilation. Thus, Parnavaz enforced all main ethnic markers and added to them a uniform administrative apparatus.

After Parnavaz’s death, his son Saurmag ascended to the throne. A revolt against him took place immediately. The chiefs of the tribes, having been replaced by the King’s
officials in regions were dissatisfied. Despite the fact that the new king managed to settle the conflict, the kingdom gradually crumbled politically and in the 2nd c B.C., even lost certain regions. These territories were part of former Arian-Kartli. They were taken by Armenia. The Armenian king created separate political unit in these regions. The viceroys of this unit were descendents of Azo’s kin. An only century later was the King of Mtskheta able to partially retake these territories. In the 1st-2nd cc, the Georgian kingdom grew stronger and began play a decisive role in world politics. This period is also significant in regard to identity history. The kingdom had grown larger then it was in Parnavaz’ times. Parsman II pushed the frontiers of the Georgian state far to the southwest. The ethnic self-awareness of his subjects became salient in face the other states, first of all Roman Empire.

As I have already mentioned, my account will be but a brief overview. Now, I am forced to omit very interesting facts and direct your attention to the 4th c A.D.

King Mirian (first half of 4th c) possessed the inner country, southwest and easternmost regions. According to Georgian annals, he beautified the burial place of king Parnavaz. By this gesture evidently he wanted to show that he was successor to Parnavaz’s legacy. (In one area, he did follow in the footsteps of Parnavaz. He too established a new state religion. During Mirian’s reign, Christianity replaced the religion invented by Parnavaz – the cult of Armazi). However, it is obvious that his pretensions were far from reality and the western regions of the kingdom were under his power in name only. Greek sources mentioned quite independent rulers (they called them kings) in west Georgia during Mirian’s and his heirs’ lifetimes. In west Georgia, Greek political and consequently, cultural influence was strong and this placed obstacles in the way of further ethnic consolidation. Georgian identity development processes
which had begun in the western part, from certain epoch continued mostly in the eastern regions of the country.

According to church tradition, the Apostles were the first to preach Christianity in Georgia. However, the proclaiming of the new creed as a state religion being a result of missionary activities of Illuminatrix St Nino took place in the twenties of the 4th c during the reign of Mirian. The local political elite hoped to use Christianity to form alliances with Rome to fend against Persian aggression. Thus, the conversion of Kartli was an expression of a political decision, which caused significant changes in the further cultural development of the Georgian society. The adoption of Christianity played a decisive role in the Georgian in-group’s consolidation. The use of Georgian in church services helped to its codification and further unification. On a ground of new religion, which was equally strange for the whole population of the kingdom, plains’ and highlands’ dwellers alike, the further social consolidation of the Georgian in-group became possible. Apart from inner societal development, the process of consolidation was also moved along by outside forces. The spread of a trans-ethnic religion brought peoples closer to each other. As a result of religious homogeneity, cultural barriers between them became penetrable. The problem of more clear-cut self-delimitation then faced all ethnic entities incorporated in Christendom. Christianization was something like modern globalization where local peculiarities are accentuated in a framework of a unified world culture.

The Life of St Nino – the biography of the woman, who introduced Christianity to Georgia, written shortly after the conversion of Kartli took place, shows ethnic markers in bold relief. Georgian identity was sharply defined. This entity designated by natesavi (seed, genos), a term equivalent to ethnie was based upon in-group members’ belief in their common ancestry and cultural distinctiveness.
Thus, Christianity had a manifold impact on the development of the Georgian identity. Firstly, it promoted the process of cultural unification, reinforcing ties between the center and the peripheries (I mean northern and eastern extremities being culturally and genetically dissimilar with central regions). Secondly, as ideological weapon it helped to strengthen borders with outside world, namely with aggressive Iran. Thirdly, it intensified ethnic sentiments by eliminating religious differences and establishing a homogeneous religious space in which ethnic identities had to fight to stay alive. These sentiments are reflected in the ethnic in-group’s defensive efforts to preserve its selfhood against Christian others. It is, of course, no accident that the original version of Georgian messianic ideology emerged in this very epoch. According to a new concept, after the Jews lost God’s grace and the place of ‘chosen people’ became vacant, Georgians occupied this place. Divine signs attest to God’s special attitude towards them. However, this special consideration will culminate in the Second Coming, when from the bosom of Georgian people, the Savior will issue forth. He will be a Georgian King. It is obvious that by these ideas, the Georgian in-group tried to resist being swept away and keep ethnic markers in an epoch of adopting to a trans-ethnic religious system.

In the 5th c, the Georgian kingdom regained its forces. The eminent King Vakhtang Gorgasali extended his authority in all directions: east, west, and north. Aiming at further social consolidation, he paid great attention to church affairs. Thanks to his efforts, the head of the Georgian church received the title of Catholicos, which undoubtedly pointed to the international recognition of the Georgian church. However, after Vakhtang’s death, kinship in Kartli weakened and in the third quarter of the century, was abolished by Persians. Local supreme authority was restored approximately two decades later, though the Georgian rulers now were not autocrat kings but dukes honored
with Byzantine court titles. They were greatly depended on support from outside, namely on Byzantine emperors. Dukes were not able to displace regional managers who were turned from king’s officials gradually into lords of manors. They had charters from emperors and even shahs attesting their rights on land use in perpetuum. As a result of this change in the political organization of the Georgian state, centrifugal tendencies were intensified. However, it did not mean that identity making processes failed. The forcible process of formation of a homogeneous Christian culture took place. Ethnic self-awareness remained rather strong. This is eloquently expressed by the dogmatic polemics between Georgian and Armenian ecclesiastics at the turn of 6-7th cc, which resulted in the doctrinal separation of these churches. The leaders of Georgian and Armenian in-groups undoubtedly guessed (and I am sure they acted quite consciously) that dogmatic similarity with an immediate neighbor would be an obstacle to selfhood maintenance.

However, trends towards further political unification did not reach the final stage of development. The process of inner consolidation could not be crystallized in firm state institutions. In the mid-seventh century, Georgia became the scene of Arab wars of conquest. As a result, at the close of the eighth and at the beginning of the ninth century, a remapping of the Georgian realm took place. It was divided into several political bodies: Abkhazian kingdom (including north-western and western regions), Kartvelian kingdom (including southwestern and northeastern regions), Kakhetian kingdom (easternmost region) and the Tbilisi Emirate (southeastern region). In the center, the political autonomy had one unit ruled by a group of noblemen. This region – Shida Kartli (inner country), was the main object of rivalries and discord between the above listed Kingdoms competing for political dominance (heightened interest in Shida Kartli was due to its significance for Georgia
proper and for the whole South Caucasus. It was the central region of Georgia, and for that reason every political unit sought to gain possession of it. Trade routes of local (Caucasian) and long-standing international importance passed through and intersected in Kartli. From inner Kartli, roads led to Western and Southern Georgia, Kakheti, Armenia, the North Caucasus and elsewhere. Possession of these trade routes was one of the main aims of the warring sides. In this epoch of Georgia’s history, the struggle for these routes was extremely important. Their possession made it possible not only to control trade but also to exercise political supremacy. In the Georgia of those days Kartli was the most densely populated region and had the highest level of cultural development. The Shida Kartli town of Mtskheta was the center of Georgian Christianity.

This contest continued for almost two centuries and resulted in a new integration – in emergence of United Georgia – Sakartvelo. This became possible thanks to a consensus between the main rivals – the Abkhazian and Kartvelian kingdoms. The first king of Sakartvelo, Bagrat Bagrationi inherited the throne of Abkhazeti in the maternal line, while in the paternal line, he was the heir of Kartvelian kings. Apart from this, he was foster-son of David Curopalate – the most powerful grandee in southern Georgia backed by the Byzantines. Thus, Bagrat’s kingdom included most of the Georgian realm. This event took place at the turn of the 10th to the 11th c. However, part of Georgian lands remained beyond the frontiers of new state. The 11th and 12th cc were devoted to maintaining this kingdom and incorporating new units. As a result of Bagrat’s successors’ activities, Georgia restored not only the borders drawn by Parnavaz, but extended far away from initial markers to encompass regions inhabited by ethnic non-Georgians.
This unification of the Georgian lands, which had its own social, economic, political and ideological preconditions, differed fundamentally in character from the many military and political alliances that appeared in the ninth and tenth centuries during the course of internal wars or wars against external enemies. The union was a new stage in the history of Georgian feudal statehood. This union led to the abolition of the independence of a number of feudal kingdoms and principalities and ushered in the establishment of a new political system throughout the whole country. This signified the creation of a centralized feudal monarchy under which the independence of the individual kingdoms was finally abolished and the political apparatus was modified. Further development proceeded through the centralization of both civil and military administrative bodies. Unification could not, of course, lead to the total eradication of tension between internal political units, though discord now arose between individual political groups and parties in the single state.

This was state a lead by an autocratic king. Six ministers and a number of regional officials participated in the governing of the state. The church was under royal subordination, though the king never directly interfered in ecclesiastical affairs. An inner security service was arranged with special care. A Court of Justice was in operation. In times of war the army was supplemented by additional troops.

The formation of a new political apparatus was a sign of a new stage of ethnic consolidation. In this respect, is very characteristic that Georgian cultural and political workers of this epoch acted in unison. The autocrat king and the monk with no authority collaborated closely. Monasteries stood in service of inter-group bonds merging; the Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity represented the principal means of Georgian cultural expansion and the assimilation of non-Georgian subjects of the Georgian monarch.
The maintenance and spread of Georgian culture was implemented by a specifically Georgian system of education.

Historiography also served the needs of the new political reality. Particular facts of history were viewed as events of common – pan-Georgian importance. The position of the Georgian church in the Christian world was explored with particular interest. Based on inquiries in relevant sources, Georgian ecclesiastics listed several Apostles as contributors to the dissemination of Christianity in Georgia and engaged in lively debates with Greeks about the apostolic origin of Georgian church. These debates are fully in line with the process of ethnic consolidation: the name of Saint was an important identity accessory in the middle Ages.

In-group delimitation proceeded simultaneously alongside both ethnic and political boundaries. On one hand, an ethno-genetic conception emerged in this epoch that asserted not only the common origin of all Georgians residing in different parts of Sakartvelo, but claimed relative ties between Georgians and other peoples of the Caucasus. At the same time, the Georgian cultural elite continuously strove to make Georgian ethnicity more and more salient. This is demonstrated in collective self-portraits against the background of others.

In the Life of St Nino, Georgian identity was defined in relation with Greeks, Armenians and Jews. The same picture is found in monuments of hagiographical literature of the 11-12th cc, though with a few modifications. The confrontation with Jews had lost its urgency due to the weakening of the Judaic-Christian polemic. The attitude towards the Greeks, despite their common faith and admiration for Greek culture is rather negative. Armenians are considered in negative light too. According the most eminent ecclesiastic worker of this period, George Mtatsmindeli, they were an evil seed. Their creed did not deserve even to be named as a faith and Georgian literature should be purged of any manifestation of Armenian writings as
a garden must be rid of weeds. Georgians are frank and innocent, while others (Greeks, Armenians) are liars. Georgians are given particular consideration from the Creator.

A new version of ethnic election conception appeared. According to messianic ideology of the 4th c, the land of the Georgian in-group was marked by divine signs; now the divinity was embodied in persons: representatives of the throne were thought of as descendants of Biblical David. Georgians were ‘chosen’ because their kings were. Kings of the Bagrationi dynasty were destined to govern peoples all over the world. The kings themselves were quite convinced of this legend of their origin and tried to build on it. On the sword of David the Builder, the following inscription was found: Sword of the Savior. Queen Tamar (King of Kings) was conceived as member of Trinity, as incarnation of the Holy Ghost. The place of her son’s birth was compared with Bethlehem. Historians described the Georgian Kingdom in her lifetime as Paradise established on earth.

These events found their expression in change of terminology. Instead of the former self-name of Kartli, it came to be known as Sakartvelo. As you can see, this is not a completely new term (it derives from the same stem), though the accent is moved. If Kartli stresses kinship as base for identity (Kartli means a set of Karts), Sakartvelo means the set of residents on the lands of Karts. Thus the term, though did not exclude kinship, accentuated territoriality as an identity marker.

However, this period of integration was followed by a new long-term fragmentation. Mongol invasions, especially Tamerlane’s campaigns at the turn of 14th and 15th cc, weakened Sakartvelo and by the end of the 15th c, brought about new political disintegration. This process developed further and further and seemed to be endless. Various small kingdoms and principalities emerged in both east and west
parts of Georgia. As a result, serious discrepancies arose between political orientation of units and initial economic ties were partially ruptured. However, language and culture remained common and most of the population did not lose its sense of belonging to the Georgian realm. Very characteristic of this is one document drawn up in 1790 in the capital city of Tbilisi. It is entitled the *Treaty of Iberian Kings and Princes of Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, Odishi and Guria*. This is an agreement concerning joint activities and responsibilities in case of aggression from outside. The signers based their decision on shared identity, which to all appearances is ethnic: they declared that all of them, having experienced a common past, were residents of the Iberian land, all of them used one and same language and all were orthodox. Thus, despite political separation, these kingdoms and principalities perceived themselves as constituent parts of a single culturally and genetically marked entity.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 had a negative impact on Georgia. The aggressive Ottoman Empire stood between the cultural West and crises taking place in Georgia. Georgians’ traditional political ally – Byzantium, was swept away. Georgian policymakers faced the problem of finding new allies among Christian countries. One way lead them to Catholic Europe, another – to their neighbor to the north – Russia. In 1783, the king of united Kartl-Kakhetian Kingdoms, Erekle II, concluded a treaty with Russia. According to this document, the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti retained inner political autonomy (as before to be ruled by kings of the Bagration dynasty and church should remain autocephalous). Restrictions concerned foreign activities. In her turn, Russia took responsibilities to protect the Kingdom in case of aggression from the outside. The impact of this event on the further development of Georgian identity was manifold, however, before presenting the relevant account, let me touch briefly on
the history of Catholicism in Georgia. Who knows what would have happened if such a fundamental change – that of traditional religious marker – had taken place? Within the period of this political fragmentation of the Georgian realm, it could have happened.

Georgians kept close ties with Rome before and after the Schism of 1054. The considerably remote religious center, which held worldwide respect and authority and had no immediate political claims on Georgia, was very attractive for Georgian policymakers both in periods of collaboration with Byzantium and rivalries alike.

These interactions are especially interesting to observe after the Schism. Georgians were very well informed about this crucial event, though they preferred to act as if nothing had happened at all. They tended to look at the issue of Church unity from higher positions than European countries. They continued to respond to appeals of the Popes and expressed desire to participate in Crusades. As attested by historical sources, the eminent King of United Georgia, David the Builder (11-12th cc), collaborated with crusaders. In the most decisive battle against the Turks at Didgori in 1121 David included in his troops 100 (according to some sources – 200) crusaders and did not seem to mind that these soldiers were not Orthodox. The limited number of European participants leads us to the conclusion that their presence in this battle was not designed to solve any military task, but had an ideological significance. By this gesture, David wanted to show his devotion to the international duties and express the growing political ambitions of Georgia. David wanted to show that Didgori Battle was not just a struggle of Georgians against Turkish invaders, but part of the general world-wide battle between believers and non-believers.

Catholic missionaries began their activities in Georgia in the 13th c. From this date onwards, for many centuries, Roman
and Georgian ecclesiastics and civic authorities exchanged letters and ambassadors. Georgians – of high nobility and lower social strata alike – welcomed the Catholic missionaries who represented various orders.

The establishment of Catholic missions in the East was standard policy of Rome. The immediate objectives and intensity of this policy varied over time. After the fall of Constantinople, its task was to pick up the Byzantine legacy, after the Reformation, Rome tried to find compensation for losses in Northern and Central Europe.

