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## **Crusaders and Georgia: A Critical Approach to Georgian Historiography<sup>1</sup>**

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### **I. Introduction**

In the present article we consider military relations between Latins and Georgians (Iberians) in the period of the Crusades. The research draws on Georgian and non-Georgian medieval sources as well as relevant secondary historical publications and reassesses some of the opinions expressed in the works by Georgian researchers.

One of the first mentions of Georgians (Iberians<sup>2</sup>) in the Medieval Latin sources is a letter of a 12<sup>th</sup> century Latin clergyman, Ansellus, the Cantor of the Holy Sepulchre, addressed to Gallon the Bishop of Paris [Ansellus 1902: 729-732]. However, the major source of information about the Georgians is *Historia Orientalis* by Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre (†1240) [Jacques de Vitry 2008]. The chronicle was written at the time of the Fifth Crusade. Since then Georgians become widely known to Latin authors, who portrayed them

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are grateful to Dr Peter Halfter for his helpful comments on the article.

<sup>2</sup> In this period “Iberia” and “Georgia” were synonyms [Skylitzae 1973: 339, 74-80; 340]. It should be mentioned that when Emperor Basilius arrived in Georgia, it was not eastern but south-western Georgia, which Skylitzae likewise calls Iberia. Besides, under the reign of David the Builder and King Thamar, Georgia (Saqartvelo) was a single kingdom called by the Latins Iberia in the 12th-13th centuries; e.g. crusader G. De Boys writes: “quodde Hiberia quidam Christiani” (“Christians from Iberia”). He mentions king Thamar as the monarch of this kingdom. Thus, in the mentioned period, Iberia was used for unified Georgia (*Histoire littéraire de la France, ouvrage commencé par des religieux Bénédictins de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur et continué par des Membres de l’Institut (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres). T. XXI. Suite du treizième siècle depuis l’année 1296, suppléments. A Paris, 1847*). It is well known for us that “Iberia” (as well as “Colchis”, etc.) was certainly mentioned in many Classical sources in both Greek and Latin, but now we deal with Medieval Latin sources.

as people of high moral order – pious Christians, and noble and courageous soldiers instilling fear in the Muslims surrounding them:

There is also in the East another Christian people, who are very warlike and valiant in battle, being strong in body and powerful in the countless numbers of their warriors. They are much dreaded by the Saracens and have often by their invasions done great damage to the Persians, Medes and Assyrians on whose borders they dwell, being entirely surrounded by infidel nations. These men are called Georgians, because they especially revere and worship St. George, whom they make their patron and standard-bearer in their fight with the infidels, and they honor him above all other saints. Whenever they come on pilgrimage to the Lord's Sepulchre, they march into the Holy City with banners displayed, without paying tribute to anyone, for the Saracens dare in no wise molest them. They wear their hair and beards about a cubit long and have hats on their heads. [Jacques de Vitry 2008: 322-324]<sup>3</sup>

## II. David the Builder and the First Crusade

The strengthening of the Georgian kingdom is associated with the name of the great ruler from the dynasty of the Bagratids, David IV the Builder, a talented strategist and outstanding administrator [Georgian Chronicles 1955: 318-364]. The reign of King David led to impressive territorial changes on the political map of Transcaucasia. The young and purposeful monarch received power in Georgia during the period when the country was in its most difficult political situation. Separate areas of Georgia were under the control of independent princes, who were against the reunion with the central government positioned in Kutaisi, since the former capital, Tbilisi, was under the control of a Muslim emir. Moreover, systematic attacks of the Seljuk-Turks on the southern territories of Georgia devastated the kingdom.

David understood well that in order to render worthy resistance to the Seljuk occupation, it was necessary to unify the country. After integrating the Klarjeti area and some other regions into the kingdom [Georgian Chronicles 1955: 318-337] in the year 1099, David stopped paying the tribute to the Seljuks, which served as a *casus belli* for the enemy, for whose military actions Georgians were well prepared. By then David had reorganized his army and increased its fighting capacity.

However, the main factor that made it possible for King David to wage successful wars against the Seljuk Turks was the political change in the Middle East to the disadvantage of Muslims. On the one hand, the death of Malik

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3 The Georgian translation of the source is available [Jacques de Vitry 2004:185-186].

Shah, sultan of the Great Seljuks (Capital city in Ispahan, Iran), was a favorable factor for David. After the shah's death, his successors engaged in a struggle for power, which resulted in the weakening of the Seljuk Empire. On the other hand, the First Crusade organized by the Latins, which was directed against Muslims of the Middle East, provided Georgians with a greater hope of liberation from the Seljuk yoke. King David skillfully used these factors to the benefit and revival of the Georgian state. The Georgian monarch not only united the country, having completely cleared it from the Seljuk presence, but he also engaged in offensive wars. A historian of King David links the revival of the Georgian Kingdom directly with the first crusade: "when Franks appeared and captured Jerusalem and Antioch, with the God's mercy Iberia flourished, King David became stronger and his army multiplied. He also ceased to pay tribute to Sultan..." [Georgian Chronicles 1955: 325-326].

