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**BYZANTINE IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL THINKING:  
MODEL FOR THE 12<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY GEORGIAN KINGSHIP**

The Byzantine Empire was the “empire of the mind;” it was not only a state but a political-cultural sphere that had a vast influence on the neighboring political entities through offering “broad spectrum of models.” One of the most influential from the “broad spectrum of models” was the Byzantine political culture, particularly imperial ideology. It found its way from the center to the peripheries, playing a crucial role in formation of the dynastic images and propaganda of the newly-emerged political entities. Georgia was an integral part of the Byzantine Commonwealth. The influence of the Byzantine imperial ideology on Medieval Georgia comes as no surprise.

This survey aims to investigate the appearance of the new kingship ideology in Medieval Georgia, and to demonstrate constructing of the power building process during the reign of David IV the Builder. I apply comparative methodology in order to observe the influence of the Byzantine imperial ideology on the twelfth-century Georgian kingship.

As to the sources, the surviving images, numismatic materials and written testimonies contemporary to David IV were designed to create the concept of an ideal ruler who possessed all the royal virtues and was inspired and directed by divine wisdom. Various written sources contemporary to David IV demonstrate increased influence of the Byzantine political concepts in Medieval Georgia. Namely, the transformed historical writing was manifested in anonymous author’s writing, *The Life of the King of Kings David*. An anonymous author introduced propaganda of legitimization, drawn from the increasingly Christianized rhetoric, which had mainly been absent from earlier historical sources. This propaganda served to create a model of kingship and power different

from the one that had existed before David IV. The chief inspiration for this new kingship ideology was the Byzantine imperial idea of a Christian ruler and his main virtues, such as courage, justice, piety, philanthropy, and wisdom. David was eulogized as an ideal Christian ruler, God's representative on earth, and compared with the biblical figures of David and Solomon and with the idealized Christian emperor, Constantine the Great.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the scriptural allusions, one can detect a significant number of allusions to classical models.<sup>2</sup>

Anonymous' rich political vocabulary and the epithets used for David can be sorted out into three groups. First are the figures of the Old Testament: David, Solomon, and Moses, whose kingship, virtues, and judgment played a crucial part in the process of legitimating the king. The second group comprises the classical models, mainly Alexander, and Homeric heroes, Achilles, Agamemnon, Priam, Hector, Odysseus, and Orestes. They are examples of military prowess to which David was equated. The last, third group is that of post-biblical Christian figures, Constantine the Great, the Apostle Paul, Basil the Great, and St. Anthony. As in the case of the Byzantine Empire, for Anonymous' discourse, David, Solomon, and Alexander the Great were the favorite propagandistic models of kingship.<sup>3</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David* thus introduced a different language into historical discourse, and emphasized divine ordination and biblical as well as classical models as the basis of David's image.

Courage and military skills were significant for the ideal ruler and a crucial part in Anonymous' power-building discourse. Apart from being modeled as a wise ruler, David was viewed as a dedicated warrior, experienced general (*umsgavso spaspeti*) and tactician, enduring all hardships for his subjects. In Byzantine imperial ideology, the military prowess of the emperor was one of the four main imperial virtues. "The emphasis on military virtues echoed Menander's suggestions that the orator must describe the emperor's armor and the moment of his engagement with the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David*, ed. M. Shanidze, Tbilisi 1992, 171, 209; Thomson R. W., *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles, Original Georgian Text and the Armenian Adaptation* by Robert W. Thomson, New York: Oxford University Press 1996, 319, 345.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the literary sources used by Anonymous have already been identified. When the author compared King David with Alexander the Great, he relied on pseudo-Callisthenes' *Deeds of Alexander and Aristobulus' History and Chorography*.