But what were the goals of the Georgians? First of all, they desired to achieve international recognition. Secondly, they wanted to break out of informational isolation. In the letters of the Georgian Kings to Popes, we often find stories about Georgian military activities against non-believers. Such information had quite specific purposes. Georgian policymakers longed to place their struggle in the context of European history and coordinate their efforts with activities of West European Christians to obtain moral and material assistance from the country that Georgia needed so much at those times.

As I have already mentioned, the period of Catholic missionary activities in Georgia coincided with a period of recurrent disintegration of the Georgian realm. It was an era of political fragmentation and cultural decay. The letters of Georgian laity and clergy to Popes, Catholic missionaries’ reports depicted this sad reality vividly. Georgians begged them to send physicians, ecclesiastical items and church painters because they lacked all these living necessities. This condition resulted from constant Turkish and Persian invasions. Links with European culture were ruptured. In such a situation, Catholicism was viewed by the Georgian political elite as the only possible channel for receiving cultural achievements from abroad. “Those who longed to help the fatherland were in hurry
to become Catholics i.e. Europeans” – noted modern Georgian historian Niko Berdzenishvili concerning the aspirations of those times.

As I have already mentioned, the devastation of Georgia was caused by unceasing Muslim invasions. However, the threat of being swept up as an ethnic identity came not only from military activities against Georgians. Not less dangerous for the in-group’s survival was the considerably more peaceful Armenian expansion. During the Middle Ages (as is the case in contemporary Georgia) Armenians constituted quite a large portion of the population. The history of their non-military occupation is rather long and falls out of the scope of my presentation, so I will limit myself to a few notes concerning the presence of this competing ethnic in-group in Georgia. First of all, I would like to point out that Armenians were economically a rather powerful stratum. Some Georgians pressed by hard living conditions, accepted Armenian Christianity, which allowed them to enjoy privileges in certain sphere of social activities and financial support. Usually, entering the Armenian Church resulted in the deethnicization of Georgians. Since the abolishment of native state institutions, Armenian ecclesiastics who were the main coordinators of ethnic consolidation, considered Orthodox Georgians as their potential flock. In addition, Armenians possessed quite firm positions at the Georgian court and this role of them became customary in the period under the consideration. As it well known, Armenians were scattered all over the globe and were mobile across state frontiers. For this reason, they were used by Georgian Kings as mediators between them and other countries. Armenian merchants were Georgia’s ambassadors, even spies. The appearance of Catholic missionaries changed the already established social order, because this meant direct contact between Georgians and the western world. This in turn resulted in Armenians losing power in the Georgian state. This
may explain the very sad incidents of Catholic missionaries’ were being fanatically persecuted by Armenian ecclesiastics in Georgia. Thus, it is clear that Georgians’ positive attitude towards the Catholicism was an expression not only of an anti-Muslim, but also anti-Armenian disposition.

However, Georgian policy makers placed limits on the spread of Catholicism and imposed on the missionaries various restrictions. They did not want to be parted from the Orthodox World in full and were afraid of drastic changes in dogma and liturgy. Georgian society was a traditional Orthodox society with traditional perceptions and already established links with Orthodox centers. We have to bear in mind the Russian factor as well. Orthodox Russia, with its claims on Third Rome, appeared as a powerful factor in the Caucasus in this epoch. Russia offered an alternative way for integration into European culture, which made it difficult for Georgian authorities to rule in favor the Catholicism. Georgians wanted to contribute to the collaboration of Catholic and Orthodox Worlds. Correspondence between the Georgian King Teimuraz I (17th c) and his contemporary, Catholicos Zakaria, with the Pope illustrates these assertions well. The Pope made an appeal for them to change their faith. Teimuraz and Zakaria replied to him with the great respect, presenting information about the life of Georgia and their activities against Muslims, but did not give a direct answer concerning the issue of changing the creed. Meanwhile, both of them repeated over and over again that Georgians were converted in the era of Constantine and since this epoch, managed to keep their faith unchangeable. From this remark, it became obvious that Georgians did not conceive of collaborations with Rome as the conversion of the entire country to Catholicism. The ambassador Teimuraz Nicipor presented himself before the leaders of European countries a representative of Constantinople. Nearly simultaneously with these contacts with Catholic West,
Teimuraz conducted negotiations with Russia. He is no exception among Georgian political leaders. He proudly informed the Pope about the support he had offered to Catholic missionaries in constructing churches. However, in parallel with this statement, asked him to send artisans for repairing of “their” churches, e.g. Orthodox churches. Thus, the policy of Georgian kings of the period in question is quite complicated, because the political environment they had to act was itself complicated.

But what was the reason for making positions closer? The most attractive feature of Catholicism for Georgians was the Papacy, an institution of a single supreme authority. Georgians appreciated the opportunity to be included in wider cultural and political communion. By means of this, they hoped to resist to the danger of cultural isolation and avoid ethnical dissolution. Catholicism was the most suitable for this purpose. In spite of that, Georgians eager to be incorporated into the European community did not apply Protestant countries. Unitarian undivided Europe – this was what Georgians needed. They viewed Catholicism as an ideology of such a social body and the institute of the Papacy – as a guarantee of this unity. Georgians accepted easily the main requirement of Catholicism concerning the obedience to Popes, conceiving it as the duty of all Christians.

Despite this, the unification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Georgian Church never took place. There are plenty of reasons, but I will list only the most significant ones. The barrier in a way of unification undoubtedly was the passing of time. It was too late for new conversion. By the time Catholic missionaries arrived in Georgia, Georgian identity had been sharply defined; religion (Orthodox Christianity) and ethnic consciousness were intimately intertwined. The task of separating these two dimensions of ethnicity required great spiritual effort and substantial funding. Meanwhile, Georgia
never received any military or financial support from the Catholic West, in situation when lack of money was destructive for the Georgian in-group. To illustrate this, I shall relate the following episode from the biography of the above-mentioned Georgian King, Erekle II. According to missionaries’ records, the King received from the Armenian ecclesiastics a certain amount of money in return for allowing them to persecute Catholics. The extremely severe conditions drove the Georgian leader to actions like this. Erekle regretted it himself and even found it necessary to offer an apology to the missionaries.

A little before the Georgievsk Treaty, Erekle unsuccessfully tried to obtain financial assistance from the West. Disappointment awaited him in Russia as well.

But let me return to my account. Shortly after the assistance pact was concluded, a destructive invasion of Iranians in Georgia took place. Russia did not lend the support it had promised. In 1801, by special decree of Russian Tsar, the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti was directly incorporated in Russian Empire. In 1812, the autocephalacy of the Georgian church was abolished. Thus, the main clauses of the Treaty were not fulfilled. Within the first half of the 19th c, all other Georgian political bodies were incorporated in Russia. The new regime was severe. Russian authorities did not hide that they had aimed at Russifying the locals by language, mentality, sentiments. These and many other events in the history of Georgian-Russian interrelations lead Georgian historians to consider the step undertaken by Erekle II as fatal mistake. However, I think more close to reality are those scholars who think that Russia was the lesser evil compared to Persia and Turkey (Stalin’s formulation) for Georgia at those times. Georgia was annexed, but undivided. Georgians even regained regions as a result of Russian-Turkish Wars. Thus, after centuries-long fragmentation, Georgia actually restored in her
historical frontiers. This was the most important moment for the maintenance of Georgian identity in the 19th c.

I cannot embrace 19th century in full – this period in the history of the Georgian nation is complicated and rich with facts. Undoubtedly, it represents a fundamentally new stage in the development of the Georgian identity: despite the lack of civic dimensions, the Georgian nation came into existence. This fact immediately was reflected in terminology. Now not natesavi, but eri was used to refer to the Georgian in-group. Both these terms are designations of a collective, though natesavi means a kinship-based collective, whereas eri does not specify the basis of common identity.

Incorporation into Russia had a positive impact on economic integration. Russia was a backward, though capitalistically developing state. Integration within it caused the development of a capitalistic form of production in Georgia. Economic links between the various regions of Georgia deepened. The existence of a uniform state apparatus (though not national), fostered similar social changes everywhere; administrative reforms uprooted traces of former political partition; the abolishment of serfdom helped social homogenization. The inner cultural homogeneity and standardization of social life was a favorable precondition for group inner conductivity and circulation of an ideology of solidarity within it.

Oppression from outside also caused the intensification of identity sentiments. All societal strata suffered from discrimination. This situation was reflected in rebellions of serfs headed by nobility (in East Georgia in 1802, 1804, 1812-1813) and clergymen (in Western Georgia in 1819). In 1832, a conspiracy of the nobility took place. The author of program documents defined the term Mamuli. Its literal meaning is fatherland, land remained from forebears, however, in this period the meaning of this word became broader: place
where we were burnt, our community, language, our faith and customs.

National self-awareness became especially salient because of its separation from religious identity. In the 19th c, the secularization of public life had taken place everywhere in Europe. Thus, this process was in line of epochal demands. However, in Georgia the above-mentioned social change was caused by particular circumstances as well. Over the centuries, the Christian religion played a special role in maintaining Georgian identity. The historical experience was built upon the following paradigm: allies – Christians, enemies – non-Christians. With Russia, the situation changed. The Russian Empire claimed a special mission in the Christian realm, whilst not all members of the Georgian in-group were Orthodox, even Christians; there were Muslims among them as well. Thus, Christianity had lost its traditional function as a safeguard of Georgian identity. Orthodoxy was not able to protect Georgians any more. In the first centuries after the conversion of Georgians took place, Georgian intellectuals worked to naturalize Christianity as a strange, Roman faith. These efforts resulted in the merging of national and religious. Under the term Georgian, both ethnic and religious (Orthodox Christianity) identities alike were implied. In 19th c, these two phenomena were separated again. Religion was replaced by nationalism, or more precisely: eri was elevated to the rank of divine.

The state institutions were Russian, not Georgian. It is for this reason that the nationalism that emerged was cultural and ethnic and not civic. There emerged many cultural bodies promoting national ideas: Society for dissemination literacy among the Georgians, Society for the study history and ethnography, Ecclesiastical Museum. A Georgian dramatic circle was founded; a number of Georgian magazines and newspapers were issued. The literary addition of the Tbilisian
Gazette declared that the purpose of the issue was the dissemination of education, establishment of native language and bringing of Georgians near to the high cultural standards of other Europeans. The leaders of the national-liberation movement popularized loyalty towards the cultural values and ethnic markers while propaganda concerning the allegiance towards political institutions was completely ignored. The beloved motto of eminent Georgian writer and statesman of the 19th c, I. Chavchavadze was *Language, Fatherland, and Faith*. It is obvious that state was deliberately omitted in this list of national markers.

In Chachavadze’s works, one can find a very impressive image of *eri*. According to this author, *eri* has soul, heart, blood, flesh, and veins; *eri* is able to be upset, awoken, joyful, happy, has suffered from wounds, can weep, speak; *eri* may become an orphan; *eri* possesses character, talent, and fortitude; *eri* may be idler, ignoramus; *eri* has a sense of self-respect, history, present, future, secrets of heart, power, memories, glories, interests, language; *eri* can be live long, become old, can be tricked, be exposed to shame; *eri* may be due to die, lack power, need time for recovery…

Common blood, common seed and so forth helped to promote the perception of *eri* as a phenomenon with corporeal characteristics. Chavchavadze viewed *eri* as living body: *woe to that country in veins of which blood has dried*. According to him, Georgians constituted a unity based upon common blood and kinship. For Chavchavadze, the past of the people was very important. History was considered by him as the foundation of the future because of the existence of genetic ties between different generations of the in-group: *if yesterday there were eminent persons of my blood and flesh, why can we not hope that public figures like them will appear in the future as well?*

At the close of the 19th c, Georgians began to elaborate projects of a political framework for the Georgian *eri*. Most
political parties viewed the future of Georgia within Russian state. Georgia should enjoy full political autonomy while remaining part of Russia. However, discrepancies arose concerning the issue of timing. National Democrats and federalists advocated the immediate fight for obtaining political rights, whereas social democrats were against separation from Russia until a social revolution would take place and solve social problems. National problems would be solved easily after the establishment of just social order. National was the same social problem. They were afraid that untimely separation from Russia would put a stop to the struggle of oppressed classes in Georgia against their indigenous oppressors. However, as fate had willed, they themselves (in particular, the right wing of them – the Georgian Mensheviks) were given authority in the independent Georgian state that emerged in 1918. The short existence of the Georgian democratic republic (from 1918 until 1921), was a time of building the Georgian civic nation. Georgian Mensheviks, despite being socialists, aimed at building a bourgeois national state. However, after the incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet Union, this movement towards civic nation making was stopped. The Soviet state preached internationalism but practiced ethnic nationalism. Due to this ethnic nationalism, obstacles appeared to solidarity sentiments among the population of multinational republics. It is for this reason that even now that Georgians have an independent state, for most of us, civic nationalism is non-understandable and unacceptable. Even in narrow circles of academics there is the widespread opinion that this form of nationalism is not linked with nation, but rather is ideology of a state. To illuminate this statement, I want to present one example, which I think is characteristic. The debates concerning the so-called requisite of nationality that occurred some time ago. Controversies arose after the submission of a project concerning identity cards in the Georgian Parliament
for consideration. Some members of Parliament advocated the exclusion of information on ethnic origin of Georgian citizens from this document. Just this caused public resentment. Georgians feared ‘losing’ their selfhood. Very often, my students and representatives of various strata of society have asked me about this issue. And always I needed long explanations on subject: that identity cards regulate the interrelations between state and citizens and for this reason, information concerning the ethnic origin of person is completely useless. All of them know that the Georgian state does not discriminate against its subjects according to their ethnic identity and the entire population of Georgia, regardless of ethnic origin, enjoys equal rights. They all agreed that human rights should be equal, however, insisted on preserving ethnic markers in such a form.

As was pointed out, these sentiments of modern Georgians are rooted deep in history. During the last few centuries, Georgians had no native state. They grew accustomed to consider state institutions as an alien force. Therefore, it is so hard to believe for many of us that the state wants to, let alone is able to maintain national culture and identity. I think this is why many Georgians even today (in an independent Georgia) are loyal only towards the eri, and not towards the state.
Chapter 5

On Georgian Identity Religious Marker


To be identified – this means consciousness of a group membership or in other words: perception by individual of those markers on a ground of which he/she can bind himself/herself with certain community. As a basis for such perception can serve quite different data, correspondingly human associations might be of various types.

Among the kaleidoscope of human identities from the perspective of societal development the most important are collective cultural identities. Nations are grounded just on them. The modern world order is an order of nations, so collective cultural identities are not only of academic, but also of a great practical interest.

For nation is characteristic specific kind of culture – public culture, i.e. culture which enables to penetrate the whole community and not only its limited segments. As this fact can take place only in modern, socially homogeneous democratic entities, undoubtedly nations are essentially modern phenomena. However, there might be also exceptions. In certain cases it is possible to speak on nations even in pre-modern times (Smith 2003: 102-108), when in high developed societies had been occurred favorable conditions for unimpeded circulation of culture.

Besides nation there might be distinguished at least three forms of collective cultural identities: ethnic category, ethnic network, ethnie (Smith 2003: 108-109). These forms differ from each other by intensity of culture circulation process within the given entity and by strength of social bonds between
the group members. *Ethnic category* represents solely imagined, in artifacts practically unfixed (for its flexibility) form. *Ethnic network* and *ethnie* (especially the last one) as usual are well documented.

Each of these forms (except the *ethnic categories* in which sentiments of in-group solidarity are not yet sharpened) have sacral foundations, i.e. they are perceived as sacral by the members of the given community believing not only in their common origin and uniqueness of collective culture, but also in providential predetermination of the very fact of incorporation within one and same socially determined entity. Just this feature distinguishes such entities from those of interest groups endowing them with durability over time.