The creation of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem and the principalities<sup>4</sup> of Antioch, Tripolis, and Edessa in the Middle East had a negative effect on the political role of the Seljuks in the region. In 1118 King David implemented a vital military reform: he settled on the territory of the Georgian Kingdom the warlike tribes of the Kipchaks (Kumans) (apprx. 40-45 thousand families) who inhabited the northern part of the Caucasus and were by then commanded by Kievan Russia's Prince Sviatopolk. In order to form a lasting alliance, David sent his first wife to a convent and married Gurandukht, a daughter of the Kipchak (Kuman) leader Atrak Sharukan [Georgian Chronicles 1955: 337]. Thus, the Georgian armies were joined by fresh forces in the battle against the Seljuk-Turks.

Having gained a control over a number of large Transcaucasian areas by 1120, King David began a series of systematic attacks against the Muslims. The military successes of the Georgians for the liberation of Georgia led to a logical end – a decisive battle of the Georgians against the Seljuks on the field of Didgori that took place on August 12, 1121 [Georgian Chronicles 1955: 340]. The Seljuks of Shirvan, whom David had crushed, applied for help to Persia, namely to the Seljuk sultan of Iran, who started assembling a military coalition against David's armies. The military campaign against the Georgian Kingdom was headed by Najm al-Din Il-Ghazi, ruler of Mardin. A battle took place in a narrow place of Didgori, where the large Muslim army was unable to maneuver, and suffered a devastating defeat due to David's effective military tactics.

The Didgori battle helped the Frankish states, which had been under the pressure of Il-Ghazi's armies. Drawing on some Latin sources, a number of

4 Volume 3 of the Historical collection in the Georgian language mistakenly calls Antioch and Edessa Crusader kingdoms instead of principalities [Essays 1979: 171].

Georgian researchers believe that crusaders<sup>5</sup> took part in this battles on the side of Georgians. The emir himself was wounded in this battle. Having his forces exhausted, Il-Ghazi returned to Mardin in a devastated condition. The weakening of the main enemy of the Latin principalities was beneficial for the Kingdom of Jerusalem under King Baldwin II. Having received a small respite, the Franks again took the offensive against Aleppo and Damascus, since Muslims strongly annoyed crusaders in Northern Syria before the Didgori battle. At this time the greatest danger to the northern Latin states was posed by the Anatolian Turks, the Artuqids and the army of the sultan from Mosul, who waged frequent wars with the county of Edessa and the principality of Antioch. After the death of Tancred, Prince of Antioch (1112), who pursued an offensive policy against the Muslims, Roger of Salerno came to power. He continued Tancred's foreign policy. In 1115 Roger repelled an invasion of Sultan Mahomed's armies and later broke them in the fight at Tell-Danis or Sarmin (on September 14, 1115). After the murder of Lulu, Roger, intensified pressure on the city. As a result, the inhabitants of Aleppo requested aid from the governor of Mardin Najm al-Din Il-Ghazi (apprx. 1062-1122), who took control over the city [Hillenbrand 1981: 250-292; Süssheim 1118-1119].

The military hegemony in the Middle East started passing to the Artuqids, who had indisputable authority among the Muslims. Further events confirmed

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5 Recently a Georgian author, Soso Margishvili, questioned this view and put forward his own arguments. In his opinion, the term "Franks" as used by Matthew of Edessa and Walter the Chancellor in their chronicles does not mean "Crusaders" [Margishvili 2006, 110], but a western European soldier in general. According to Al-Husein, Franks fought with the Georgian army in 1068 in the war of King Bagrat IV and Alp-Arslan (p. 112). Frankish soldiers often appeared as mercenaries in the Muslim army too. The author even points out that "there were many Frank mercenaries in the army of the Empire of Nicaea, who were used against Frank crusaders by the Emperors of Nicaea" (p. 112). We do not share Margishvili's opinion for the following reasons: If "franks" fighting at Didgori refers to "Latins", this does not at all mean that they could not be crusaders because: 1) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century sources, all Latins were called "Franks"; 2) the term "crusader" never appears in Latin as well as non-Latin sources; 3) Walter the Chancellor does not call the crusaders at the Didgori battle "our" soldiers or "Antiochienes" (people from Antioch) because they were not his compatriots. He calls them French (Francigenae). He also uses the term Franks (Francorum) – the overseas Latins – the people who fought against the Muslims – i.e. crusaders! In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the term "crusader" (in Georgian: "Jvarosani"; In Armenian: "Khachakir") did not exist. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a term "Khachazgest" appears in Armenian sources, meaning "a bearer of cross on the clothes". It is true that Matthew of Edessa and Walter the Chancellor did not use the term "crusader" describing the Didgori battle. However, King David's biographer obviously called the crusaders "Frank" as he wrote that "[Franks] captured Jerusalem and Antioch" [Georgian Chronicles, 1955: 325-6]. Here we should also cite Roin Metreveli, who mentions *en passant* that crusaders were called Franks in those times "not only in Georgia but in the Near East in general" [Metreveli 1986: 292].