<sup>3</sup> For the Byzantine dimension see Angelov D., *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 79.

enemy during the battle.”<sup>4</sup> In Anonymous’ words, David IV as a *Lion* led the army and was the example of courage on the battlefield.<sup>5</sup> The fact that David himself led the army, fought in the battlefield, and provided an example of courage (*simxne*) and fearlessness (*ushishi*) underlined his military prowess. Using allusions and highly rhetorical style, Anonymous narrated the king’s heroic actions:

*The king himself, unlike some others, did not lead his troops from behind, nor did he shout orders from a distance like one of the princes. But he went in front at the head of all; like a lion [emphasis is mine] he roared with the loud voice, and like a wire wind he turned this way and that. He advanced as a giant, and with the strong arm he struck down the champions; he destroyed and cut down all who stood before him. From the great slaughter, as ‘in the time’ of David of old the hand of Eleazar stuck to the guard of his sword, so too were his loins filled from the river of blood that followed his sword [emphasis mine].*<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, in the above-mentioned excerpt, Anonymous quoted the passage from the *Old Testament* and compared David IV’s courage with biblical models. Growing popularity of the *Old Testament* figures in Anonymous’ political vocabulary marks their importance for kingship ideology. Moreover, it indicates the influence of the Byzantine rhetorical treatises that advised on how the emperor had to be set in relation to the *Old Testament* figures.<sup>7</sup> The emperors had to be associated with the *Old Testament* figures because of their role as generals, lawgivers, and leaders of a Christian people.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Angelov D., *Op. cit.*, 82. On the importance of the military virtues for the emperor see Russell D. A.; Wilson N. G., eds., *Menander Rhetor: A Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1981, 85.

<sup>5</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David*, 172-173; Thomson R. W., *Op. cit.*, 321.

<sup>6</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David*, 172-173; Thomson R. W., *Op. cit.*, 321: ხოლო თვით მეფე არა ვითარცა სხუთ ვინმე შურგით უღვა ოდენ სპათა თვისთა, ანუ შორით უზახებდა, ვითარცა ერთი მოავართავანი, არამედ უპირაგეს ყოველთასა თვით წინა-ვედოდა და ვითა ლომი შეუზახებდა ხმითა მდლითა და ვითა ვრთავლი მო-დამოთქეოდა, თვით გოლიათებრ მიჰმართებდა, და მკლავითა მტკიცითა დაამხოდა ახოვანთა, სრვია და დასცემდა წინა-დამოხეულთა ყოველთა, ვიდრემდის ფრთადისა ექმისავან არა თუ ვითარცა ბუქელსა ელიამარს [ქუქელისსა ხელი ხრმლისა ვადასა ოდენ დაეწება, არამედ ხრმლით მისით უკომდინართა სიხლითა წადნისა აღსავსელ ეგვიტონეს.

<sup>7</sup> Rapp C., *Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium*, in *Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino, Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2010, 193-196.

<sup>8</sup> From Constantine’s time onwards the custom of calling the emperor the “New David” and the “New Solomon” and comparing him to Melchizedek and Moses started to emerge. In this way the Byzantine emperor gained the reputation of being the successor of the kings of the *Old Testament*. See Rapp C., *Op. cit.*, 175.

Apart from the Biblical models, Anonymous largely exploited classical examples. In a passage, Anonymous evokes Alexander the Great as one of the models that David is compared to and even announced to be superior to. David's military skills, speed of attack and marching are more impressive and marvelous than Alexander's. If Alexander was superior to all his contemporaries so is David, who outshines all around him:

*... our crowned (king) and new Alexander [emphasis mine], though he was later in time, none the less was not less in deeds, or counsel, or valour (simxne). In those very deeds for which Alexander is called conqueror, the later was not inferior, but I think him superior for their number. As much as the one was superior and pre-eminent among all his equals of his time in temporal and material ways, so did the latter exceed all the best around him in the commandments of God and of Christ, as well as in material ways.<sup>9</sup>*

In another passage, Anonymous puts David IV in higher esteem than Achilles. The usage of Homer, as Anonymous did, for the glorification of the king, was something that was applied regularly in the Byzantine Empire, since it was recommended by Menander. He named the Homeric epics among the recommended works from which orators were to derive models for comparison.<sup>10</sup> Seemingly, Anonymous was well acquainted with the idea of Byzantine imperial ideology and knew in detail what figures he had to compare his protagonist to in order to render his narrative more persuasive and to position his main actor's image as praiseworthy.

