

GEORGE NARIMANISHVILI

FREE UNIVERSITY OF TBILISI

g.narimanishvili@freeuni.edu.ge

THE ROLE AND PLACE OF GEORGIA IN THE MIDDLE EAST SECURITY ARCHITECTURE OF THE 11TH CENTURY

Abstract

This article is dedicated to one of the important episodes in the history of Georgia when our country was actively involved in the ongoing processes in the Caucasus and the Middle East and was an essential part of the regional security architecture. At the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century, the process of establishing a united state of Georgia was completed, and the stage of strengthening positions in the international arena began. In this process, it was important for the country to develop the right international policy and conduct active diplomacy. The discussion of the processes taking place in the mentioned era in the historical background allowed me to outline in relief the bases and reasons for the cooperation between Georgian and the Great Power states of that time and to present more completely the goals of the parties involved in the process and the results of the diplomatic relations. In particular, the article discusses the connections between Georgia, the Byzantine Empire, and the Fatimid Caliphate when all three countries faced the global threat, the Seljuk expansion, and it was decided to establish a unified security system. Historical sources tell us that in 1047, the rulers of different countries or their family members, including the sons of Georgian kings, came to Cairo on an official visit. This episode is likely connected with our country's joining the international military coalition. Significantly, the coalition was formed between the countries that have been in sharp conflict with each other for decades due to religious differences and political conflicts. The main goal of making the coalition was to defend against common threats and to establish a joint regional security architecture.

Keywords: Georgia, Byzantine Empire, Caliphate of Fatimids, Seljuks, military coalition.

In light of the current situation in Georgia and the world, the study of the formation of a united state of Georgia in the early Middle Ages is very relevant for the correct understanding of the history of our country and the importance of Georgia's involvement in global processes. The role of international politics is significant in maintaining the country's independence, where the outstanding place of diplomacy is crucial. That is why the present article is dedicated to one of the important episodes of the relationship between the Kingdom of Georgia and the Fatimid Caliphate. In particular, the visit of the sons of the Georgian kings to Cairo. Only Nasir Khosrow gives us information about this visit. He describes the ceremony held in August 1047 to mark the opening of the Nile Canal and informs us that "sons of Georgian kings" participated in it.

Nasir Khosrow tells us that on the day of the opening of the canal, early in the morning, a large procession consisting of the servants of the caliph, soldiers, and high officials went from the caliph's palace to the canal, and the caliph himself was in the middle of the procession. The Persian traveler also tells us that the sons of kings and nobles of different countries took part in the procession, and what is especially interesting for us is the "sons of Georgian kings". Nasir Khosrow writes:

There is also a contingent of princes from all over the world – the Maghreb, Yemen, Byzantium, Slavia, Nubia, and Abyssinia – who have come here but who are not reckoned in the ranks of the regular army. The sons of the Chosroes of Daylam and their mother have also come here, and the sons of Georgian kings, Daylamite princes, and sons of the Khaqan of Turkistan (Nāṣer-e Khosraw 1968, 49).

Here, of course, the question arises: who are the mentioned Georgian kings and their sons? As is known, in 1047, the king of Georgia was Bagrat IV, and his son was George, in the future King George II. Georgian sources do not provide us with any information about the visit of the Georgian prince to Egypt. It is also worth noting that Nasir Khosrow does not refer to the sons of one king but to the sons of kings. Professor Valerian Gabashvili notes that the Persian traveler does not make a mistake when he mentions Georgian kings because, at that time, Kakheti was ruled by an independent king, Kvirike (Gabashvili 1968, 70). Also, it must be mentioned that Catholicos Melchizedek of Mtskheta mentions Kvirike as the king of Kakheti in his will and asks for approval of the will together with Bagrat IV (Berdzenishvili 1931, 293). Kvirike is also mentioned as a king (Malik) on the coins minted by him (Paghava 2016, 261). In my opinion, one should not exclude the owner of the fortress of Kldekari, Eristavt-Eristavi Liparit IV Baghvashi, whom the Arab historian Ibn al-Athir mentions as Malik (king, chief) of the Abkhazians (Ibn al-Athir 1987, 289, 362).