the fears of the Christians. In the summer of 1119 Il-Ghazi attacked the principality of Antioch. Prince Roger could not hope for timely aid from Jerusalem and Tripoli, and set off immediately to confront Il-Ghazi. On June 28, 1119 the army of Antioch (700 knights and 3000 infantrymen) was totally routed by the Turkmens in a fight at Balata (or the Bloody Field as called by the Franks). The prince was killed and the majority of his soldiers either perished or were taken captives [Asbridge 1997: 301-316]. The crushing defeat shook the Latins, and the people of Antioch pleaded for aid from the King of Jerusalem, Baldwin II, who had become the regent of the principality. The principality lost to al-Asarib and Zardan on the eastern frontiers, and also to Albara and Maarratan-Numan in the South. However, the capital of the principality resisted, and after the second fight at Tell-Danis (on August 14, 1119) Il-Ghazi was compelled to recede to Aleppo. The immediate threat to Antioch disappeared, but a threat of a new invasion remained. Indeed, in the beginning of June 1120, the army of Il-Ghazi appeared already near Azaz, and then within a stone's throw from Antioch. The situation remained unstable despite the fact that the parties concluded a truce [Kamal ad-Din 1990: 154] in the beginning of 1121. In the spring of 1121 Baldwin, aided by troops from Edessa, again took the offensive. Finally Il-Ghazi was compelled to make peace with the Franks on quite favorable conditions for the latter (probably, June/July, 1121). Incidental military operations, however, proceeded (where the Franks acted as an attacking party), but it was clear that the Muslims would not be able to capture Antioch. The Franks recovered from the shock and regained strength [Asbridge 2000: 69-83; Cahen 1940: 266-292].

Apparently Emir Il-Ghazi himself planned a campaign against the Georgian Kingdom and hurried with a truce with the king of Jerusalem. At the same time King David and his son Demetre were actively broadening the kingdom's territories, oppressing the Seljuk Turks practically in all directions along the southern borders, which provoked responsive actions from Il-Ghazi. The Artuqid (Il-Ghazi) set two purposes: to destroy Georgia, and then to recapture from the crusaders Antioch and Jerusalem. These events are described by Chancellor Gaultier of Antioch [Galterius 1896: 113]<sup>6</sup>. Until a certain time Il-Ghazi was not interested in the problems of Muslims in Georgia, however, he desired to be enriched, and gain a fresh renown after his fading glory as well as the reputation of the winner at Balata. Exasperated by his repeated failures between 1119 and 1121, he resolved to organize a campaign against the Georgian King, who was emboldened by his successes against the Seljuks.

Obviously, both Georgians and Franks in Antioch knew about this. There

6 This source is also available in Georgian [Galterius 2004: 155].

is a reliable source confirming that at least the Chancellor of Antioch was completely aware of Il-Ghazi's intents. Most likely, this circumstance compelled the Latins of the Middle Eastern principalities to send their soldiers to Georgia to support King David's army in its fight against the Muslims. The participation of Frankish soldiers in the Didgori battle is reported in two sources: one by a 12<sup>th</sup> century Armenian historian, Matthew of Edessa (Matteos Urhayetsi), who mentions 100 Franks [Matteos Urhayetsi 1869: 438], and the other by Walter the Chancellor, according to whom David used 200 Frankish soldiers deployed ahead of his armies as a striking force against the enemy [Galterius 1896: 113-114]. The surviving scanty information about the Frankish soldiers does not allow us to be certain whether they were auxiliary troops sent by the prince of Antioch or the king of Jerusalem, or simply mercenaries. However, as both Franks and Georgians had one common enemy, the Muslims, it can be argued that the Frank soldiers were allies rather than mercenaries. As Nino Doborjginidze writes, "this military support from the Crusaders was an expression of gratitude to the Georgian king David for his victory over their common enemy, Sultan of Seljuks, in the battle of Samshvildi, which was an important relief for Latin Antioch and the Kingdom of Jerusalem at that time" [Doborjginidze 2012: 19]. During this battle an important fortress was captured from the local garrison.

We suppose that this small troop of crusaders arrived in Georgia through Constantinople because the territory between Antioch and Georgia (including Armenia) was occupied by the Seljuks.

The presence of Frankish soldiers in the Georgian armies reveals the contacts existing between Georgians and Latins as early as the period of David the Builder, but these relations were not as close as Georgian historians try to show us. In the medieval sources from those years, both Georgian and non-Georgian, there are no hints at the proximity of relations between King David and King Baldwin II. However, it should be noted that according to a 12<sup>th</sup> century Norman historian, Orderik Vitaly [Orderik 1978: 123], King David and the governor of Cilician Armenia, Toros I the Rubenid, took part in the release of several crusader knights taken captive by the Muslims.

Here we have to consider two main erroneous statements by the Georgian scholars aimed at substantiating the alleged close relationship between the Georgian King David and the crusaders of the First Crusade, and later with Baldwin II.