As other virtues, wisdom was a strong ideological element of the ideal ruler in Medieval Georgia under David IV. It presented a reflection of the concept of the philosopher-ruler manifested in the tenth-century Byzantium in the case of Leo VI "the Wise" (r. 886–912). The figure of Leo VI "the Wise" (r. 886–912), the author of homilies and hymns on religious issues, was a model for King David IV's image.

In the Macedonian era, the notion of the wise ruler was well presented in the example of Leo VI "the Wise." No Byzantine emperor before or after Leo was ascribed such a wisdom.<sup>11</sup> Solomon served as a model for Leo's

<sup>9</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David*, 186; Thomson R. W., Op. cit., 329: *...ჩუენი ეს ვვირგვიხიხიხიანი და ახალი ალექსანდრე, დაღათუ ქამითა შემღვობ, არამელ არა საქმითა, არცა განზრახვითა, არცა სიმხნითა უმცირე; და თვით მათ საქმეთა შინა, რომელთა მძლედ ითქუეს ალექსანდრე, არა უმდაბლე, არამელ მრაველთა უმაღლეს მგონიეს ესე; და რაოდენ საწუთითა დახორციელთა შინა იგი მისთა სწორთა და მოჭამეთა ყოველთა უმაღლეს და უზეშთაეს იყო, ევეოდენ ესე საღმრთოთა და ქრისტეს-მცნებათა შინა ხორციელთავე თანა მისთა პირველსა ჰმაგდა.*

<sup>10</sup> Russell D. A., Wilson N. G., Op. cit., 1981, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Tougher S. F., *The Wisdom of Leo VI, in New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Papers from the Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews ed. P. Magdalino, Ashgate: Variorum 1994, 171.

wisdom; Solomon was the wise king of the *Old Testament*, the son and the successor of David, God-chosen king. His wisdom was a gift from God and it found its expression in his talent as a judge, temple builder, a writer of psalms and proverbs, and a king of encyclopedic knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Solomon's wisdom indicated his prophetic and priestly role. His reign was denoted as a Golden Age of the Jewish kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Leo's talent was modeled after Solomon's and he was recognized as a pillar of knowledge, writer of hymns, a ruler concerned with law, and a church builder. The fact that Patriarch Nicholas emphasized the emperor's wisdom as a gift from God, just as Solomon's, indicates that the concept of the wise ruler was of paramount importance in the tenth-century Byzantium. Moreover, Leo was recognized as a Byzantine Solomon, which might have been an attempt to cultivate the status of the wise ruler in Macedonian propaganda and to present the rulers in the image of the kings of Jerusalem, David and Solomon.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to the Georgian example, the wisdom of David IV was well represented by the king's own writing on religious themes. David is considered to be the author of *The Hymns of Repentance*, dedicated to the Theotokos. The main theme of *Hymns of Repentance* is the king being repentant and showing himself as a great sinner, just like biblical David was expressing his religiosity and demonstrating piety and devotion to the faith.<sup>15</sup> According to the Christian apologetic tradition, repentance was the commencement of a substantial transformation of man. Each act of repentance signified the "death of the old" and the "birth of the new," in this way providing a firm ground for "a new man."<sup>16</sup> Gilbert Dagron notes that a simple humility and repentance could easily be understood as Christian virtues and the image of the repentant emperor should not come as a surprise. This was the "truly imperial" act which the emperor could make "imperially."<sup>17</sup>

*The Hymns* are similar to the Psalms of the biblical David, as they are believed to be based on the motifs of *Psalms 50*.<sup>18</sup> In this way, King David

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<sup>12</sup> Tougher S. F., Op. cit., 173.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 177- 178.