Of course nobody would be astonished if we say that in a pre-modern society there was venerated cult of forbears and through this veneration kinship-based social relations assumed cultural dimensions, however it is rather unexpected and paradoxical (in any case at first glance) that even such a phenomena as are nations cannot exist without sacral foundations. As it is turned out for citizens is not enough at all to be loyal to the common legislation and state institutions. In supplement to it and even more than it they need to share believe in certain divine mission of their community that might be fulfilled only by and through membership of the group (Smith 2003: 142-146).

By directing the attention of the audience to this fact I would like to underline the following: for a group emerged on the ground of collective cultural identities religion does not serve as only one (among others) identity marker, but it represents necessary precondition for their rise and survival.

Today Georgian identity represents a national one. Its roots are traced very deeply in pre-modern times. Georgian identity gradually passed all above-listed forms of collective cultural identities as evolitional stages. This fact finds its eloquent
expression in history of Georgian self-name (Chkhartishvili 2006a: 204-218). Its continuity and resistibility during millennia is a really striking fact. It is clear that Georgian national identity belongs to the rare type of the collective cultural identities.

Georgian national identity is boldly marked by religion. In present contribution I intend to analyze the precondition of this fact or in other words to answer the question: how it might be happened that Christianity – a trans-ethnic and transnational belief-system – during the centuries (till nowadays) stoods out as Georgian national identity marker?

I will begin with analysis of evidences of Leonti Mroveli (Georgian historian of 11\textsuperscript{th} c) whose work the ‘Life of Georgian Kings and progeny of Georgians’ displays comprehensive account of the medieval Georgian historiography. The historian mostly deals with facts of political history but for each epoch he also makes notes concerning the confessional issues of Georgian society. Namely, Leonti points out that Kartlosians’ (thus he designates ethnic Georgians to distinguish them from those of non-Georgian population of Georgia) venerated idols – patrons of Kartli (the designation of Georgia before 11\textsuperscript{th} c).

From certain period Georgian paganism had been formed in cult of Armazi, which was conceived as a god of Georgians. Be loyal to Armazi and be Kartlosian i.e. ethnic Georgian according to Leonti was one and same. He describes the case with King of Parnajom who was killed by his subjects because of dropping veneration of idols of Kartli and becoming fire-worshiper (Kaukhchishvili 1955: 29).

For present investigation does not matter in what degree the picture depicted by Leonti corresponds to the reality. It is principal to clarify the importance given by the historian to Georgian religious identity marker in pre-Christian era.

As it well known Christianity in Georgia was disseminated from the 1\textsuperscript{st} c (the first preachers were Saint Apostles
themselves), however adoption of Christianity as a state religion took place only in 320s (according to another opinion in 330s).

In special literature there are often listed several domestic and external factors caused this radical change in life of Georgian society. I do not intend to consider any of them but only try to place this fact in context of history of Georgian identity.

The adherence of Armazi religion by Georgians points out in group’s exclusive character and its cultural, genetic closeness. As it well known at the initial stage of group making this fact creates favorable conditions for group’s shaping. However be isolated for a long time is impossible as isolation makes obstacles in a way of societal development. Usually a community possessing enough vitality, radically changes its strategy in the struggle for survival: namely it starts opening identity borders. This fact finds reflection in adoption of a trans-ethnic religion.

It is logical to suppose that replacement of an ethnic religion by trans-ethnic one might be like a shock for the society as changes concerned not only one marker among the others, but the very frame of Georgian identity. This ideological crossroad was followed by deep social processes. The cultural elite of Georgian in-group faced urgent tasks to naturalize strange religious system, create cultural toolkit for its adoption and define in-group’s place within the world marked by Christianity. Overcoming psychological discomfort and achieving cultural compatibility became possible through the new state ideology. This was conception of Georgian ethnic election fixed in original version of the ‘Life of Saint Nino’ – biography of Illuminatrix of Georgians. This hagiographical writing was created shortly after the official conversion of the country had taken place.
Grounded on *Scripture* and being logical creative continuance of it, this ideology ascribed specific role to Georgians for Humankind’s salvation. Lord’s Tunic being kept in Georgian land was referred as an argument for this assertion. According to this ideology specific attitude of God towards the Georgians will be manifested in times of Second Coming: Savor will be issued from the bosom of Georgian nation (Chkhartishvili 1999: 6-17; Chkhartishvili 2002: 32-47).

Just by means of this ideology Christianity began functioning as Georgian identity marker. Georgian community, which primarily was perceived as kinship-based entity, from now on had been turned into spiritual communion in Christ.

The ideology of Georgian ethnic election appeared to be very vital. Even until today its core idea – Lord’s specific attitude towards Georgians attested by the fact of Lord’s Tunic being kept in Georgia – is alive and still represents powerful factor for in-group consolidation.

Georgian identity religious marker had been further sharpened in 11th c. At the close of 10th c the most of Georgian lands were incorporated into the new political body – United Georgian Kingdom. 11th c was epoch of developing and fixing of these results. For national identity development in parallel with of political unification was needful homogeneous cultural space. This meant coinciding cultural borders with political ones. Main role in this process was played by Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity. Orthodox ecclesiastical literature in Georgian became principal tool for extending Georgian culture along the borders of territory controlled by Georgian King. Both these markers (Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity) were very suitable for this purpose, however was one problem with the last one: despite the fact that Georgian identity was well separated by Chalcedonian creed from the neighboring Armenian one, with Byzantium being stronghold of Orthodoxy this marker could not worked.
Meanwhile absence of ideological partition in face of such political partner (actually rival) possessing great political and cultural potential, was very dangerous for Georgian identity. By this time Georgian language had achieved very high position in standardization. Consequently its function as a national marker was unalterable. However, religious marker definitely needed to be enriched by new nuances, so that it could operate as marker in face of Orthodox Byzantium too.

This problem had solved by the eminent Georgian ecclesiastical worker and erudite Saint Father George of Mtatsminda, whose contribution in Georgian identity markers strengthening, in providing ideological basis for Georgianess is great.

Now I intend to cite one episode from his ‘Life’. I have in mind Saint Father’s assertions concerning the confessional issues while his being at the court of Byzantine Emperor Constantine Ducas.

According to his biographers Constantine Ducas was pious, well acquainted with Scripture and fond of rhetoric (Sewter 1953: 254-256, 264). He asked Saint Father to make some clarification in sphere of confession. Among other issues he concerned the interrelation between faith of Greeks and Georgians. Saint Father displayed in full “Georgian faith”, stressing its dogmatic similarity with of Greeks’. At the same time he pointed out that in regard of historical experience there exists essential discrepancy. Georgians had never changed original faith; while in Byzantium Christianity in many times had been involved in heresy. Emphasizing discrepancy in historical experience against the background of dogmatic likeness St George of Mtatsminda sharpened Georgian identity religious marker. At first glance this may seem rather trivial idea, but just it greatly helped to survival of Georgian identity in non-favorable political conditions creating firm ideological ground for the community (Chkhartishvili 2006b: 87-102).
As I have already mentioned this fact had taken place in 11th c. This was epoch of consolidation of early Georgian nation. Now let me to analyze the situation that had taken place later on, in 19th c, on an essentially new stage of Georgian identity development. 19th c in Europe and beyond of it is an epoch of emergence of modern nations and nationalisms. Just in this time of “Spring of Nations” Georgian national consolidation also had been driven to its point. The process was influenced by both domestic and external (among them oppression from side of Romanov Empire, dissemination of Western ideas of nation) factors. It was maintained by the ideology of Georgian nationalism (it is time to deprive this word from negative connotation ascribed to it by Soviet historiography and use it as neutral sociological term free from any evaluative sense), which can be found already in the 1st half of 19th c in writings of many Georgian public figures. However, it had assumed its final shape in works of Ilia Chavchavadze’s – Saint Ilia the Righteous’ – in the second half of 19th c. According to generally accepted opinion the most principal feature of the epoch in question was secularization of public consciousness, decay of public functions of religion. Just in light of this fact seems very thought-provoking that Georgian nationalism continued to stay boldly marked out by Christianity.

Issue of Christianity occupies very important place in writings of Saint Ilia. He perceived it as principal national marker and undertook all necessary efforts to point it further. It is well known his motto: Language, Fatherland, Faith. Despite that there was not mentioned which faith was concerned, it was obvious for all that there was implied Christianity. Saint Ilia stressed over and again the decisive role of Christianity in life of Georgian nation. In his words is echoed assertion of St George of Mtatsminda that Georgian experience in defending of Christian faith had no precedent: “Jesus, our Lord
was crucified for the sake of the World, and we were crucified for Jesus Christ’ sake. We erected the Temple to Christianity on the chest of Georgia as on rock. We have used our bones for stones and our blood for mortar” (Chavchavadze 1987a: 175).

St Ilia longed to preserve this traditional Georgian national marker and tried to correspond it to the requirements of a new epoch. He attempted to identify national and religious, make inseparable sense of being Georgian and being Christian. In this regard is very characteristic his following words: “Christianity in addition to doctrine meant for us the entire Georgian territory, Georgianness. Until now in whole south Caucasus Georgian and Christian is used as synonyms. Our clergy had guessed that patria and nation are amalgamated with faith, are invested in faith representing an unconquerable saber, unbreakable shield in face of enemies. They pointed their preaching, teaching, learning just in that direction, so that to make sacral Fatherland and Nationality and elevate them in rank of Faith. Just this save us and keep our land, our language, our selfhood, our nationness” (Calendar 1999: 128-129); “From the very moment of birth the Georgian is endowed by divine responsibility to serve nation. Just the devotion to the Fatherland is a guarantee of his immortality” (Chavchavadze 1984: 109; Chavchavadze 1987b: 421).

Chavchavadze’s nationalism was cultural one; it aimed at consolidation of ethno-nation and did not articulated political tasks. Customary cultural nationalism* constitutes preparing stage for political nationalism. Every national identity longs to make political frame in form of national state because state institutions can effectively keep culture. However, Chavchavadze’s cultural nationalism had not immediately transformed into political one.

Georgian social-democrats (Mensheviks) – political party which had come to power in Georgia in 1918 – were convinced internationalists and atheists. Their attitude towards
nationalism and religion was exclusively negative. It is true that in 1918-1921, in a short period during, which they were in power, was impossible to eliminate Christianity (traditional marker of Georgian identity) however the links with being Georgian and being Christian was gradually weakened.

This process had further deepened in Soviet Georgia in condition of strong atheistic propaganda. The break up of Soviet Union had been accompanied with a new edition of Georgian nationalism rooted in the dissident movement. Unlike of cultural nationalism of Ilia Chavchavadze the new one represented the political ideology.

The author of this ideology was first Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Deep knowledge of Georgian and World history and a political intuition helped him to guess that Christianity remained main marker of Georgian identity. In his appeals to his fellow country men Gamsakhurdia referred to Christian heritage of Georgian history.

After long social dormancy and amnesia Gamsakhurdia has managed to awake in most of Georgians not only national, but also religious sentiments. He made national and religious indivisible whole again. Being Georgian and being Christian had been entwined again in public perception. Just this gave to national-liberation movement of 1980s-1990s great potency. Zviad Gamsakhurdia possessed charisma of a religious leader. Sometimes his follower even compared him with Biblical Moise. He himself willingly fitted in the image of Father of nation. His emotional speeches and academic works devoted to medieval Georgian literature favored to dissemination of messianic ideas among the widest strata of Georgian society. His appeals to his fellow country men concerned the choice which should be done by Georgian nation between ways of social-democrats and the current struggle for independence. First way was equated of Barabas while the second one with of Christ. Z. Gamsakhurdia associated Georgian national
character with Christianity. He argued for uniqueness of Georgian experience, great contribution in preserving of Christianity. In Gamsaxurdia’s position towards Christianity as a Georgian national marker there is traced views of Ilia Chavchavadze and through Ilia that of Saint George of Mtatsminda. As illustration I will display here some excerpts from works of Z. Gamsakhurdia:

“Christian ideal of humankind – charity, nobility in such degree amalgamated with Georgian character that in reality it was manifested as it inherited feature and not something acquired in result of teaching and training” (Gamsakhurdia 1991a: 89); “In developing of Christianity peoples of Georgian origin have played a decisive role. Peoples of Semitic origin have played a decisive role in preparing of Christianity, while peoples of Georgian and Indo-European origin have played principal role in developing of Christianity” (Gamsakhurdia 1991b: 217); “I suppose you can recall what kind of nihilism was preached in those times by G. Asatiani. He even doubted in individuality of our nation. What is unusual and unprecedented in mission of Georgia – he had questioned. I had answered: Unprecedented is Georgian nation’s exploits in behalf of Christian culture. And this, I think, is the most essential as for shaping of our historical profile as for making obvious national character of Georgiankind. Ability be sacrificed, devotion to ideas, devotion to comrades it is what is principal in our national character. In this regard you had to underline that this not numerous nation has generated surprising number of martyrs. This feature distinguishes history of Georgia from history of other Christian nations” (Gamsakhurdia 1991b: 559-560); “The main feature of Georgian national character lays on its religious tolerance, for which is strange fanaticism and rigorism” (Gamsakhurdia 1991b: 567).
In public perception of most Georgians the major weight of a religious marker is attested by the fact that obvious manifestation of national symbolism – national flag – has religious symbol on it. In particular, it is designed as five crosses on a white background. Our main message to the world should be that Georgia is a Christian country, country of Christian culture and values – said once the present President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili arguing for the necessity of national flag changing. These words of political leader reflecting public perceptions were aimed at further sharpening this marker. The fact that Mr. Saakashvili has guessed in Christianity national identity marker and occupied right position towards it I think helped greatly to his successful elevation to power.

Apostolic Church of Georgia has also contributed to strengthening of ties between sense of being Georgian and being Christian. This intention is declared publicly in speeches of ecclesiastical hierarchs, manifested in everyday practice of ordinary clergy. As illustration we can cite here words of His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II: “The following question is natural: how were we able to come until today, how can survive in those unfavorable conditions? The answer might be only one: our national consciousness fused with of Orthodox Faith and national values constituted and still constitute the ground for our durability over time and strength” (Christmas Epistle 2003/2004: 8).

As audience could notice in these words of Georgian spiritual leader the partition between religious and national has been actually eliminated. This very fact attests eloquently that today Christianity still preserves its traditional social function. However, in future on an essentially new stage of identity development (building of Georgian state-nation) for maintaining this customary role of Christianity for Georgian identity Georgian cultural elite, I think, should offer up-to-date
conceptual system in which rich heritage of previous ideologies would be renewed and creatively reinterpreted.

Note

* For the notion of cultural nationalism see: (Hutchinson 1994: Ch. 1) and also (Smith 2003: 77): “In practice, cultural and political forms of nationalism often succeed one another, and nationalists may oscillate between them. As a political nationalism falters in its aims, a cultural nationalism may step into the breach, building up the community’s collective cultural resources; when its vigor fades, a new political movement of nationalism emerges. Nationalism, then, cannot be confined within the political, or any other, domain; and to oppose ‘politics’ to ‘culture’ or ‘ethnicity’ in this way does not help to advance understanding of complex phenomena such as nations and nationalism”.

References


Chapter 6

Forging Georgian Ethnie: Ideology of Ethnic Election

Paper presented at the International Congress of Caucasian Studies (Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, October 23, 2007)

The present investigation is focused on 4th c Georgian society. This period may be considered as a transition epoch in historical development of the Georgian identity. In this century Christianity was adopted as an official religion of Georgian Kingdom Kartli. The written and archaeological sources attest dissemination of Christian faith much earlier than this date. According to the church tradition St Apostles preached in Georgia, however, the proclaiming of the new creed as the state religion took place only in the twentieth of the 4th c.