1) The Georgian researchers argue that Georgians participated in the First Crusade as allies of the crusaders and refer for evidence to an allegorical passage from a 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century anonymous chronicle called by researchers *Histories and*

*Eulogies of the Sovereigns*, which describes the reign of the Georgian monarchs King Giorgi III (r. 1156-1184), Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1212), and her spouse David Soslan. This passage says: “They also remembered how thirty seven heroes of David the Builder or the troops of Vakhtang had fought and defeated enemies, and in the past the troops of new David the Builder united in Jerusalem with the troops of David [i.e. King David the Prophet], and now [likewise] the troops of his descendent Thamar, who is the eighty first anointed descendent since David the Prophet” [Histories and Eulogies 1954: 60].

This fragment describes the capture of Jerusalem by the Latins in 1099. According to Korneli Kekelidze, the troops of “David the Prophet” refer to the crusaders who took Jerusalem and who were aided by the armies of David the Builder – i.e. “New David”. 19<sup>th</sup> century historians, Ioane Batonishvili (Bagrationi), Platon Ioseliani, Vasily Potto and Nikoloz Urbneli also write about David IV the Builder’s participation in the mentioned campaign, but make no reference to primary sources. Vakhtang Kopaliani, Shota Badridze and Roin Metreveli share Kekelidze’s opinion. Moreover, Shota Meskhia argues that the Georgian King David personally participated in the capture of the Holy Land [Meskhia 1986: 70; Meskhia 1972: 80]. Mikheil Tamarashvili writes about this fact with more caution: “King David succeeded in aiding crusaders in their fight for the Holy Land” [Tamarashvili 1995: 103].

However there are strong reasons to disagree with this opinion of the Georgian scholars: a) David the Builder’s contemporary chronicler, who exhaustively described the activities of the King of Kings (i.e. David), narrates about the crusaders’ campaign in the Middle East but makes no mention of David’s help during the siege of Jerusalem; b) numerous Latin chronicles are likewise silent about the fact; c) later Georgian historians do not refer to any historical sources when they write about the Georgian aid to the crusaders – i.e. this merely is their personal opinion.

Another Georgian historian, Vladimer Kekelia, refers to two more sources apart from the *Eulogies* to corroborate his opinion regarding King David’s participation in the first crusade. These are 1. the Syrian Chronicle by Abul Faraj;<sup>7</sup> 2. *Historia* by Fulcherius Carnotensis (1059-1128), the principal historiographer of Baldwin I (1100-1118). Kekelia argues that Fulcherius mentions the Iberians i.e. Georgians among the twenty ethnic groups participating in the crusade. He refers to “Fulcherii Carnotensis Historia Iherosolymitana”, *Recueil des historiens des Croisades*. T. III, Paris 1866, 337-338) [Kekelia 2004: 65-66].

7 However, Kekelia does not cite the chronicle of Abul Faraj itself but the following secondary source: Metreveli, Roin. David IV Builder. Tbilisi: 1990, 295. We checked this work by Metreveli but could not find any reference to Abul Faraj’s chronicle.

Let us consider these sources. Fulcherius Carnotensis mentions nineteen (and not twenty) ethnic groups. The Iberians (Iberi) appear between the “Apuli” (Italy) and “Britones” (north-east France), which means that they are from Spain, i.e. the Iberians from the Pyrenees. Greeks and Armenians are mentioned together at the end of this list [Fulcherius Carnotensis 1866: 337]. Thus, Kekelia makes a rude mistake as he cites this source in evidence to his opinion.

As concerns Abul Faraj, he only mentions Georgians in the context of the Didgori battle in 1121, but says nothing about their participation in the First Crusade (1099-1137) [Abul-Faraj 1932].<sup>8</sup>

2) Drawing on the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century author Ioane Batonishvili, a number of Georgian researchers including Shota Meskhia, Merab Vachnadze, Vakhtang Guruli, Z. Toidze and others [Meskhia 1986: 68-69; Meskhia 1974: 61], write about Baldwin II's secret arrival in Georgia before the Didgori battle in 1121. However, this information invites doubts for the following reasons: a) it is based on the accounts of an 18th-19th century author, while Medieval sources does not mention such a fact; b) at that time, Baldwin II was actively engaged in the fight against the Seljuk Turks and could have hardly afforded a personal visit to faraway Georgia, which would have taken several months; c) all the lands between Georgia and the Latin states were under the control of the Seljuk Turks; d) according to the chronicles, the county of Edessa was the northernmost point visited by Baldwin II prior to the Didgori battle in 1121. Considering these four arguments, the mentioned statement by the Georgian scholars is to be rejected as unreasonable and unsubstantiated.