<sup>15</sup> Grigolashvili L., *Hymns of Repentance of David the Builder*, Tbilisi 2005, 145 (*in Georgian*).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>17</sup> Dagron G., *Emperor and Priest: the Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 146.

IV was competing with the old David,<sup>19</sup> to whom he was often compared, both in *The Acts of the Ruis-Urbnisi Synod* and in Anonymous' *The Life of the King of Kings David*.

Aside from the religious theme, some phrases of *The Hymns* have strong political implications and refer to the new concept of kingship ideology, elaborated under David IV's reign. David IV claimed that apart from the "purple by nature," he received the halo *sharavandedi* (შარავანდელი) of kingship from God in order to govern a new realm and his people.<sup>20</sup> The purple in *The Hymns* referred to the Bagrationis' biblical origin and to the legacy of David and Solomon's kingship, which David IV claimed to have received from God.

The notion of a wise ruler was also well adopted in Anonymous' *The Life of King of Kings*, where David is described to possess divine wisdom: "... King David, given wisdom by God ...," which plays an important part in Anonymous' discourse and was of a paramount importance in constructing the king's authority. Divine wisdom was a significant part of the Byzantine imperial ideology. In court ceremonies and acclamations, Byzantine emperors were often compared to Moses, David, Solomon, and Constantine. The wisdom by which they governed was praised.<sup>21</sup>

As Anonymous states, the king's wisdom (*sibirznye*) was in a direct connection with his "fear of God," because this was the source and beginning of wisdom. The concept of God's fear as the source of wisdom was part of Christian political philosophy. It was elaborated in the works of Agapetus, who in his *Advice to the Emperor Justinian I* (r. 527–565) viewed "the fear of Lord" as the beginning of the wisdom.<sup>22</sup> In the passage above, Anonymous' emphasis of David IV's wisdom might imply both concepts together – the image of a God fearing Christian monarch and the philosopher-ruler. Moreover, the ruler's theological knowledge and Orthodoxy were the ways to present him as "the chosen one" for the throne.

Like Leo VI "the Wise" in his *Homilies*, David IV in his *Hymns of Repentance* tried to combine the elements of the two *Old Testament* kings and equate himself with them. David and Solomon had been models for

<sup>19</sup> Grigolashvili L., *Hymns of Repentance of David the Builder*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> David the Builder, *The Hymns of Repentance*, Tbilisi 1989, 20: ბუნებრივად რაიხს პორფირას თვისიძეულობისა თანა შეუღობისაჲა შარავანდელი მარწმუნეს.

<sup>21</sup> Gavrilović Z., *Divine Wisdom as Part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology*, Zograf 11, 1980, 44.

<sup>22</sup> Bell N., *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2009, 33.

the Byzantine emperors from Constantine the Great. Thus, the rulers of the Macedonian dynasty were preoccupied with identifying themselves with these kings. I will argue that considering the Old Testament and particularly biblical David as his predecessor, David IV tried to highlight his inheritance of the biblical king's role as mediator between God and His people; this has been a common practice in the Byzantine imperial ideology.<sup>23</sup>

Among David's other virtues, his justice towards his flock is narrated by Anonymous in a high rhetorical style. He is represented as a supreme judge and guarantor of the peace and tranquility between "rival nations." On his entrance into Ossetia, David IV could easily unite Ossetians and Kipchaks (Cumans), who were in hostile relationships for a long time. He could make friendship and peace between them like brothers.<sup>24</sup>

In his judgment, the king is even compared to God, who never bends "the balance of the scales." David's purity (*siwminde*), superior to all other virtues (*satnoeba*), is demonstrated as greater than that of St. Anthony. The king's constant fasting and vigils, his care for piety of the army – he forbade "devilish songs, music and festival, and insults, which offend God" – and compassion for the poor that "filled the sea and dry land"<sup>25</sup> were strong Christian notions, which introduced a new concept of the pious king who continually cared for his subjects and was truly a guardian of the faith. Moreover, it was a strong hint of the king's stoic behavior that he avoided all luxury.<sup>26</sup> In Anonymous words, King David IV "received with a pure mouth and chaste mind incorruptible mysteries of Christ, with corroborating conscience and not unwilling consent – to which the witness is the Faithful One in heaven."<sup>27</sup>