The results of the research concern the perceptions of inter-group bonds and main ethnic boundary markers such as territoriality, language, religion, self-designation and ideology of Georgian ethnic election. The revealed facts allow us to conclude that in 4th c ethnic sentiments among Georgians were especially salient and Georgian ethnie was clearly defined. I think the cause for such clear-cut ethnic self-delimitation was Georgians’ incorporation into the Christian Church. It was the ethnic group’s defensive effort to preserve its selfhood in an epoch of establishment of a trans-ethnic religion. The creation of a trans-ethnic unity of the Christian Church brought peoples closer to each other. As a result of religious homogeneity cultural barriers between them became penetrable. Thus, the problem of more clear-cut self-delimitation faced all ethnical entities incorporated in Christendom. The Christianization was something like modern globalization when national peculiarities are accentuated in a framework of a unified world
culture. ‘Christianity stimulated the emergence of nations and the national model of the modern world’.  

In the present paper I do not intend to concern all above mentioned ethnic markers, but will limit myself by exhibiting the ethnic election ideology. The option of the topic of course is not accidental. I had in mind social theorists’ findings on the importance of election ideologies in the process of ethnic forging and ethnic (and also national) identity survival.  

I base the investigation upon authentic source the *Life of St Nino* created in the middle 4th c.  

The original version of The *Life of St Nino* is a rather voluminous monument fashioned as a collection of memories: St Nino (Illuminatrix of Georgians) and her disciples are presented as narrators. And all this material, it is said, was put down by the princes Salome Ujarmeli (Salome of Ujarma). The composition is furnished with a brief foreword evaluating the apostolic mission of St Nino. Then the narration begins. First the final episode of the Saint’s biography is exhibited. The author describes a farewell with the dying Illuminatrix. The believers gather round her and cry and ask her to tell them the story of her life. On her deathbed the Saint asks the people to bring writing materials and take down her biography. Princes Salome (she was King Mirian’s daughter-in-law, wife of Prince

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Rev) and another woman from the high nobility are writing the story down. This chapter is followed by the memory of a Jewish woman Sidonia. The next chapter encompasses the story of her father Abiatar (the former local Jewish priest). Then the memories of the Archbishop Jacob and King Mirian follow. King Mirian’s Will to his son Prince Rev and Queen Nana close the collection. Some facts are reported twice and even thrice. However, the repetition does not make the reading boring. The compiler always ménages to change the perspective. Thus, one is given an opportunity to observe newer aspects of already recorded facts at each curve. By means of this method the compiler makes the narration impressive and memorizing.

According to this monument, myth of Georgians’ ethnic choseness was built upon three main assertions: (1) After Crucifixion the Jews who initially were God’s chosen nation, lost His grace and the epoch of hegemony of the Jewry over the World finished; (2) The Georgians were given God’s grace. They become a chosen nation in the New Era. Lord’s Tunic buried in Georgia, is a sign of God’s favor, His specific attitude towards the Georgians; (3) The divine mission of the Georgian nation will be accomplished in future when it become apparent that Georgia is that very country where the final events of the human history will take place and where after the consummation of historical period of the development of the humankind God’s Kingdom (//Garden of Eden//Heavenly Jerusalem) will be established.

Now I intend to display the relevant passages from the source. According to the Life the Jews residing in Georgia received a letter of invitation to attend the ceremony of Christ’s Crucifixion. One of those Jews, an inhabitant of Mtskhet’a, Elioz by the name, before the departure was given a warning from his mother not to mix up with the other Jews, dwellers of the other countries:
‘Take up the call of the King and Law, and go, o, my son, but do not join in what they desire, in no way at all’.\(^5\)

The old woman foresaw the fatal aftermath of Crucifixion. At the very moment this fact had taken place she pronounced the following prophecy:

‘Oh, Jews you became murderers of Savor and Redeemer and foes of the Creator. From now on your Kingdom is over’.\(^6\)

The same idea can be traced in the words of another Jewish personage of the Life Sidonia – St Nino’s disciple who, while interpreting the vision of the Illuminatrix, notes:

‘We are made aware by you of the acts of our fathers in those remote times: how unjustifiably they shed the blood of an innocent man from Heaven and how for this they were disgraced by God being scattered over the world. God had destroyed their Kingdom, deprived them of their temple and made closer another people to Him and glorified a strange seed’.\(^7\)

Thus, according to the Jewish personages after Crucifixion their nation gave up dominant position to the ‘strange seed’, i.e. the Georgians.

The assertion of the Jews’ guiltiness in the death of Christ, of course, was not Georgian idea. Doctrinal anti-Judaism was an essential characteristic of Christianity initially. And this

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very characteristic was rather salient in the epoch under the consideration. The Georgian ideologists (I am taking in plural ideologists, because I am sure that the compiler was backed by staff) attempted to use this idea for attaining a certain objective, namely, for proving that the place of the ‘chosen nation’ was vacant and might be occupied by a ‘strange seed’.

Later on the *Life* informs us that Elioz and his accompanying persons, while they were visiting Jerusalem, witnessed the Crucifixion and together with others Jews from Georgia cast lots for the Lord’s Tunic. They won it and took it to the royal city of Mtskheta. When St Nino was informed that Georgia was the final resting place of the Lord’s Tunic, she decided to visit this country.

Thus, the story of the Lord’s Tunic is a principal topic of the composition. It is repeated over and again. Different persons narrate it. All the narrators are non-Georgians: Jew, Greek, and Armenian. This fact, of course, is not accidental. Undoubtedly, it was made intentionally. The Jews were elected in the past. Greeks and Armenians having contended for this position after their incorporation into Christian Church. Thus, all of them were rivals of the Georgians. That is probably why the compiler found it necessary to emphasize that the presented assertions are shared and accepted by these nations.

When Elioz came back to Mtskheta with the holy garment, his sister clutched the garment to her chest and died instantaneously. It became impossible to dislodge Lord’s Tunic from the hands of the deceased woman. Therefore, it was entombed with Elioz’s sister. In due course the burial place became a part of the royal garden and a very beautiful cedar of Lebanon grew up there. While constructing the first church, the cedar was cut down and used for a pillar of the church. However, the builders were unable to erect it. Only after St Nino had offered up her prayers it was ascended by an angel to Heaven and then descended and was planted on its place.
without help from anybody. This pillar was named Svetitskhoveli – the Vivifying Pillar, for it was miraculous and cured all kind of illness.

But how might be interpreted this story on Lord’s Tunic, what it might point to?

It is well known that the cedar of Lebanon was regarded, as a plant of Eden, as well as the Vivifying Pillar may be associated with Tree of Life – being the plant of Eden too.

An old Georgian word Samotkhe that is used by the compiler for denoting royal garden in Mtskheta, means not merely a garden, but the Garden of Eden//Heavenly Kingdom//New Jerusalem//Paradise. Samotxe means quadratic (compare English square in the sense of a garden). But according to Scripture mystic city established in Heaven was also quadratic, is not it? (Rev. 21: 12-3). It seems to me that all these facts are intended to make sense that royal garden in Mtskheta has a respect to the New Jerusalem and that the Kingdom of Heaven would be established therein. Later Sidonia states this idea explicitly, which is referred here only implicitly. While explaining St Nino’s vision, she notes that this place of Samotkhe as a result of St Nino’s apostolic activities would be transformed into Samotkhe where God would be glorified everlastingly.  

The Life contains an evidence of another sacred thing interred in Mtskheta. It is the Mantle of Elias the Prophet. According to the Old Testament Elias the Prophet did not die. He won God’s favor and was ascended to Heaven alive. Therefore, it was expected that he will come back and this fact will take place just before the Savor’s Second Coming. Christian interpreters identify Elias the Prophet with one from two witnesses mentioned in the Revelation. On the grounds of

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these facts some scholars\(^9\) assert that the tale on the Mantle presented in the *Life* serves as a symbolic indication to the epoch of the Second Coming.

I share this opinion. However, it seems to me that the above-mentioned assertion needs to be developed further. In the *Life* we have information not only on the Mantle as such, but on the Mantle entombed in Georgia. This makes me to conclude that the Mantle serves as the temporal and spatial indications alike, that the compiler tried to associate the Second Coming with Georgia. The Mantle, it is told, was placed in that part of the city where the kin of the above-mentioned Elioz resided. This house of local Jews is presented as an elected part of the Jewish nation. As have been already mentioned, Elioz had brought the Lord’s Tunic to Mtskheta. His mother was an author of an unprecedented prophecy. St Nino’s disciple Sidonia who explained the Illuminatrix’ vision, also belonged to this house. Elioz’ sister was endowed with a divine ability of foreseeing too. She like her mother understood the importance of Christ’s mission and foresaw the aftermath of Crucifixion. Thus, this place was considered as the place of the prophets’ residence. It seems that the compiler longed to assert that in the epoch of the Second Coming from the bosom of this family would be issued a new prophet, the person possessing the power equal to that of Elias. Thus, it was expected that new Elias would be Georgian Jew and, accordingly, the divine message would be announced firstly in Georgia. The said fact must be considered as a token as well. This sign validated once again God’s favor towards the Georgians.

Now let me display all above-mentioned facts in sequence. The prophet of local origin will announce the Second Coming

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firstly in Georgia. New Jerusalem will be established in Georgia, in the royal garden. I think the compiler is trying to make the reader believe that the Savor will be issued from the bosom of the ‘strange seed’. It is implied that the future Redeemer would be the Georgian King. The attachment of the Lord’s Tunic with royal residence makes me to conclude this.

A.D. Smith distinguishes four patterns of conceptions of election. From his point of view dynastic is one attached to the ruling house and dynasty from which the community takes its main symbols and with which is associated itself. Thus, the Georgian conception of messianism may be considered as a dynastic one.

As I have already mentioned, the conception of self-choseness is a general characteristic of ethnic communities, and the creation of an early Christian Georgian messianic ideology was not something extraordinary or exception from the common rules. The idea of ‘specialness’ owned every in-group with developed sense of ethnic identity as A. Smith convincingly argues this. However, in each particular case the scenario was different A.Hastings’ work provides wide context for considering Georgian ‘specialness’. He distinguishes two categories of conception of peoples’ ‘specialness’: eastern and western. According to him the former is one that derives from Byzantine political theology, from experience of Christian empire of Constantine: ‘How can one get back from that to any sense of a single Christian nation set apart as chosen by God? There was a twofold way, which one may categorize a little simplistically, as Eastern and Western. What concerns us first is the former. It entirely derives from the intellectual and political revolution, which we associate with Constantine. His conversion to Christianity and the subsequent process whereby Christianity became first a privileged and then the one

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established religion of the Roman Empire politicized Christianity not merely in practice, but also in theory. At the same time it sacralized the empire’;¹¹ ‘Constantine become and remained a figure of vast providential significance, a “thirteenth apostle” forging a unity of empire and church, such that, increasingly, the new “chosen people” could be seen as a world-wide political-religious unity ruled from Constantinople by Christian emperor and “ecumenical” patriarch’.¹²

Other representatives of Eastern Christianity such are Serbia, Russia held to imperial model of peoples’ ‘specialness’.

The western way is depicted as follows: ‘In the West, far more than in the East, the road to an elect people lay across the Old Testament and the model of a chosen nation there presented, rather than the New but also across the conception of the world as a society of nations witnessed to by New Testament texts… as well as Old Testament ones…’¹³

It is not difficult to find out that Georgian self-conception of election, elaborated in accordance with biblical pattern, follows the Western model. Actually, it is a modification of a Jewish conception recorded in Old Testament, but it there has been used New Testament evidence on the Lord’s Tunic as well. And it is despite the fact that from the very beginning the official Georgian Christianity was closely linked with Byzantium. It would not been out of place to note that on other facts of this kind the author points out himself: ‘Curiously, the first exemplars for this “Western”, non-imperial road are actually oriental ones, Ethiopia and Armenia. Here, indeed, as later in Serbia or Russia, we see the development of a largely autocephalous church, though in neither case was that complete. What appears to have been decisive was the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and the double

effect that this had. On the one hand it stimulated the wider development of literary vernacular, which stabilized a given community over against everyone else. On the other, it provided a political text-book. A Christian kingdom, standing very much on its own, naturally applied to itself everything that it could find in the experience of Israel. Ethiopia in particular saw itself as replacing Israel, and produced the wonderful myth … to prove its inheritance of chosenness’. 14

I think, the reader would agree that above displayed narrative from Georgian hagiographical compilation provides not less wonderful modification of biblical ideas than Ethiopia and, accordingly, as it was already mentioned, it should be ascribed to the non-imperial ‘western’ model of peoples’ ‘specialness’. The case of Russia is a little more complicated: the ideology of Moscow as Third Rome that Hastings has in mind while making his assertions, represents indeed imperial or eastern paradigm of ethnic electivity, however, it is the later version of Russian messianism, which was emerged in period after the fall of Constantinople. Before this, almost synchronously (as in Georgia) with the official adoption of Christianity by Russians, was created narrative of Russian ethnic electivity based directly upon the Scripture. 15

Georgian early Christian messianic ideology has turned out very vital. One can find some of its notions until today in the writings of nationalistic minded Georgian intellectuals and perceptions of common people. This fact shows evidently, that it is impossible to explore national aspirations and attitudes of modern nation without taking into account its ethnic past, even such a remote period as one under the consideration.

Chapter 7

The Byzantine Emperor Constantine X Ducas in Recollections of Georgian Monk

Paper presented at the 6th Annual International Caucasian Session (Warsaw University, December 8, 2007)

Dear Colleagues!

Firstly let me express my gratitude to the organizers and sponsors of this representative international conference which I consider as very important event in academic life. It creates favorable atmosphere for exchanging ideas and helps to mutual understanding between specialists in field.

My special thanks to Professor David Kholbaia for giving me opportunity to participate this important meeting of the scholars and visit Poland – this wonderful freedom-loving country which was and continues to be exemplary for Georgians.

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In my presentation I intend to display evidences on Byzantine Emperor Constantine X Ducas (enjoyed imperial power in 1059-1067) which are available in the Life of Saint George of Mtatsminda – Georgian hagiographical writing of 11th c. St George of Mtatsminda (1009-1065) is an eminent Georgian clergy to whom belongs very important role in making Georgian identity (Chkhartishvili 2006: 87-101). During many years, he lived in Byzantium where he was occupied in translating church literature from Greek to Georgian and also vice versa. For a while (1040s-1050s) he was father superior of the Georgian Monastery of Iviron at Mount Athos (Chalkidike peninsula in northern Greece).

The author of the Life of Saint George of Mtatsminda, as it is obvious from the monument, was an accompanying person.
and disciple of the Saint Father. Nowadays among the Georgian scholars is widespread opinion that the name of the compiler was also George and for this reason it is customary to designate him as George the Minor (Mtsire). However, I do not find this opinion documented sufficiently. So, I am mentioning the author without proper name simply as the monk (because there is no doubt that he was monk) or the compiler or the hagiographer.

The roots of Georgian-Byzantine interrelations are traced deeply in history. The adoption of Christianity as a state religion by Georgian Kingdom of Kartli in twentieth of 4th c meant political orientation just on Byzantium. Since this event which might be considered as turning point in Georgianess forging process (Chkhartishvili 2002: 32-47; Chkhartishvili 2007a: 256), interactions between Byzantium and Georgia had been never interrupted. Sometimes Georgians and Byzantines were political rivals, sometimes partners, but always (during many centuries) Georgia remained inseparable part of Byzantine Commonwealth in regards of culture. Georgian historiography, hagiography, art etc were strongly affected by Byzantine ones.

Byzantine sources preserve plenty of evidences on Georgia and Georgian political and ecclesiastical workers. It is customary among Georgian scholars to study these evidences with close interest: most of them have already been translated into Georgian and successfully used in historical reconstructions. They serve as an important data upon which Georgian medieval history is grounded. Georgian medieval hagiographical literature, historiography and also other sources (inscriptions, coins, mural paintings etc) contain valuable information on Byzantines and Byzantine life. They help to fulfill Byzantine history data-base. However, the information of these sources has not been investigated with due attention yet. Meanwhile they are not less important: introducing them to
the international academic audience would help to placing facts of Georgian history in wider historical context. Apart this they allow to document Byzantine history better. In this regard case with Constantine Ducas is especially remarkable.