This, of course, does not rule out the possible agreeable relationship between David the Builder and Baldwin I. For example, there is one Latin document, a so-called panegyric to Baldwin I, where the panegyrist testifies to King David's sending gifts (insignia) to Baldwin I [Röhricht 1898: 120]<sup>9</sup>. This message obviously refers to the exchange of gifts between the two monarchs as a **signal of friendship**. The term “insignia” would indicate subordination only if

8 Abul Faraj writes: “And in the year [284] fourteen hundred and thirty-three [of the GREEKS] (A.D. 1122), the Sultan MAHMUD sent a great army to the country of the IBERIANS and when the turks went in the king of the iberians shut the fortifications and destroyed many of them. And JOSCELYN the FRANK took the country of GUBOS. And in the year five hundred and sixteen of the ARABS (A.D. 1122), ‘ILGAZI, the son of ‘ARTUK, died. And JOSCELYN, his wife having died, took a second wife, the daughter of ROGER, the lord of ANTIOCH, and he wished to take her to EDESSA. BALAK, however, laid an ambush for her, and he took her and carried her to BULA. MICHAEL, the ARMENIAN, being defeated by the TURKS, gave GARGAR to king BO’DWIN, and took a town in his country” (Abul Faraj, Chronography... (see the page at: <http://rbedrosian.com/BH/bh33.htm>).

9 By the way, the fact that David sent insignia to King Baldwin is suggested by this primary source [see: Gesta Francorum 1866: 542].

David were the accepter. In this case, the insignia could have been a banner or a crown **from** King Baldwin.

The battle at Didgori was the culmination of the entire Georgian-Seljuk War, and led to the Georgians' reconquest of Tbilisi in 1122 [Beradze 1960: 289]. Soon after that David moved the capital from Kutaisi to Tbilisi. The information about King David's and the Georgians' success in their fight against the Muslims quickly spread among western Christians [Badridze 1973: 20-21]. "In 1130-1135 Hugh of St. Victor, one of the most distinguished teachers in the schools of Paris, while he was giving a course of lectures on world topography, pointed to the existence of "Toflit", a city in the Caucasus and he was clearly referring to the city of Tiflis [Tbilisi]" [Hamilton 2011: 120]. After the successful wars in 1121-1122, the Latins started to consider Georgia as an ally of the crusaders [Hamilton 2011: 120, 121]. A year before his death in 1125, King David freed Ani, the capital of Armenia, and the nearby territories.

David's successor, his son Demetre, did not wage offensive wars anymore and tried to keep his father's heritage. Western authors traditionally "continued to view the Georgians as important allies of the Franks. The chronicler, Richard of Poitou (c. 1120-1175), writing at Cluny in 1172-1174, named the King of Georgia (*rex de Avesguia*) as one of the Eastern Christian rulers who were causing much damage to the Muslim powers of the Near East" [Hamilton 2011: 121].

There is no evidence of contacts between Georgians and the Crusaders during the Second Crusade.

### III. Legendary King Presbyter John – Georgian King David the Builder?

Shota Badridze [1973: 23-24] and Zurab Avalishvili [1989: 96] note that crusaders associated the mythical Eastern King Presbyter John with David the Builder and that the hope of help from an Eastern Christian king in their fight against Muslims had been alive for quite some time. Strangely enough, these scholars do not subject this idea to criticism. For example, Avalishvili, while calling it "a fantastic identification" [Avalishvili 1989: 108], does not further provide arguments against this identification. Another Georgian author, Alexander Tvaradze, notes that "messages arriving from the Georgian Kingdom to Europe played a very important, and even the key role in the establishment of the image of Presbyter John (in 1145, 1165, and also partially in 1177 and 1219-1221)" [Tvaradze 2009: 9]. Roin Metreveli directly states: "Today it is no longer disputable in literature that King-Presbyter John is King David the Builder" [Metreveli: 1986: 316].

In his other work, Badridze attempts to prove in more detail that the Christian king mentioned in the Chronicle of the German historian, Otto Frisingensis (1114-1158) [1912: 365-367]<sup>10</sup>, “closely resembles” [Badridze 1984: 169] the Georgian King David. Below we summarize his three arguments:

1. King David was a strong monarch in terms of both his internal and external policy as he successfully subordinated disobedient feudal lords; subordinated the Church to the secular authorities; severely defeated the Seljuk Turks at Didgori in 1121. Thus, crusaders could have quite naturally identified him with Presbyter John, whom they held as their major hope against the Muslims. As a counter-argument, we could say that a king of such a small state as Georgia, no matter how courageous and successful, could have hardly been associated with Presbyter-King John.
2. Badridze’s second “argument” can hardly be found noteworthy. He writes: “In the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century..., some sources associate the Christian monarch with a certain King David on several occasions” [Badridze 1984: 171]. We will leave this statement without any comments.
3. And finally, in connection with the fact that King-Presbyter John is mentioned in the legend as Nestorian, Badridze notes that Nestorianism appeared in Georgia in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and that in the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Georgian Catholicos Kirion fought against Nestorians. The author also mentions that in the 11<sup>th</sup> century “the Byzantines considered Iberians [i.e. Georgians] the followers of Nestorius” [Badridze 1984: 174]. He thus concludes that “the identification of King-Presbyter John with King David is in principal correct” [Badridze 1984: 165]. On our part, we should comment that the idea about the Nestorian inclinations of the Georgian Church was hardly widespread in the Middle Ages, especially from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, to say nothing about the fact that the Georgian church and secular authorities had never been Nestorian.