The philanthropy presents one of the king's main virtues and plays a significant role in the rhetorical description of Anonymous' *The Life of King of Kings David*. Among the king's many tasks, the care for the poor remained an integral part of David's image. As Anonymous states, the king was making an act of charity every day through dispensing money, which was not taken from the treasury, but earned by David himself. This story is narrated as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> Bell N., Op. cit., 79.

<sup>24</sup> *The Life of the King of Kings David*, 183-184; R. W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, Oxford University Press 328.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 207; 343.

<sup>26</sup> The Byzantine emperors were advised to avoid luxury, money, laughter, musical performances and so on. See in detail: Angelov D., Op. cit., 81.

<sup>27</sup> *The Life of the King of King David*, 207; Thomson R. W., Op. cit., 343.

*For he had a little bag; he would fill it with money daily by his own hand, and in the evening would bring it back empty with joyful heart and countenance. Sometimes he would dispense a half of it, and sometimes no one would be found; then he would put it aside full for the morrow and say with a sigh: "Today I gave nothing to Christ through fault of my sins." Now he did not make the offerings from the taxes of his officials, nor from his stores, but from the profit of his own hands. From his source he once gave to his father confessor John about 24 000 drachmas for him to distribute to the poor. It is impossible to describe more than this little from the multitude.<sup>28</sup>*

The concept of philanthropy had a long history in the Byzantine political and social thought. It was an integral element of Byzantine imperial ideology. In his rhetorical handbook, Menander considered philanthropy as an integral part of justice. He advised panegyric authors to praise emperor's philanthropy.<sup>29</sup> The late antique orator Themistius regarded philanthropy among the most important imperial virtues.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion one can say that David IV's reign was not only truly conspicuous in terms of establishing a politically strong realm in the Caucasus, but also innovative in terms of conducting the power-building process and introducing a new kingship ideology. The concept of wise ruler manifested during David's reign was significantly moved by the Byzantine imperial idea. The religious poetry the king himself composed provided a first indicator of the kingship ideology in transformation and the way the ideal ruler started to be understood in medieval Georgia. Another intricate aspect of David IV's reign was reflected in the generic changes occurring in Georgian historiography, and manifested in the Anonymous' highly rhetorical work, *The Life of the King of Kings David*. This work abounded with biblical as well as classical allusions, and aimed to introduce a new concept of the monarch being divinely inspired, anointed and chosen by God.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 208-209; 344: *რამეთუ იყო მისა კისაკი მცირე, რომელსა აღავსებდის რაი დრაჰმითა დღე სარწმუნოდ თვისითა სელითა, სამწუხროდ ცალიერი მოაქუნდის იგი მხიარულსა სულითა და პირითა; და ოდესმე ნახევარი წარავის მისი, და ოდესმე არავინ ეპოვნის და ევრეთ ხავე მისცეს დამარხვად ხვალისა და სულთქმითა თქვას: „დღეს ვერა მივეც ქრისტეცა მარცხებითა ჩემთა ცოლავითა“. და ამას იქმოდის არათუ სელისანთა შორთეულისაგან, ანუ საჭუჭლოდ, არამედ სულთა თვისთა ნადირებულთა, რომელთაგანი ოდესმე თვისსა მოძღუარსა იოვანეს მისცა დრაჰმანი, ვითერ ოცდახუთათასეული რაითა განუყოს ვლახაკთა. და ესეცა მცირელი მრავლისაგან თქუმად შესაძლებელ.*

<sup>29</sup> Russell D. A., Op. cit., 89-91.

<sup>30</sup> Angelov D., Op. cit., 2007, 112.