Byzantine sources also contain information concerning him: not to go very far it is enough to mention that in Michael Psellos’s Chronographia offers vivid portrait of the Emperor. In particular he is presented as a political leader endowed with attractive features, certain, hardly described, charm enabling him to evoke admiration without offence, to come to power without bloodshed, to die a death not assassinated, but naturally in result of illness, ruler who could inspire sense of peace in his subjects, to make sure friends that he missed their company, that he is listening to their advices. I will cite a few excerpts from the Cronigraphia: “Of all the emperors he was the most pious; nobody in fact, rivaled him in that virtue” (Sewter 1953: 255); “He controlled his temper, did nothing by instinct, always followed the dictates of reason” (Sewter 1953: 255); “It would be possible for me to name emperors rivaled, even equaled, Constantine in other things, but not where belief in God was concerned, or the mystery of the ineffable dispensation of God the Word. This latter, to Constantine, was more than anything else beyond conception: no words could possibly explain it … Every time I tried to expound to him the Mystery … his heart would fill with joy, his whole body tremble in exultation, and the tears would stream from his eyes. He had made a study of Holy Writ in all its fullness, and his knowledge was not confined merely to the text, but extended to deep spiritual ideas that underline it. Whatever leisure from public duties he enjoyed was spent in the reading of the Sacred Books” (Sewter 1953: 262); “He was a keen student of literature and a favorite saying was this: would that I were better known as a scholar than as emperor” (Sewter 1953: 264); “I doubt whether any other emperor lived
a life more glorious, or died more contended. Apart from the one conspiracy against his life and disaster from which he was saved, the rest of his reign was spent in tranquility and pleasure. What is more, he left behind sons to succeed him on the throne, sons who were the living image of their father, resembling him both in character and in physique” (Sewter 1953: 263).

But, as you are aware, Psellos was close friend of Ducas. It is partially for this reason that among the researchers Psellos’s information on Constantine X had been become subject of doubts and criticism. For verification of this information it would be very helpful to introduce source created in completely different environment allowing researcher to consider the situation from different point. Above mentioned Georgian source proves to be just a text by means of which verification of this kind is possible. It adds very important details to Ducas’s portrait enabling the reader to gaze the image of the Emperor in bold relief. Psellos is famous by excellence of literary devices he uses; but Georgian hagiographical monument in question also represents a writing of a high order and primary source as information it contains is grounded exclusively on recollections of eye-witnesses.

The Life contains four episodes that concern Constantine Ducas. The compiler was eyewitness of first three. For the last case he uses first hand information by Peter – Byzantine official of Georgian origin. Without any doubts these are sixties of 11th c, more precisely it is 1065. We are able to calculate this date on a ground of the following data: from the Life we know that Saint George of Mtatsminda after his long stand visit in Georgia departed fatherland in 1064. The first from the above mentioned episodes concerns just his meeting with Constantine Ducas which had taken place straightway on his arrival Byzantium. As representative of Georgian King he had brought official letter to the Byzantine Emperor. In
supplement to it we can point to evidence borrowed from hagiographical monument in question: in particular, among the noblemen surrounding the Emperor compiler names Gagik of Kars i.e. ruler of the principality of Kars. It was customary for Byzantium to offer political accommodation to persons who for a while (or for ever) had lost access to power in their own countries. We know that this political unit had been annexed by Byzantium in 1065 (Angold 1997: 40). This fact also makes us to think that the above mentioned diplomatic reception at the court of Byzantine Emperor had taken place in above mentioned year.

Despite the fact, that the Life had already been investigated by many scholars (philologists, historians) and all these episodes are well known, they had never been used for reconstructing missing pages in Constantine Ducas’ biography. In relatively recent article by Georgi Cheishvili (Cheishvili 2001) devoted exclusively to the investigation of issue of Georgian perception of Byzantium in 11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} cc the evidences on Constantine Ducas are not mentioned at all, while the generalization offered is ambiguous and contradictory. On one hand Cheishivili declares the following: “Though not always unbiased, the image illuminates the basic attitudes of Georgians towards Byzantines, who were the object of admiration as well as of criticism” (Cheishvili 2001: 199). On another, he concludes: “The image of Byzantium in the eleventh-century sources is mostly negative. For example, Byzantines are severely criticized in the Vitae of Athonite Fathers: Life of Iovane and Ep’twime by Giorgi Mt’atcmindeli and Life of Giorgi Mt’atcmindeli by Giorgi Mc’ire” (Cheishivili 2001: 203).

As we shall see the generalizations of this kind are incorrect. The compiler of the hagiographical writing in question depicts Constantine X Ducas as a man of great virtues possessing attractive personality and deserving general
admiration. The *Life* creates solid ground for advocacy of Psellus’s representations: in light of its evidences the Byzantine author’s assertions concerning his distinguished friend have been becoming quite persuasive. It became obvious that Georgian ecclesiastics distinguished between different ranks of Byzantine society, namely, between some representatives of lower Greek clergy being from their point of view evil and Byzantine emperors which were considered by them as strongholds of Orthodoxy.

Very superficially concerns Constantine Ducas in his otherwise interesting and thought-provoking article J. Samushia (Samushia 2005: 410-411). The researcher provides English summary reflecting the topics of the article (Samushia 2005: 524). This summery shows most obviously that the Georgian hagiographical source in question has not been used yet for Byzantine history reconstruction with due insights.

* * *

Period from the death of Basil II (1025) until the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes (1067-1071) is characterized as specific. According to Kaukounas this is period “during which the Roman empire declined from its medieval peak of military power to the point at which it was defeated by the Seljuq Turks at the battle of Mantzikert in 1071. While the Empire remained politically and military significant for another century, and culturally creative long beyond that, 1071 marks a real turning point in Byzantine history” (Internet Medieval Sourcebook).

According to Hussey “The eleventh century … was crucial time, not because of the fact its acute political difficulties – after all the Empire had faced danger time and again – but because it was now brought up against certain new and ominous developments both within and without which it failed to control, and hence its total downfall in fifteenth century may be traced back to this period” (Sewter 1953).
The main characteristic of this crisis was problem with reproduction of ruling dynasty. Basil II died without his own heirs, he left as such his brother Constantine, who before this was co-emperor and by the time of Basil’s death was rather old. “In 1028 he fell mortally ill. Who was to succeed him? He had no sons; of his three daughters, the eldest had long been a nun. The second, Zoe, had spent twenty-six years in the imperial gynaecaeum, in company of her more intelligent but less attractive sister Theodora… After protracted discussions by the bedside of the dying Emperor, the bureaucracy proposed senator and aristocrat named Romanus Argurus. . . On 10 November Romanus married Zoe in the imperial chapel of the palace; on 11th he stood at his new father-in-law’s bedside as he breathed his last; and on 12th November he found himself Romanis III, seated beside his beaming wife on the imperial throne. His next duty, despite his wife’s advanced age, was to found a dynasty” (Norwich 1998: 217-218). Zoe was beyond child-bearing age, “though no one was much surprised when he failed to do this” (Norwich 1998: 218). The period from 1028 until 1056 was thus one in which various men acquired legitimacy as emperor by marrying Zoe. From 1056 various families competed for the throne, among them were Ducas.

Dying Isaac Comnenus “nominated as successor – almost certainly at the instigation of Psellus – Constantine Ducas, the most aristocratic of that group of intellectuals who had been responsible for reviving the university a few years before” (Norwich 1998: 235).

The same author continues:

“If Psellus was indeed responsible for the choice, his burden of guilt must be heavy indeed; for there is no Emperor in history whose accession had more disastrous consequences. Had Isaac reigned for twenty years instead of two, he would have built up the strength of the army to the level it had known under Basil and would been able to bequeath the empire,
undefeated and undiminished, directly to his nephew Alexius. But it was not to be. Isaac’s tragically premature death, and his choice of successor, rendered inevitable the first of the two great catastrophes that were ultimately to bring about downfall of Byzantium” (Norwich 1998: 235-236).

This conclusion obviously is provoked by Psellos’ information concerning Ducas specific attitude towards the determining principles of foreign policy. Namely, Constantine Ducas was sure that external policy of the Empire should be regulated not by means of military campaigns and army, but through political partnership: by sending gifts and offering other signs of friendship. According to Psellos remark, in Ducas’s opinion such policy would ensure saving of imperial income. Apart this, the policy grounded on principle of collaboration suited to the Emperor’s mode of life. We can read between lines that Psellos did not fully share this position. At the same time he mentioned achievements of Ducas in military spears as well.

I think it is not justifiable to ascribe to one person (even to Emperor) the responsibility for empire decline. Constantine Ducas was not idealist at all. His at first glance romantic view on foreign affairs was adequate response on challenge to new circumstances (danger of Turks invasions, inner disorder), that faced the Empire in the middle 11th c. Just under these circumstances Byzantine Emperors gradually having been gave up imperial ambitions regarding their neighbors and instead of ‘patronizing and lordly condescension’ gone on collaboration. This policy had reached its high point just in epoch of Constantine Ducas. This assertion may be illustrated especially eloquently by case of Georgia. For imagining real scale of this policy it is enough to mention two following facts: Constantine’s elder son Michael, afterwards the Emperor Michael VII (1071-1078), married Georgian Princess Mary (the daughter of King Bagrat IV). Constantine Ducas had
agreed to provide allowance to the increased brotherhood of Georgian Monastery of Iviron which actually was diplomatic representative of Georgia in Byzantium from the close of 10\textsuperscript{th} c, i.e. from the very time of its foundation.

Now I intend to display above mentioned episodes with necessary comments.

**Episode 1** (Abuladze 1967: 176-180)

After long journey St father George had reached imperial city, i.e. Constantinople with his accompanying persons. Peter (as it was already mentioned the Byzantine official of Georgian origin) had reported to the Emperor on Georgian delegation arrival. This was just time when Georgian Princess Mary (Martha) was officially introduced to the court as future daughter-in-law of the Emperor. The reception was appointed on next day. The compiler describes the first meeting of St George of Mtatsminda with the Emperor as follows: as the St father entered the imperial apartments, he had bowed to the ground before the Emperor, eulogized him and offered prayers for him and for his son according to all requirements of royal court regulations.

We know that Constantine Ducas had not one, but three sons. It is obvious that at this very reception was presented only one, evidently the elder son Michael the future spouse of Georgian Princess.

The hagiographer continues: as the Emperor saw him with the God-inspiring face and heard his revealing spiritual strength and inner tranquility modest, well pointed and directly affecting the listeners speech, said to Peter: “How I am thankful to the King Bagrat that he had sent to us this man who is like angels, man which despite being Georgian is keenly aware all rules of us”.

Then he read King Bagrat’s letter. Georgian King characterized the monk as holy man and asked Constantine Ducas to receive him as it is befit to his imperial Excellency.
As the Emperor became aware of all his virtues, remarks the compiler, regarded him with more respect and promised to render assistance in all initiatives he would intend. Saint father had brought with him 80 juveniles picked up by him throughout the Georgia for additional personnel of Georgian Monastery of Iviron. Evidently the allowance for them was subject for consideration in the Bagrat’s letter.

As the Emperor liked too much the St George of Mtatsminda’s magnanimity and as he (besides imperial hierarchs) was surrounded by Romans and Armenians at this reception and peaceful time also disposed to deep inquiries, began conversation with Saint father on spiritual issues and rules of faith. Firstly he concerned the Georgian faith, namely, show interest in reasons distinguishing Georgian creed from the Orthodox faith of Greeks.

Of course, it was not mere curiosity from side of the Emperor. Byzantine and Georgia from open (military campaigns) or not visible (supporting anti-royal conspiracies and uprisings) revelries of previous period should be switched to large-scale political collaboration and it became necessary to put all ideological principles on the line so that to find points for joint efforts.

According to the compiler Saint father displayed in full “Georgian Faith” stressing its dogmatic similarity with of Greeks’. At the same time he pointed out that in regards of historical experience there existed essential discrepancy. Georgians had never changed original faith; while in Byzantium Christianity in many times had been involved in heresy. Indeed in manner of Byzantine diplomacy George of Mtatsminda elucidated to his listeners the problem. Saint George of Mtatsminda had linked heresies not with contemporary Byzantium, but with its past realizing that for the past Constantine Ducas as the founder of new dynasty was not
responsible. The hagiographer shows that the Emperor was not insulted by such explanations of the Saint father.

I find it necessary to clarify the last assertion with special care because sometimes in scientific literature the passage under the consideration is interpreted as follows: aiming to demonstrate Georgians’ superiority Saint father had entered into a controversy with the Emperor (Bakradze 1988: 12-14).

Such an interpretation is incorrect not to say naive. The purpose of Georgian ambassador (we can regard Saint Father indeed as an ambassador) was not to quarrel with Byzantine Emperor who was respected by Georgian ecclesiastics not only as political leader, but also as Christian ruler, defender Orthodoxy, but to help establishing of friendly collaboration between two countries. The problems facing Byzantine state by the middle 11\textsuperscript{th} c were not yet visible and it is not surprising that Georgian authorities were longing to found political partnership with the Empire. Emphasizing discrepancy in historical experience against the background of dogmatic likeness St George of Mtatsminda sharpened Georgian identity religious marker (Chkhartishvili 2007b: 17-18).

It is impossible to render from original text all nuances of Saint Father’s impressive speech. The compiler narrates: strongly affected by this speech the Emperor praised God and continued his inquiries. Now he asked the monk concerning Romans’ and Greeks’ faith. Of course, the Emperor was very well aware all nuances, but he wanted to consider the issue once again publicly. However, he explained his unawareness by his mode of life: as military man he did not know the problem in detail, meanwhile he as a person enjoying supreme power wanted to know everything concerning the Greeks’ and Romans’ faith.

The answer on this question represents again example of diplomacy. For this once also discrepancy between the liturgical practice of the Romans and Greeks was explained by
the dissimilarity of historical experience. According to Saint father the characteristic features of Greek faith reflects the history of cultivating the heresies by Greeks. As for Romans, they had never accommodated heresies. And it is for this reason that they managed to retain original ecclesiastical practice. But, these should not cause division, when faith is right.

I think there is implied the following: ecclesiastical practice of Constantinople reflects not more than zigzags in history of making Orthodoxy and this is comparatively unimportant when both Greeks and Romans hold true faith.

This answer represents also the topic of debates among the Georgian scholars. Part of them think that Saint father gave preference to Latin Christology, that his aim was to bring Georgian Church into the bosom of Latin Church, that he wanted to please Romans as he saw that Byzantium was already weakened, that balance existed before in Georgian Church between Greek and Latin Christology in period under consideration had been destroyed in favor of Romans (Khintibidze 1983: 83; Papashvili 1995: 68-69; Aleksidze 1991: 9; Mamulashvili 2003: 46-47).

Such an interpretation of the passage is completely misleading. It makes obvious that for the part of scholars the very character of Byzantine-Georgian interrelations in the middle eleventh century and so called Eastern Schism are unintelligible. This was not period of rivalries between two countries, but of collaboration. Besides, as I have already mentioned, from outside it was impossible to notice the unsolvable problems facing the Empire; after all this was heyday of Byzantine culture.

As for so called Eastern Schism: the significance of the events of 1054 was certainly not recognized at that time. It has been exaggerated only later. Excommunications of particular Patriarchs or Popes had occurred in many times before (and
also after). “The dispute between Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Kerularios represents only one incident in a process of cultural and political separation which had begun much earlier” (Cunningham 1999: 91). It is for this reason that the contemporaries of the event did not find the event fatal; they considered it as occasional transient happening, a fault of certain unbalanced persons. There can be no doubt, that personalities of the leading contenders in this debate contributed to its bitterness (Cunningham 1999: 90). The Emperor Constantine Ducas as well as evidently St George of Mtatsminda were among those who did their best to save the situation.

Thus, the above mentioned answer of the Georgian representative at the Byzantine court was aimed at healing of the wounds and preventing the further development of the conflict.