Western authors, including A. Papadakis and J. Meyendorff, note that the long-term reign of the Ethiopian dynasty of the Solomonids (1270-1527), founded by Ekunno Amlak (1270-1283), left a considerable trace in the history of the Ethiopian Church as well as in its state policy. Certainly, victories of the powerful Solomonids over the Muslim enemies fostered church consolidation in the Ethiopian society. Besides, they promoted very fruitful development of literature and monasticism. The rule of the Solomonids was marked by the flourishing of Ethiopian literature. In addition, the military success of the

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10 This source is cited by Badridze as *Ottonis Frisingensis Chronica*, Libro octo, Basiliae, 1659, L. 7, T. 33, p. 146-147.

Solomonids could have compelled people in the West to start identifying the Ethiopian King with the legendarily wise and fantastically rich King-Presbyter John. Originated in Asia at the end of the seventh century, the myth ended up being identified with Ethiopia (Abyssinia). The reason probably lies in the fact that the counter-attack of Islam against the crusade movement in Palestine caused a severe demoralization of the West. So King-Presbyter John had to rescue Latin crusaders [Papadakis 2010: 194].

It is interesting that A. Papadakis and J. Meyendorff also mention the version that identifies King-Presbyter John with King David the Builder of Georgia [Papadakis 2010: 204]. However, both authors seem to prefer the version that identifies King-Presbyter John with the Ethiopian Emperor, and this is quite understandable, because a) in the period of King David, crusaders did not need help from other Christian kings so desperately (Latins then controlled the main cities of the East: Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa...); b) as mentioned above, David the Builder was the king of a very small state in comparison with the Kingdom of Ethiopia, i.e. Abyssinia. Therefore, his army could not be seen as a serious military force by the crusaders. Recently Marie-Laure Derat put forward an opinion that the Ethiopian King identified with the legendary King-Presbyter John was Emperor Yemrehanna Krestos, who reigned before the dynasty of the Solomonids [Derat 2012: 323-326].

Popes began to write to the Georgian monarchs for help only since Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), who appealed to Georgians to assist the crusader armies in the Middle East in the period of the Solomonid hegemony, when the crusaders lost the biggest part of their conquest in the Middle East, and in 1291 when the last stronghold of the crusaders, Acre, fell, and they were in great need of external help.

#### **IV. Georgia in the period of the Third and Fourth Crusades**

It should be mentioned that according to Georgian historical sources, prior to the Third Crusades there were some contacts between Latins and Georgians, specifically, during the reign of the Georgian King Giorgi III (1156-1184), father of King Tamar. Being at the peak of his political power, King Giorgi III was a desirable ally for Eastern monarchs and for Crusaders too. The latter had a very weak position in Jerusalem because of the strengthening of Salah Ad-Din, who captured Jerusalem after the battle of Hattin (1187). According to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Georgian chronicle, many Eastern monarchs used to send presents to King Giorgi III in an attempt to build relations with him. Among them were “Alemannic (i.e. German) Kings” of Jerusalem, mentioned

after the Greek Kings [Histories and Eulogies 2008: 398].<sup>11</sup> Evidently, the author of the chronicle referred to King Baldwin III (1143-1162), Amory I (1162-1173) and Baldwin IV (1173-1184), who ruled the Kingdom of Jerusalem at the time when Giorgi III was King of Georgia.

These sources make clear that even before the Third Crusades there were diplomatic contacts between Crusaders and Georgians. These alliances could further be strengthened by the marital union between Tamar and one of the younger sons of Prince Bohemund III of Antioch (1160-1201) [Halfter 2008: 420f], who was doing his best to achieve this goal. According to this Georgian chronicle, among the numerous monarchs looking for diplomatic relations and the royal marriage with Queen Tamar were also the son of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel and the son of the Latin Prince of Antioch [Histories and Eulogies 2008: 416]. However, King Tamar married David-Soslan, who was allegedly a successor of the Georgian royal dynasty of the Bagratids.

Such contacts naturally would be a very good foundation for further diplomatic relations between Georgians and Franks when in the period of the Third and Fourth Crusades Georgia was ruled by the glorious Queen Tamar (r. 1184-1212).<sup>12</sup> The highest eminence of the Georgian state is connected with her name. There were some contacts between Georgians and crusaders in the period of the Fourth Crusade when crusaders took control of Constantinople (1204). However, it is impossible to speak about direct political relations in this period.

After the death of Emperor Andronikos Comnenus (1185) at the hands of partisans of usurper Isaak II Angelos, his grandsons Alexius and David were secretly brought to Georgia, where they were raised at the royal court of the Bagratids. It is obvious that Andronikos' grandsons, in whom queen Tamar saw future allies of the Georgian Kingdom, were going to take revenge for their lawful throne in Constantinople. Georgians had their own vested interests in this.