The compiler remarks: the Roman noblemen having been learned the answer became extremely joyful; before this case in many times they were involved in debates concerning this very issue and for their ignorance they were not able to answer. Romans, according to the compiler, even expressed desire to present Saint George of Mtatsminda to the Pope. Byzantine Emperor had not been offended by such behavior of his guests. Quite on the contrary: with obvious hint of inner satisfaction he continued his query. He concerned the Armenian faith. He asked whether Armenians bear any relation to Christianity. Actually this was question containing the respond (Abdalaze 1988: 114). As we know one of main characteristic features of eleventh-century imperial policy was a renewal of persecution of Monophysite Christians. This represented a reversal of the more tolerant policies of the previous century. Under the Patriarch Constantine Leichoudes (1059-1064) Byzantine patience gave out and persecution began in attempt to force the Armenian and Syrian Churches into communion.
with Constantinople (Angold 1997: 41-42). Patriarch John Xiphilinos (1064-1075) undertook to drive out Monophysite influence within the Empire. In 1064 and 1065, Xiphilinos summoned various Monophysite hierarchs to Constantinople for questioning, including both secular and religious leaders of the Armenians (Cunningham 1999: 91-92).

Issue of Armenian faith was point in which position of Georgians and Byzantines coincided. At the close of 10th c the most of Georgian lands were incorporated into a new political body – United Georgian Kingdom. 11th c was an epoch of developing and fixing of these results. The King of the United Georgian Kingdom had many non-Georgian subjects, Armenians among them. It is for this reason Georgian state ideology in the period under the consideration also characterized by anti-Monophysite propaganda.

Correspondingly, Georgian ambassador’s answer on the last question of the Emperor was laconic and simple: “One can not label evil faith as faith at all”. According to the compiler this respond had exposed Armenians to shame while the Emperor was extremely pleased and had tendered thanks to God and praised the Saint father for his ability to explain fairly and concisely the issues being so complicated and difficult for understanding. He repeated his promise to render assistance to Saint father in all his initiatives.

**Episode 2** (Abuladze 1967: 180-181)

On the next day the Saint Father with his accompanying persons (the compiler among them) was again summoned by the Emperor. The Emperor welcomed Saint father with most kind regards and said to him: “Kind monk go back to your Monastery and bring up there the orphans you have brought. Our brother Bagrat the Sebastocrator concerns just this issue in the letter of his. And show us your orphans so that we reward them with our benevolence”. At parting the Emperor
encouraged the Saint father once more to inform him on all lacks of the monastery so that he was able to help.

**Episode 3** (Abuladze 1967: 182-184)

Some time passed by and the Georgians were summoned again. Saint father asked brothers to prepare the orphans for meeting with the Emperor. Vicinity of the Monastery of Peribleptos was appointed as place for meeting. The compiler recalls: the Saint father was very ill. In addition of many other diseases he went with high temperature as well. All brothers asked him to postpone the meeting till next day. However, he said firmly: “We should see Emperor today as we have no tomorrow”.

According to hagiographer’s opinion Saint father foresaw the exact date of his death; he knew that this would be happened just on tomorrow. They reached the place of appointment. Saint father came down from his mule and we were waiting to the Emperor, recalls the compiler. Soon Peter came as well. And Saint father and Peter had prepared petition. Some time later the Emperor approached the place where Georgians were arranged in accordance to regulation. Hagiographer notes: “We had fallen onto ground and praised the Emperor in Georgian. As he saw us, come to us and was very astonished by the orphans’ multiplicity and by the fact that most of them were under age.

“Holy man you have committed great and distinguished dead, nobody would be able to do the same”. Father handed him the petition asking for grace of His Excellency for the orphans: foster them for your and your sons’ souls praying, as the Emperor for this time was with his sons”.

The above mentioned Roman noblemen and Gagik of Kars were also accompanied him. All were very astonished. The Emperor asked for motet. The orphans had performed some in Greek. The Emperor expressed his satisfaction remarking: “How skillfully had you trained them”. He ordered to give to
the monk some allowance in advance and promised to grant everything listed in the petition.

**Episode 4** (Abuladze 1967: 194-196)

On the next day Saint father passed away. All felt deep sorrow at his death. Peter was also extremely upset. Despite this he found enough power in him to disturb the Emperor and passed to him the bad news. For a while Ducas kept silence. Repeating three times “God be praised” he addressed the Saint father: “You are blessed Oh, holy monk, and I rely on your prayers as I intent to grant everything you had asked”.

Immediately he ordered to bring the petition and create two *crisobules*: one for the Monastery that it was free from any oppression from side of Byzantine clergy and one for the orphans that be brought up in the monastery. The Emperor handed both these *crisobules* to Peter and also huge candles and other articles necessary for deceased with following words: I have granted more than the Holy Man had asked me, put these on his chest and beg him for me for forgiveness.

* * *

Let us now on the background of presented evidences recall Constantine Ducas portrait by Psellos. We are witnessing how the image of the Emperor becomes more and more lifelike. Reflecting indeed very attractive personality of the Byzantine ruler the evidences are rather striking and impressive, are not they? And it is no justifiable that in historical narratives Constantine Ducas remains in the shadow of the Emperors notoriously known by their brutality or infidelity.

I think, the audience will agree the Georgian source under the consideration provides really very useful material for history of Byzantium.

**Note**

¹ For understanding of the Saint Father’s diplomacy insights it would be not out of place to recall that: “Latins and Greeks often adopted
divergent attitude towards the Monophysites, with the old Rome remaining much more rigidly attached to the very formula of the “two natures” adopted at Chalcedon, whereas Constantinople was more ready to remember that St Cyril of Alexandria also spoke of “One incarnate nature”’ (Meyendorff 1982: 27). Monophysites represented great unsolved problem for Georgian state inner policy. According to George of Mtatsminda Georgians had ambition that they always stood firmly on Chacedonian faith and in this point Georgians were alike Latins. Actually in this discourse Latins are not so important. What was really count is to emphasize the virtue of true faith devotion.

References


Chapter 8

Armenians in the Process of Georgian Identity Forging

Paper presented at the International Conference “Georgia: The Making of a National Culture” (Michigan University, May 17, 2008)

**Problem’s posing.**

The main human associations, ethnies and nations, represent communities grounded on collective cultural identities. They are defined by a set of markers among which others are of principle importance. The concept of others delimitates the concept of we: by asserting who we are, we assert who we are not. We can consider we as a response to a challenge of others. For nations and ethnic groups, others are manifested as neighboring peoples. Usually the “contact” identities serve as others.

The ethnic roots of the national community known as “Georgian” date back to the remote past and have always been surrounded by many other peoples. Each of them was or still represents a challenge to Georgian identity. Throughout history the main others for Georgians are Armenians. I cannot recall any other case in world history of such a long-term challenge. Thus, the topic declared in the title of my paper deserves special attention not only in the context of a case study on Georgian identity, but also in regard to wider generalizations on the issue of collective cultural identities.

**Theoretical framework of the investigation and state of problem study.**

I am Georgian – in other words I am a member of the Georgian national in-group, so I explore the phenomenon of Georgian identity from inside. It is generally accepted that it is difficult for members of a given culture to identify its
characteristics. Therefore, I undoubtedly have problem as an observer, but at the same time my position as insider gives me advantages. Language is very important in how Georgian (as well as any other) identity is perceived. The fact that Georgian is native for me and that I can comprehend all its nuances provides me with greater opportunities compared to researchers who are non-members of the Georgian community.

Today the history of Georgian nation attracts the attention of many Georgian scholars for whom Georgian is also native. However, I think that I have advantage over them, as the Soviet adaptation of Marxian sociology still serves for the most of them as a theoretical framework while making historical reconstructions. Because of economical determinism and disregard of subjective factors in the nation-making process, Soviet sociology does not make it possible to describe adequately the process of forging collective cultural identities.

The greatest failure of this theoretical system lies in the lack of a category for designation of loosely bound “pre-culture” entities which do not appear in historical records. For this reason the category of tribe (kinship based small entity), the lowest stage in the in-group binding process according to Soviet sociology, is used to refer to the socially more advanced state of ethnie. Meanwhile, the category of ethnie is not an equivalent of tribe. Being essentially cultural constructs (belief in common origin is unverified) ethnies usually are well documented while tribes are small communities of immediate relatives, which are not and might not be well-documented.

Georgian historiography of the Soviet period and also current historiography in Georgia provides many examples of interpretations of the sources being misleading due to unelaborated theoretical devices. On the one hand, researchers correctly attest that 11-12th cc marks the time when Georgian medieval culture became characterized by advanced, very close to national level, state in-group consolidation. On another
hand, the same researchers also assert the existence of Georgian tribes. Thus, according to these investigations tribes (defined in the Soviet manner) could be carriers of national culture. I think this is nonsense.

As for me: unlike most of my compatriots, I am rethinking the history of Georgian national identity using an ethno-symbolic approach. The main proponent of this approach is British scholar Prof. Anthony D. Smith. The essence of this approach can be explained as follows: despite the fact that nations are essentially modern phenomena (there are only a few examples of pre-modern nations), they are not solely products of modernity. They have emerged in the modern era, but within the framework of available ethnic cultures in result of selections and reinterpretations of ethnic symbols. Thus, the modern nations have deep ethnic roots. Nation-making processes are not processes driven by political elites voluntarily; they always took place in certain cultural frames as a result of ethno-symbolic rearrangements. This is what ensures the ethnic entity’s continuity and self-identity through many generations. First of all nations are forms of culture and not sets of political institutions and loyalties, as some scholars contend. Namely, nations are forms of a specific kind of culture – public culture, being feature of modern societies exclusively.

In terms of the process of imagined forging states, this approach has two notions: *ethnic category* and *ethnic network*.

From my point of view this approach is the most elaborated theory of the concept of nation. It provides the necessary tools for describing national identity-making processes.

I would like to direct your attention to one more advantage I have as a Georgian identity researcher – the time in which I am conducting my investigation. For any community grounded on collective cultural identity, the fact of having its own state represents the highest possible achievement. This fact not only
testifies to the fulfillments of previous periods, but also represents a precondition for successful development in the future. Georgian identity has already achieved its ultimate goal of having a sovereign Georgian national state. This state’s function is to ensure the preservation of Georgian national culture and territory. This is why I am convinced that Georgian identity will never again face the danger of dissolution and allows me to look at the nation's past coolly and dispassionately (in any case more dispassionately than those who were not able to enjoy such a privilege) draw conclusions on issues of history.

This factor preconditions my attitude to the relevant problem arisen in this paper. It is free from any kind of sentimentality. Some Georgian scholars are very sensitive to the “unfriendliness” of Armenians, while they can disregard the analogous “unfriendly” acts committed by Georgians altogether. In parallel, it is often also asserted that Georgians and Armenians are brothers. I think such a position is useless for academic purposes.

As for me, the fact of Georgian expansion aimed at Armenian identity elimination in the 12th c does not make me conscience-stricken, nor do instances of Armenian migrants’ ingratitude and betrayal in many critical moments of Georgian history make me feel resentment. This is because I know that neighboring identities were forged just in competition, mutual rivalries and deadly violence. Georgians and Armenians were not brothers. Even more: they could not have been brothers. Georgians and Armenians were competitors, rivals and sometimes even enemies. Regardless, today Georgians and Armenians should build interrelations grounded on mutual respect and partnership; for this it is not necessary to idealize or embellish the past. The tension between two neighbors will continue as long as the Georgian and Armenian identities survive, but our (meaning first of all my and other academics’
duty is to constrain interrelations of this kind so that they develop in conditions of peaceful and honest competition and according to international norms.

**Brief overview of the history of Georgian identity.**

The modern Georgian nation emerged in 19\textsuperscript{th} c. We can point to many indicators that bear this out, the best being the fact that the character of inter-group bonds was rethought. If in the previous period the designation of Georgian in-group was the term *natesavi* (the main segment of this word, *tes-l-i*, in Georgian is “seed”, so, *natesavi* means a group of humans being of a common origin), now it was *eri*. Simultaneously with this change, the sphere of usage of *natesavi* was narrowed to immediate relatives. In the Middle Ages *eri* was used to refer to socially-based identities. Only from 19\textsuperscript{th} c did it begin to operate as term designating in-groups based on ethno-cultural grounds. *Natesavi* meant that the in-group consisted of members sharing a common origin, while in the case of *eri* the basis for membership was not specified. Thus, *eri* as well as *natesavi*, refer to a group of humans, though the last one does not accentuate (though does not exclude) the common origin of its members. They might be, but they also might not be the descendants of a common forebear.

In current usage, *eri* means nation. Already in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of 19\textsuperscript{th} c Ilia Chavchavadze – the eminent Georgian writer and leader of national-liberation movement had entwined term *eri* with term of *nation*. For instance, translating E. Renan’s famous work on nation its title “What is a nation?” by Chavchavadze was translated as “What is eri?”

During the whole 19\textsuperscript{th} c as well as 20\textsuperscript{th} c (excluding the period from 1918 to 1921, i.e. the years of the independent Georgian state – the Democratic Republic of Georgia), Georgian identity was perceived in the framework of an ethno-nation. In 19\textsuperscript{th} c Georgia was part of the Russian Empire and in-group consolidation was possible only in terms of ethnicity.
This process continued in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, which was not an independent state.

Despite the fact that Soviet official doctrine was internationalism, Georgian ethnic nationalism was kept down deliberately. The explanation of this is very simple: Georgia was and is a multiethnic country. So, a civic conception of a nation which would foster loyalty to Georgian state was not acceptable for Soviet domestic policy. It would help ethnic minorities residing in Georgia to find their place within the multiethnic national culture. Ultimately this would lay the groundwork for real political sovereignty of Georgia and for her secession from the Soviet Empire. It is for this reason that in Soviet Georgia the ethnic nationalisms of Georgians as well as all ethnic groups resided in Georgia, among them Armenians, who had loyalty to neighboring Soviet Republic of Armenia and not to republic to which they were ascribed as citizens, were promoted and fostered. For *homo sovieticus*, national solidarity at the level of Soviet republics was non-understandable.

The rather feeble sense of common Soviet attachments was overwhelmed by strong ethno-nationalistic dispositions. This situation was maintained by inertia until very recently. Only since the *Rose Revolution* in 2003 has Georgian society begun to gradually move towards a conception of a Georgian civic nation able to accommodate the ethno-cultural diversity of Georgia and forge an up-to-date national culture and multiethnic nation state.

The modern Georgian nation emerged on the basis of the Georgian ethnie, which has a very long history of development. The 15th c BC may be considered as initial point for our narration: this is time when we are able to witness Georgian ethnie’s presence. Already by this moment it is endowed with all main ethnic markers: a unique culture, which represented the greatest challenge even to Hellenistic world, a unique
language, perceptions that it held its own lands, memory of common origin, a self-name and also state with large territorial coverage in western and eastern Georgia. Firstly centre of the Georgian political body was situated in western Georgia.

The 4th-3rd cc BC may be considered as a new stage in Georgian ethnie forging. This date is marked by the emergence of new political unit, this time with its centre in eastern Georgia. The process of cultural unification had taken on a far more intensive character and concerned all main ethnic markers. The Georgian language obtained official status, while the use of other languages was restricted. The special status assigned to the Georgian language was materialized through the unique script introduced by King Parnavaz. The ancient Georgian alphabet was designed for making historical records accounting for the birth of a new political body. A new cult of the god Armazi was established. All members of Georgian in-group were obliged to venerate the idol.

In 4th c the Georgian ethnie consolidation process received a new very powerful impact: Christianity became the official religion of the Georgians. The adoption of trans-ethnic ideological system caused further intensification of in-group solidarity and inner mobilization. It was this ideological crossroad that witnessed the creation of the myth of Georgian ethnic election, the core idea of which was the assertion that the Robe of Christ was stored in the capital city of the Georgian Kingdom at that time, Mtskheta. In 5th c consolidation along ethnic borders continued. The Georgian Church became autocephalous. Georgians began perceiving themselves not as mere kinsfolk, but first of all as a sacred communion in Christ.

Then political fragmentation began. It is worth mentioning here that from time to time the Georgian in-group was characterized by a modification of its political frame: unification with different territorial coverage, moving of
political centers from west to east, from east to south etc, breaking up and simultaneous availability of several political centers. However, all these changes did not concern the cultural framework. The most eloquent testimony for this assertion is the Georgian language, which is characterized by the emergence of a standard linguistic code at a very earlier stage of Georgian identity development.

At the close of 10\textsuperscript{th} c and beginning of 11\textsuperscript{th} c the new political state (designated as the united Georgian Kingdom in special literature) accommodated the Georgian in-group. The flourishing of Georgian medieval culture reached its peak. In 12\textsuperscript{th} c the Georgian community continued developing within the Pan-Caucasian Empire. The expansion of Georgian culture through this Empire was a principal tendency of this epoch. The facts of amalgamation of Georgian culture and enhancement of political power lead some Georgian scholars to think that the 11-12\textsuperscript{th} cc should be named as date of Georgian nation’s birth. I share this opinion, with one remark: this was the pre-modern Georgian nation whose heir is the Georgian modern nation, which emerged in the 19\textsuperscript{th} c.

From the 13\textsuperscript{th} c onwards, due to domestic as well as outside factors, the political borders of the Georgian state gradually narrowed. Ultimately, the unifying frame was destroyed altogether. However, destruction concerned only a superficial political marker. What actually happened was that the Georgian ethnie broke into smaller political units. Instead of one single state, several political bodies became carriers of Georogianess. It is customary in Georgian historiography to consider the political disintegration as a very unfavorable event in the history of the Georgian nation. Unfavorable circumstances caused the fragmentation, but the fragmentation in the face of dangerous challenges in fact increased chances for survival.
The unfavorable conditions persisted for many centuries. Georgian ethnie had managed to survive, however, its inner resources were so depleted that it was difficult for it to be unified again. The inclusion of all Georgian political units and core historical territories within the Russian Empire in the 19th c enabled the Georgian ethnie to be unified within a single (though not its own) state; imperial pressure, policy aimed at the cultural integration of Georgians through Russification and repressions (and also several other factors) helped to further mould the Georgian ethnie and ultimately the formation of the Georgian ethno-nation. In the Soviet Empire, despite the fact that conditions for this were not totally favorable, the Georgian identity forging process continued. We can judge its great (ensuring the very high degree of social cohesion within the Georgian in-group) power by the fact that Georgian ethnic nationalism exploded after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

This is very brief description of the path taken by the Georgian identity until the Rose Revolution. This revolution marked a new stage in Georgia's history. A new generation of western-educated politicians has come to power. They are trying to lead the nation-building process in the framework of the civic conception of nation and refashion social interrelations according to the principles of open society.

**The Armenian challenge and the process of Georgian identity forging.**

For an understanding of Georgian identity development, is necessary to take into account plenty of factors. The *Armenian factor* can provide added insights.

As I have mentioned, Armenians have represented a permanent challenge for Georgian identity. Consequently, it is impossible to touch on all available facts in one presentation. Thus, I intend to make only a general description.

Though according to available sources the roots of Georgian-Armenian interactions are traced to the remote past, I
would like to begin my narration from the epoch of the official adoption of Christianity by the Georgians in the 4th c. This was transient epoch, an ideological crossroads in history of the Georgian community. The process of trans-ethnic religion implanting evidently was painful. Georgian ethnie responded to this challenge by strengthening identity markers. A very special level of ethnic bonds saliency is viewed in the Life of St Nino the most ancient (extant) monument of Georgian hagiography. It was created in middle of the 4th c, i.e. shortly after the Georgians declared Christianity as a state religion. The writing is distinguished by deep symbolism and is characterized by prominent artistic merits. It represents collections of memories by Illuminatrix of Georgians St Nino and her pupils and followers. The compiler – or, more precisely – editor of the writing was Princess Salome Ujarmeli – daughter-in-law of the first Christian Georgian King Mirian.

This very monument represents a main document of the Georgian project aiming to demonstrate the Georgian ethnic election myth. Others also were concerned in this project. Alongside the Jews and Greeks there are presented Armenians as well. All these peoples are depicted as witness bearers, namely, they are witnessing the chosenness of Georgians.

As this indeed unique project of peoples’ specialness and as projects of this kind generally play very decisive role in the making of ethnic identities, I would like to say a bit more about it. Case study details would allow me to elaborate on the specifics of Georgian perceptions concerning Armenians in the epoch under the consideration.

The project consists of the following main assertions: after the Crucifixion of Christ, the Jews lost God’s grace and consequently the place of God’s chosen people became “vacant”. This place was occupied by a heretofore unknown people, the Georgians. As a testimony to God’s special attitude towards Georgians and a sign of their future glory, the Robe of
Christ is entombed in the royal city of Georgian Kingdom, Mtskheta. It was brought there by Georgian Jews from Jerusalem being attended at the Crucifixion. According to the writing, Georgian Jews are the elected part of Jews. Just through them the God’s grace was passed to Georgians. The function ascribed to Jewish personages of the *Life of St Nino* is obvious: they should witness that Georgians possessed the most sacred article; should recognize that in new era Georgians were chosen.

The case with Armenians is essentially the same. I would like to direct your attention to the following fact: St Nino’s teacher was an Armenian woman Sara Miaphor – a resident of Jerusalem. It is impossible to characterize a person more positively than this woman was characterized. According to St Nino, nobody in Jerusalem in their days and also before had a deeper knowledge in Holy Writ than this woman. At the same time it is noted that this woman was Armenian. Through her title *Miaphor* (Armenian canton’s designation) emphasizes her ethnic affiliation, the reader is driven to the conclusion that her ties with her native ethnic community were not interrupted and consequently she might be considered as representative of it. I am sure the teacher of St Nino was indeed Armenian, but I also am sure that there should be reasons that this evidence had found its place in ideological writing like the *Life of St Nino*.

To understand the role assigned to this fact, let us explore the goal which are achieving through this personage. Sara was first who told St Nino that the Lord’s Robe was kept in Georgia. Thus, this Armenian who was most knowledgeable in holy things bore witness that Georgians were possessors of Robe. It is obvious that Georgians perceived Armenians (as well as Jews) as witness bearers, *others* whose recognition was necessary for promoting Georgian ethnic election ideology.

However, Georgians gradually found that relations with Armenians were not so simple, that they tended neither to help
nor recognize Georgian ambitions. Even more: being backed by Persia, they were dangerous. The Georgian cultural and political elite tried to re-draw religious demarcation line being eliminated at the meeting point of Georgian and Armenian identities after the adoption of Christianity as a state religion. I mean the Georgian-Armenian ecclesiastical controversy reflected in correspondence between Georgian and Armenian clergy and lay hierarchs at the beginning 7th c. Despite its dogmatic entourage, the polemic represented a struggle between neighboring identities resulted in schism entailing cultural and political separation. The concluding document announcing the split between Georgian and Armenian Churches was issued by the Armenian side, but still, the Georgian-Armenian ecclesiastical schism in the early 7th c was not an Armenian, but Georgian project.

The next Georgian project in which Armenians are also concerned was created in the second half of 11th c and continued almost until the close of 12th c. Conventionally it may be designated as the project of invitation. As I have already mentioned, the period from the close of 10th c to second half of 11th c is the epoch in which the united Georgian Kingdom emerged. Gradually this political unit grew into the pan-Caucasian Empire led by Georgians. Georgian Kings had many non-Georgian subjects. Thus, the problem of their cultural integration was urgent. The above-mentioned project sought to solve this problem. The main document of the project is a monument of Georgian official historiography “Kartlis Tskhovreba” (i.e. life of Kartli; Kartli is an ancient designation of the Georgian in-group), namely, the compilation of the founder of this collection historian Leonti Mroveli (11th c) The life of Georgian Kings and their progeny. According to Leonti Mroveli all Caucasian peoples were brothers – sons of one and same biblical father.
It is impossible to interpret this conception of official Georgian historiography in any way other than as an invitation to the Georgian in-group. Leonti provides the list of these peoples being inhabitants of north as well as south Caucasus actual or potential subjects of the Georgian King. All these peoples were invited to have equal rights as members (be brothers) of the community controlled by the Georgian King. Armenians were honored with a very special offering: they were invited to hold the position of elder brother, ensuring the satisfaction of all their social ambitions.

It would be not out of place to note here that this epoch is marked by growing interest concerning the history of Georgian-Armenian schism from both sides. Attitudes are different: Armenian author of 10th c Ukhtanes tried to deepen the split, while Georgian author of 11th c Arseni of Saphara tried to help the healing of wounds: he did not accuse Armenians, but explained that extremely strong pressure from Persia forced the neighboring people to profess a “false” faith.

Was openness of this kind not dangerous for the Georgian identity? Evidently not, in any case the Georgian identity was so strong that it was possible to calculate the results of this project realization, namely, be sure of its successful resolution. This scheme of integration obviously was well elaborated by Georgian political thought and was considered as most effective. While writing about the reign of King Parnavaz, Leonti Mroveli describes in detail the social contract ensuring the entrance of a stranger in Georgian community. Supporters of King Azo (who was assassinated by Parnavaz) were not punished, but granted social privileges and enjoyed high level of integrity in Georgian state. According to Leonti Mroveli, Parnavaz’s reign was prosperous. Foreigner Azo, grounded solely on his kinsmen, persecuted the local population mercilessly. According to Leonti Mroveli, he suffered a gruesome downfall.
The medieval historian creates an ideology in which the Georgian Empire is on the rise and uses for this *Holy Scripture*. Nothing about this is unusual or special. It was customary for medieval Christian authors to use biblical personages and draw genealogical trees for their peoples. But, Leonti Mroveli’s approach to this traditional task is indeed unique. According to him, the elder brother was not people proposing the invitation i.e. the Georgians, but people who were invited i.e. the Armenians. This conception was an imperial ideology and was not aimed at the harmonic co-existence of different identities within the one political body. This is quite understandable for the epoch in which he lived. However, we should say to his credit that he seems far more sophisticated and modern in matters of social integration than Russian historians of the Soviet period, who argued that the position of elder brother was meant exclusively for the Russians.

The *project of invitation* was operated under the condition of uncompromising anti-Monophisite propaganda. Converted into Diophisitism, Armenians would not be able to create an inconvenience to Georgian state and identity even enjoying the privileges of elder brother. Religious identity was a core part of the Armenian identity’s boundary-defining package. It is for this reason that the Armenian clergy, the main protector of Armenian identity, put up heavy resistance to the realization of this project. One of the reasons that this project was not successful is just this. Another reason was the weakening of the Georgian state. Accomplishing a large-scale social project like this required long-term availability of political and administrative resources, in addition to cultural impact. Thus, on the whole this project was unsuccessful. However, it was not without any results at all. Fragments of the Armenian ingroup were absorbed by the Georgian identity. The existence of liminal cultural spaces reflecting the transitional state of Armenian identity may serve as testimony to this.
As it was already mentioned in 13th c and onwards began the gradual decay of the united Georgian state. Being fragmented politically, the Georgian in-group became powerless culturally. It had no more imperial ambitions; it was not able to assimilate anybody. The condition of Armenian identity development was also hard. It had no political unit of its own in the South Caucasus. For exhausted Georgian-Armenian identities it was time of relatively peaceful coexistence. The number of Armenians grew as a result of permanent migrations in Georgia. Mostly the Armenian migrants were refugees longing to find accommodation in more favorable places. As a matter of fact this was intervention. But, since it was peaceful, it was not resisted by the host population.

Some Armenian migrants were peasants who assumed Georgian identity relatively easily. However, those engaged in commerce or craft, kept themselves apart from the Georgians. Armenianess in Georgia meant ethno-social identity. Georgian word *somexi* (designation of Armenians) in this epoch pointed not only to ethnic and religious belonging, as was the case before, but also to social position. *Somexi* meant merchant, money-lender.

Armenians were not invited in the Georgian in-group any more. For Georgian identity, which by this time was weakened, it was more comfortable to marginalize them: their different confession was ideal means for marking them this way. The fostering of low opinion concerning those involved in trade or the money lending business was another way of Armenians’ marginalization. The Georgian nobility looked at this estate with disdain. Despite the wealth part of Armenians had accumulated, they remained serfs and consequently were deprived of rights in feudal Georgian society. It is for this reason that Armenians created no problems for Georgian society, since they had no political or social ambitions.
Considering Georgian Kings as theirs patrons and siding with them in struggles against the Georgian high nobility, they eagerly served them as diplomats and spies. Their worldwide network of compatriots allowed Armenian merchants resident in Georgian Kingdoms to be internationally mobile. This mobility may explain their function in Georgian society as mediators between Georgians and the outside world. This role was especially appreciated by Armenians themselves and therefore they were resistant to any change of it. This can explain the violent resistance they had put up to the Georgian project aimed at laying the groundwork for close interaction with Europe and in order to solve this task encouraging Catholic missionaries’ activity in Georgia. Evidence reflecting facts of fanatical persecution from side of Armenians is available through the missionaries’ records. These events made evident that Armenians in Georgia were not so indifferent and that they could go even against the projects promoted by the host people if their own interests were at stake.

With centuries passing by, the fact of being newcomers was progressively erased in migrants’ memory. This state of mode had been fixed and maintained with the dawning of modernity characterized by the emergence of nations. It was in this period of Georgian history that the contours of Armenian revenge became perceptible.

The commencement of the nation building era forced Armenians to redesign their strategy of identity survival. As it is known, nations are territorialized communities; for their creation it is necessary clear cut territorial associations and delimitations. Meanwhile, a core element in the Armenian ethnic identity-defining package was religion; the territorial dimension was less elaborated. Responding to the new challenge, the Armenian in-group began focusing more on the territorial marker. Armenians scattered all over the world fastened their gaze upon their historical homeland in South
Caucasus as to the place where the foundation of the Armenian nation state would be reasonable. According to nationalist leaders, this process would be considered not the creation of something essentially novel, but as a regeneration of a political body that existed in ancient times. Ties with past were necessary in order to endow nation building activity with sacredness and, correspondingly, with legitimacy.

Armenian projects aimed at the creation of an Armenian nation-state included the lands which were historically Georgian, but which during previous centuries were partially occupied by Armenians: firstly with the permission of Georgians themselves, later on with help of Russian imperialists.

The Armenian threat became especially palpable when the Georgian in-group was deprived its political framework – the order of feudal ranging broke up and the capital turned into the main factor of societal development. The abolishment of serfdom in the 2nd half of 19th c made all strata of Georgian society socially free among them wealthy Armenians. They constituted an important part of the newly emerged third estate. Had they taken on Georgian identity, they would be able to lead the process of Georgian national consolidation. Part of the bourgeoisie of Armenian origin had tried to assume Georgian identity already before these changes. They did this by entering the in-group of the nobility. This social status was grounded also on ethno-social identity. Just like all money lenders in Georgians perception were Armenians (or Jews) regardless their actual ethnic affiliation, likely all noblemen were considered Georgians. So, the Armenian merchant was able to become Georgian through changing social status. However, this process did not find full scale development. Georgian nobility put up fierce resistance to all instances of class identity changing. In the case of Armenians, they were even more furious. The majority of wealthy Armenians resident in
Georgia were themselves not ready to play the role of national bourgeoisie. Instead of considering themselves as masters of the country and leading the movement of Georgian national consolidation, they felt themselves to be part of the Armenian ethnic in-group, as a diaspora community belonging to the ethnic group of the main competitor of Georgian identity.