The successor of Alexius IV, Alexius V Doukas Murzuflos refused to pay a tribute to the Latins. Having reinforced the Byzantine army and realizing that he was strong enough, he shook his fist at the crusaders calling them to go away from the walls of Constantinople. In response, the Latins sieged and captured Constantinople. But before the fall of the capital of Byzantium, probably aware of the expected unstable relations between the Byzantines and crusaders, Georgians invaded the Byzantine territory called Pontus. They captured Chaneti, Trebizond (Trabzon), Lemon, Sinop, Kerasunt, Kotiora, Amastrida, Heraklia and "all lands of Paphlagonia and Pontus" and put them in the hands

<sup>11</sup> See translation of this Georgian chronicle in German [Sardshweladse 2004: 27].

<sup>12</sup> Tamar, a female monarch, is commonly referred to as King of Georgia, not Queen.

of Alexius Comnenus, who established the Trebizond Empire. Though both crusaders and Georgians were against Byzantium, there is no historical proof that they were direct allies and coordinated their invasions into the territories under Byzantium.

In the subsequent reign of Queen Tamar, Georgians progressively expanded the borders of their kingdom, and by 1209 took control of the North Iranian territories. According to Bernard Hamilton, “two years later Innocent III [1198-1216] appealed to her [i.e. Tamar] to give military aid to the Crusader States” [Hamilton 2011: 122]. However, Tamar soon died from an ailment without having managed to help Latin armies. In Dr Peter Halfter’s view, Pope Innocent III addressed this letter to the young king Giorgi-Lasha (son of Tamar) [Halfter 2008: 403-436], because in the Middle Ages, at the age of 16 a boy was regarded as an adult.

Pope Innocent III was informed by the ambassadors of the Latin Patriarch of Antioch about the crusading plans of King Giorgi IV. The Patriarch could have learned about this from Georgian monks living in one of the Georgian cloisters in the principality of Antioch. The Pope sent this letter to the Georgian king through the Latin Patriarch of Antioch under whose jurisdiction then were the Georgian monasteries in Antioch and the Georgian Orthodox Church, at least before 1239 [Tamarashvili 1995: 365].

In terms of contacts between Georgians and the Crusaders, it should also be mentioned that during the Third Crusade, namely in 1189 [ИВАНОВ 1912: 209], Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1122-1190) on his way to the Holy Land got acquainted with the Georgian abbot of Petrizoni Monastery in Byzantine Bulgaria. Despite all his suspicion and hate against Orthodox clerics, the Emperor held him in high esteem and made him one of his advisers [Halfter 2012: 381-383].

## V. Georgia in the period of the Fifth and Sixth Crusades

By the time of the Fifth Crusade, Giorgi IV, the son of Queen Tamar, was the king of Georgia. Giorgi had a second name too – Lasha. Therefore, in history he is also known as Giorgi-Lasha. His personality is interesting per se – he was a free, ambitious and impudent young man. Giorgi-Lasha’s opinions on government often did not coincide with the opinions of the elderly nobility of Queen Tamar’s times, which frequently led to a conflict between them.

The legate of the Pope, cardinal Pelagius, were looking for new auxiliary armies when the jubilant message came from Georgia that Georgians agreed to take part in the crusade. The messenger of the Pope, who reported this news to

the cardinal, told the papal legate about the force and richness of the Georgian Kingdom, the great courage of the Georgian soldiers, and their prominent opposition to Muslims. The stories of the messenger greatly pleased the cardinal and his confidants. Pelagius immediately wrote a reply to King Giorgi-Lasha and sent it with this messenger to Georgia.

The letter of the cardinal could not but inspire the Georgians. Pelagius from Damiett, on behalf of the Pope, requested military aid to the crusaders [Tamarashvili 1995: 474]. According to the Latin author, scholasticus Oliver of Cologne<sup>13</sup>, who personally participated in the described events, Georgian King Giorgi-Lasha expressed an ardent desire to help the crusaders in Frankish Syria [Oliver 1894: 232-233]. But this desire could not be realized – the Mongols invaded Georgia. Indeed, “...as we find out from the letters of Queen Rusudan and Commander-in-Chief Ivane addressed to the Pope in 1223, before the Mongol attack, Giorgi-Lasha was preparing for taking part in the liberation of the Holy Land together with the crusaders. But it was exactly then that the Mongols approached Georgia” [Kiknadze 1979: 399].

Thus, it is obvious that Giorgi-Lasha was willing to help crusaders, but was prevented by reasons regrettably explained in his sister’s, Queen Rusudan’s letter to Pope Honorius III in 1223 (see below). As shown above, scholasticus Oliver of Paderborn too speaks about Giorgi-Lasha’s plans regarding the crusaders.<sup>14</sup> To this extent, the Georgian author Soso Margishvili is wrong as he argues the opposite. King Giorgi-Lasha died in 1223, probably, of wounds received in one of the battles with the Mongols, and was thus unable to help the crusaders.

The Sixth Crusade was declared by Pope Honorius III in 1223. Emperor Friedrich II Hohenstaufen (1194-250) accepted the cross and was going to act in 1225 in a campaign (Friedrich had promised to go to the Crusade in 1225, but he obtained permission from Pope Honorius III to postpone his departure

13 Oliver was then scholasticus at the cathedral of Cologne. Later he became Bishop of Paderborn and after that Cardinal Bishop of Sabina.

14 One Latin source of first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century says: “Queen Thamar vowed to go to Jerusalem. Therefore her son Giorgi-Lasha took the bones of his mother and entered Jerusalem with a sizeable army in order to fulfill his mother’s will at least after her death. He thus also wanted to destroy the Muslims” (*Histoire littéraire de la France, ouvrage commencé par des religieux Bénédictins de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur et continué par des Membres de l’Institut (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres)*. T. XXI. Suite du treizième siècle depuis l’année 1296, supplements. Paris: 1847. A modern and more accessible edition: Reinold Röhrich (Hrsg.), *Regesta Regni Hierosolymitani, Oeniponte* [Innsbruck], 1893, nr. 868, p. 323f. This letter composed by the crusader G. de Boys, contains wrong data as Giorgi-Lasha was unable to go to the Middle East to help crusaders. However, the letter is another proof that the Georgian monarch had an ardent desire to help the Latin soldiers.

for the Holy Land to the year 1227). In this period the Kingdom of Georgia was ruled by Queen Rusudan (r. 1223-45), sister of Giorgi-Lasha. In 1223-1224, Rusudan sent the Orthodox bishop David of the Armenian city of Anito Rome, with a letter and apologies that her brother could not help the crusaders.

Queen Rusudan wrote to the Pope:

We received great advice and command regarding my brother's departure to the aid of the Christians. He was prepared to do this when the evil Tartars invaded our country. Presumably, you know about this. They devastated our people and killed six thousand Georgian soldiers ... [Tamarashvili 1995: 474-5]

Bishop David took a second letter to the Pope, composed by the Georgian Commander-in-Chief Ivane Mkhargrdzeli. The latter also expressed regret for the obstacle caused by the first invasion of the Mongols into Georgia, but despite this he wrote:

Now we inform you that we are waiting for your command and are ready to go to the aid of the Christians. I am prepared to go for the liberation of the Holy Land with 40,000 soldiers wherever you wish. We also hereby inform you that I and all the princes of our country have adopted the cross of crusaders. [Tamarashvili 1995: 476]

The pope replied to both letters. In his letter to Rusudan he notes that every person who takes part in this "Holy Cause", will directly or indirectly assist the crusaders, obtain pardon for all their sins and receive other privileges for crusaders declared by the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Lateran, 1215. As for his reply to Ivane Mkhargrdzeli, the pope approves of his readiness to assist the crusaders.

However, the crusade was delayed. Friedrich II arrived in the East only in 1228; by then, in 1225, the armies of Jalal ad-Din had invaded the Georgian lands. After the defeat of the Georgians in the East of the Georgian Kingdom, the royal throne was again moved to Kutaisi (Jalal ad-Din failed to enter western Georgia). The Commander-in-Chief of Chozm, Jalal ad-Din, who ruined Tbilisi in 1226, was very cruel to the Christians of Georgia. In 1227, tens of thousands of people were killed for refusing to desecrate the image of the Blessed Virgin and Jesus Christ.

In 1236 Mongols invaded Georgia repeatedly and massacred the population, including women and children, with renewed cruelty. After this extreme atrocity, Queen Rusudan wrote to Pope Gregorius IX. This second letter of the Queen did not survive to our times, but the Pope's reply of 1240 reveals that Rusudan had asked him for military aid against the Mongols. The Pope, however, wrote that his armies were fighting in Spain, Syria and Italy against the

Muslims and heretics, and therefore, he could not help Georgia [Tamarashvili 1995: 486].

By 1240 Mongols had already totally captured the eastern part of the Georgian Kingdom and took control over it. Queen Rusudan signed a peace treaty (1242) with them. She recognized herself as the vassal of the khan and undertook to pay tribute to him.

## VI. Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that neither of the extreme opinions expressed by some Georgian researches is to be accepted. On the one hand, they believe that Georgians never were the political allies of crusadors (as, for example, claimed by Margishvili [2006: 263]), and had no particular desire to support the campaigns. On the other hand, some Georgian researchers (e.g. Meskhia, Badridze, Ioane Batonishvili and Toidze) write about close relations between crusaders and the Georgian King David and the latter's participation in the first crusade, which seems unsubstantiated, not to mention the unbelievable event of the arrival of King Baldwin in Georgia. The identification of the mythical King-Presbyter John with the Georgian King David seems likewise simplistic.

It can be argued that the relationship between crusaders and King David the Builder had a sporadic, unsystematic and accidental nature. However, later, in the reign of Queen Tamar, Giorgi-Lasha and Rusudan, this relationship acquired a consistent political character.

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