In 20th c the struggle between Georgian and Armenian identities grew into violence. It turned into military conflict shortly after the emergence of the Georgian Democratic Republic. And Armenians resident in Georgia did not support the Georgian state, whose citizens they were, but their ethnic compatriots instead. This conflict would be continuous, but with Bolsheviks’ coming to power, the strict limits for inter-ethnic interrelation and rivalries were set. Sometimes it seems to me that Georgian Bolshevism partly represented the response of the Georgian identity to the challenge posed by the Armenian identity.

In the Soviet period as well Georgian-Armenian identities’ interrelations were marked with tension. The marginalization of Armenians continued, people with Armenian family names were not able to occupy managing positions in Soviet Georgia. However, when Armenians changed their family names to have Georgian endings, they could reach positions even higher than those of Georgians. This was Soviet policy: all those possessing high social status should hide something in their biography so that be easily controlled. The majority of Armenians in Georgia were loyal to Soviet Empire. Naturally they were not with Georgians in liberation movement of 1990s, evidently because they were frightened of an explosion of ethnic intolerance if an independent Georgian nation state were to emerge.

However, the situation has drastically changed after Rose Revolution. Armenians resident of Georgia are invited again to be part of the Georgian in-group, but this time not in the
Georgian ethnic in-group, but in Georgian national in-group and for this they are not asked to change their ethnicity. Problems exist from both sides: the concept of civic nation is novel for Georgians and is difficult to inculcate among common people. The case with Armenians even more complicated. Their experience of existence in diaspora makes great obstacles to the integration of ethnic Armenians in a non-Armenian national community.

This is my view of the problem. It was impossible to delve too deep into this topic; the story of interrelations between two, so continuous identities encompasses almost the entire history of these two identities. I have to omit some important topics altogether due to time-limit. In some cases I touched on them, but was not able to present numerous available documents which serve as basis of my assertions. I ask you to consider my presentation only as an attempt to propose issues for discussion.

Thank you for your time and attention.
Chapter 9

Stepping towards West: Impact of Christianity on Georgian Identity Development

Paper presented at the 3rd Via Egnatia Conference (La Sapienza University of Rome, December 15, 2008)

Colleagues!

Firstly let me express my gratitude to the organizers and sponsors of this representative international conference which I consider as very important event in academic life. It creates favorable atmosphere for exchanging ideas and helps to mutual understanding between specialists in field.

My special thanks to Professor Antonello Biagini and his fine team for giving me opportunity to participate this important meeting of the scholars and visit Rome - the Eternal City.

In the present contribution I intend to deal with the history of Christianity in Georgia. In particular, I would like to concern the initial fact of Christianization when early medieval Georgian Kingdom of Kartli adopted Christianity as its official religion and became member of Christian international community.

However, before doing so I intend to display the brief history of Georgian identity development

Outlining the history of Georgian identity developments.

National community referred today as Georgian had been shaped in 19th c in the frames of cultural nationalism. This social product of modernity was entirely ethno-project. From this time until the Rose Revolution (in November 2003) Georgian community is developing as ethno-nation. It has assumed civic characteristics only in most recent period after
the principles of open society had begun establishing in Georgia. Georgian ethnic nationalism still retains strong positions in public perceptions; however, the sentiments of civic solidarity and ideology of state patriotism are gradually coming to maturity as well.

Georgian modern nation emerged on the basis of Georgian ethnic community, the roots of which are traced deeply in remote past. At least from 15\textsuperscript{th} c B.C. one can speak on rather developed Georgian (Colchian) ethnic entity. This social body had state of its own (Colchian Kingdom) with the centre in western Georgia.

From 4\textsuperscript{th}-3\textsuperscript{rd} cc B.C. the political centre of Georgian community had been moved from western to eastern Georgia and the heir of Colchian Kingdom became the state found by King Parnavaz. This political unite embraced territories in both western and eastern Georgia. The process of cultural unification had taken on a far more intensive character and concerned all main ethnic markers. The Georgian language obtained official status, while the use of other languages was restricted. The special status assigned to the Georgian language was materialized through the unique script introduced by King Parnavaz.

After six century – in 4\textsuperscript{th} c the Georgian ethnic consolidation process received a very powerful impact: Christianity became the official religion of the Georgians. The adoption of trans-ethnic ideological system caused further intensification of in-group solidarity and inner mobilization. It was this ideological crossroad that witnessed the creation of the myth of Georgian ethnic election, the core idea of which was the assertion that the Robe of Christ was stored in the capital city of the Georgian Kingdom at that time, Mtskheta.

In 5\textsuperscript{th} c consolidation along ethnic lines continued. The Georgian Church became autocephalous. Georgians began
perceiving themselves not as mere kinsfolk, but first of all as a sacred communion in Christ.

Then political fragmentation began. This was result of both: inner social developments and permanent invasions from outside.

It is worth mentioning here that from time to time the Georgian in-group was characterized by the modification of its political frame: unification with different territorial coverage, moving of political centers from west to east, from east to south etc. However, all these changes did not concern the cultural essence. The most eloquent testimony for this assertion is the Georgian language, which is characterized by the emergence of a standard linguistic code at a very earlier stage of Georgian identity development.

At the close of 10th c and beginning of 11th c the new political state (designated in special literature as the united Georgian Kingdom) accommodated the Georgian in-group. The flourishing of Georgian medieval culture reached its peak. In 12th c the Georgian community continued developing within the Pan-Caucasian Empire. The expansion of Georgian culture through this Empire was a principal tendency of this epoch. The facts of amalgamation of Georgian culture and enhancement of political power lead some Georgian scholars to think that the 11th-12th cc should be named as date of Georgian nation’s birth. I share this opinion, with one remark: this was the pre-modern Georgian nation whose heir is the Georgian modern nation, which emerged in the 19th c.

From the 13th c onwards, due to domestic as well as outside factors, the political borders of the Georgian state gradually narrowed. Ultimately, the unifying frame was destroyed altogether. Especially crucial were political consequences that had been emerged after the fall of Byzantine Empire.

However, destruction concerned only superficial markers. What actually happened was that the Georgian ethnic
community broke into smaller political units. Instead of one single state, several political bodies became carriers of Georgianness. It is customary in Georgian historiography to consider the political disintegration as a very unfavorable event in the history of the Georgian nation. Unfavorable circumstances caused the fragmentation, but the fragmentation in the face of dangerous challenges in fact increased chances for survival.

The unfavorable conditions persisted for many centuries. Georgian ethnic community had managed to survive, however, its inner resources were so depleted that it was difficult for it to be unified again. The inclusion of all Georgian political units and core historical territories within the Russian Empire in the 19th c enabled the Georgian community to be unified within a single (though not its own) state; imperial pressure, policy aimed at the cultural integration of Georgians through Russification and repressions (and also several other factors) helped to further mould the Georgian community and ultimately the formation of the Georgian ethno-nation.

In the Soviet Empire, despite the fact that conditions for this were not totally favorable, the Georgian identity forging process continued. We can judge its great (ensuring the very high degree of social cohesion within the Georgian in-group) power by the fact that Georgian ethnic nationalism exploded after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

This is very brief description of the path taken by the Georgian identity until the Rose Revolution. This revolution marked a new stage in Georgia's history. A new generation of western-educated politicians has come to power. They are trying to lead the nation-building process in the framework of the civic conception of nation and refashion social interrelations according to the principles of open society.
After presenting this introductory part let me to be passed on the issue of Kartli conversion and its impact on Georgian identity pro-western development.

**Christianity and the concept of West.**

The attempts to distinguish types of world culture gave birth to the dichotomy *west – non-west, west – east*. Above typology reflects a desire of academics to catch all nuances of the world historical process. The social, economic, political, cultural characteristics provide criterions for such classification which in certain degree is conventional. Actually it provides intellectual tools and helps us to describe adequately the multi-facet reality. From this point of view the fixing of the dichotomy in question seems quite reasonable, though of course it is unfair to politicize the issue of cultural belonging and use it for national or any other kind of discrimination.

There may be singled out plenty of markers of western culture. Perhaps Christianity represents its most principal feature. The emergence of Christian ecumene within the borders of the Roman Empire (I mean both its west and east parts alike) may be considered as one of the most decisive stages in making of *Western (European)* identity.

**Impact of Christianity on Georgian identity.**

Christianity disseminated in Georgia already from 1\textsuperscript{st} c. According to Georgian Church tradition the first preachers of new faith were St Apostles Saint Andrew, Saint Simon Canaanite, and Saint Bartholomew. However if in period from 1\textsuperscript{st} c to 4\textsuperscript{th} century Christianity in Georgia marked solely individuals and little social groups, since twentieth of 4\textsuperscript{th} c when Christianity was adopted as official religion of Georgian Kingdom, it turned into collective experience of entire Georgian in-group. For Georgian identity the impact of religious conversion was indeed dramatic. Christianity had sharpened it further and ensured its durability over long span of time.
Stepping towards West: main actors of Kartli’s conversion.

Alongside with missionary woman Saint Nino - the Illuminatrix of Georgians, the King Mirian who first among Georgian Kings embraced Christian faith, represents main actor of the process of religious conversion.

I shall concern this outstanding political figure of Late Antiquity in more details. Through the prism of Mirian’s biography the features Eurasian cultural crossroad embodied in Georgian culture is viewed with clarity.

A few remarks concerning the sources used for this part of my presentation.

Two monuments of medieval Georgian historiography Moktsevay Kartlisay (The Conversion of Kartli to Christianity – Kartli is an old designation of Georgia; today is used Saqartvelo) and Kartlis Tskhovreba (The Life/History of Kartli) have preserved evidences on Mirian. The testimonies are also remained in Armenian, Greek and Latin. However, non-Georgian sources are less detailed.

Conversion of Kartli to Christianity was composed in 5th c and revised later for many times. As for “History of Kartli”: it was composed in 11th c.

It is worthy to mention here, that almost all dates concerning the antique and medieval history of Georgia are subject of controversy and debates between scholars. The dating of above monuments are not exceptions from this “rule”. It is impossible to display all variety of available views on this issue. Thus, I am providing the date which I find more documented. The dating of first monument displays the result of my own investigation, while for History of Kartli I am grounding on opinion originating from so-called “founding fathers” of Georgian Studies: I mean I. Javakhishvili and K. Kekelidze. I also share generally accepted opinion regarding the sources of Leonti Mroveli (the historian whose compilation
begins the History of Kartli), in particular the assertion that this medieval author, while concerning the events of antique period, bases his representation on well informed authentic sources.

Almost all my colleagues, specialist in Georgian studies think that evidences of above mentioned Georgian sources on Mirian are mutually exclusive. To my mind, the above monuments do not contain any opposite data; on the contrary: the testimonies of both sources are well matched and supplementary and consequently help to draw more nuanced portrait of the King under the consideration.

According to Leonti Mroveli Mirian (original Mihran) being yet child was brought and left in Georgia by his father - allegedly Iranian Shah, but most probably only a member of Iranian royal family, and fostered here under the supervision of the regents. He managed to be integrated fully in local culture and become actual Georgian, in particular: he forgotten his mother tongue – Persian, learned Georgian and began venerating local pagan deities. At the same time Mirian preserved loyalty to fire-worshipping too. This duality in confessional affairs reflected the consent between Georgians and Persians on a ground of which Mirian was able to occupy the throne of Kartli. According to Leonti Mroveli the Persian prince was invited by local nobility in order to neutralize danger of Persian invasion in Kartli. The words ascribed by Leonti to Mirian’s father shows with due clarity the religious background of this consensus.

Here the excerpt from Shah’s speech addressing the Georgian nobility: “My son will observe both religions, the fire-worship of our fathers and worship of your idols”.

Mirian accomplished systematization of pantheon of Georgian pagan gods and goddess, and did much for strengthening heathenism in Georgia. Loyalty to the god of gods Armazi was main Georgian identity marker, the most of Mirian’s subjects were obliged to venerate it. But this cult was
not the only religion professed in Georgian society on the eve of conversion. Georgian society was multi-confessional. Saint Nino in her memoirs (they are available from her *Vita* created in middle 4th c) mentions abundance of fire-worshiping places and Synagogues in Georgian Kingdom. Actually in all main urban centers the followers of three above-mentioned religions, namely fire-worshippers, Jews, Armazian cult believers, lived side by side. And royal family’s religious tolerance was close to atheism: there were many persons among Georgian political elite who like Mirian professed both fire-worshipping and Armazian cult; as for Jews: they were rather respected and fully tolerated. Evidently their spiritual leaders were welcomed at the Georgian royal court.

The above *Vita* represents an authentic source and, therefore, it is very helpful for of exploring public perceptions of the epoch under the question. Just basing on it we can conclude that in 4th c ethnic sentiments among Georgians were rather salient. Under this circumstances Mirian found it necessary to strengthen Georgian heathenism so that to make firm the ideological basis of the community leaded by him. As was already mentioned, he put forth great efforts to consolidate Armazian cult. And he did this despite the wide spread of fire-worshipping among his subjects and his close ties with Persia. Perhaps, Mirian first among Georgian rulers understand that the cultural and political delimitation of Georgian community was not possible within Iranian Commonwealth inseparable (in regards of politics and culture) part of which it actually was. Erasing native pagan religion would in moment entail the dissolving of Georgian identity in Persian one. In other words: it was not possible for Kartli to be a country of fire-worshippers.

Consequently the systematization of the Georgian pagan pantheon was Mirian’s initial religious project. But after the idols had been destructed in result of lightening this project had
lost any sense. As a respond on this extra ordinal situation when idol of Armazi was no more in existence and deep latent centuries’ long crisis had become obvious, new plan for religious transformation was drawn up. The purpose of it was to reanimate cult of Armazi. This project was centered on above mentioned Christian missionary woman, who should be presented not as an Illuminatrix, but as servant of pagan gods. King had proposed her to occupy the highly prestigious social position of *matsovnebeli – Nino*, (i.e. wet-nurse in direct sense of the word). As it has became clear *Nino* which in its modern use is a proper noun, evidently was general noun and has a meaning of *mother, lady*. By same name (nan/nin) was referred the mother goddess, the pagan cult of which was widely spread not only in Georgia, but in entire ancient world. It is why in many cultures (not only in Georgian) differently vocalized *nn* root is connected with a notion of *mother, wet-nurse*.

The above interim project had never been realized. A little later the King was converted in result of miracles. But it is clear that he was already ready to this crucial change in his life. In his conversion the decisive role was played by the information about Lord’s Tunic being interred in capital city of Georgians. Just this information gave the ideas to Mirian concerning naturalization of trans-ethnic Christianity that this trans-ethnic ideology could serve as Georgian identity marker. Of course, it is not accidental that ideology of Georgian ethnic election was created just in this time. This ideology was like “melting pot” in which fusing and merging of native and cosmopolitan ingredients of had taken place.

In following centuries Georgian messianic ideology received more moderate character. Lord’s Tunic and the ideas of world’s sacred centre marked by It, Georgians being God’s chosen people in new era, had not been fully forgotten. However, Georgian community began to consider its obligations to Christian world essentially differently: now its
members began perceiving their country not as centre, but as deadline between civilized (western) and uncivilized (non-western) realms and viewing themselves as frontier guards, as gate’s keepers of this civilized world i.e. Christian Europe.

**Epilogue.**

Via Egnatia - the ancient Roman road from Adriatic Sea to Constantinople had never reached Georgia. However, in symbolic sense i.e. as a reflection of westerners’ intention to be enlarged (culturally, politically) to east, it did touch the Georgian realm. From certain times on the virtual via one can notice also the Georgians moving from opposite side. Being inhabitants of liminal cultural space, they are marked by constant preoccupation to remain in orbit of European realm.

In one of the recent speeches of his President of Georgia Mr. M. Saakashvili has underlined that the European future represents the only possible future for Georgia. I share this opinion as it is grounded on rational reasoning: it takes into account the facts of political and cultural development of Georgia during previous centuries.

To my mind, the first step to the European future of Georgia was made already in 4th c.

Thank you for your time and attention.
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