Nasir Khosrow arrived in Cairo on August 4, 1047. During this period, Liparit participated in the siege of Dvin. None of his children are in captivity¹, and it seems that they are opponents of King Bagrat because only after the capture of their father did they acknowledge the rule of the Georgian king (“Matiane Qartlisa” 1955, 302). We know only one son of the king of Kakheti Gagi, Agsartan I, who became the king of Kakheti in 1058 and later sided with the Seljuks. It is also known that Gagi fought on the side of Liparit near Sasireti Chala and Arkis Castle; thus, during this period, he supported Baghvashi (“Matiane Qartlisa” 1955, 299-300). Accordingly, it is not excluded that Bagrat King’s son Giorgi, as well as the sons of Liparit and Kvirike, who were in his opposition, arrived in Cairo or that only one of the opposing parties was represented.

Of course, the Fatimids considered all guests natural or supposed allies.

During this period, the primary opponents of the Fatimids were the Seljuks. Thus, it is unsurprising that Caliph al-Mustansir actively sought allies to fight against the Seljuks. The Seljuks appeared in the Middle East in the 11th century. Toghril Beg, after defeating the Ghaznavids, proclaimed himself the Sultan of Nishapur in 1038 (Ṭaqqūsh 2002, 85). After that, he conquered much of Persia and invaded Iraq. The Seljuks saw it as their duty to free the Abbasid caliphs from the influence of the Shiite Buyids and the Muslim world from the Ismaili Fatimids (Ṭaqqūsh 2002, 91). The hostile attitude of the Seljuks toward the Fatimids is confirmed by the fact that in 1044-1045, the governor of Maveranahr organized a massacre of the Ismailis (Ibn al-Athir 1987, 267). The main power that could find tangible support for the Fatimids in the fight against a common enemy was the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines were interested in finding a strong ally, as the Seljuks reached the empire’s borders in 1044 and raided Vaspurakan (Treadgold 1997, 592).

At that time, there was an excellent relationship between the Fatimid Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire. The peace treaty concluded in 1036 was renewed shortly before the described event (Ibn al-Athir 1987, 279; Al-Maqrīzī 1996, 194; Ṭaqqūsh 2002, 377). Constantine IX Monomachos sent valuable gifts to Cairo. In addition to the “beautiful” horses, he sent “thirty kintars of gold, and a kintar is equal to seven thousand two hundred dinars with them (the Byzantines)” (Al-Maqrīzī 1996, 194; Shihāb ad-Dīn 2003, 379).

The event held in Cairo provided an excellent opportunity to form an anti-Seljuk military alliance, which would unite the Fatimids, Byzantines, Georgians, and other guests.

Negotiations are also supposed to be held on military matters. In addition to minor border disputes, Byzantium and the Fatimid Caliphate had to take care of external threats. Possibly, the parties agreed on mutual assistance and common security, as they faced a significant threat from the East. A new, powerful force appeared in the political arena – the Seljuks. Thus, the protection of the eastern borders was in the common interest of both countries.

The political map of the first half of the 11th century shows that the defensive line organized against the enemy’s attack from the East consisted of three main sections. The Fatimids’ defensive line started from the Sinai Peninsula and went up through western Syria to Aleppo; the defensive line of Byzantium started from Northern Syria, followed Eastern Anatolia, and reached Georgia. The third border should cover the South Caucasus (Map 1)².

I believe that the creation of a joint defense zone meant the inclusion of Georgia in it. As already mentioned, the Byzantine Empire had to fortify the northern part of the strip. To fulfill this task, it was

¹ Liparit exchanged his son Ivane, who was in Bagrat’s captivity, for the Eristavi of Artanuji Abuser before the battle of Sasireti.

² I would like to thank the geographer and GIS expert, Giorgi Zedginidze, for his help in creating the maps.

necessary to control the territory of Georgia. At that time, Byzantium was not strong enough to annex completely a strong and united Georgia. Thus, to achieve its goal, Byzantium decided to use Liparit Baghvashi. By the middle of the 11th century, Liparit Baghvashi, a faithful ally of Byzantium, represented a much greater power than the Georgian king. Thus, it is possible that Liparit, not Bagrat IV, would be at the head of the coalition formed against the Seljuks to strengthen and defend the Caucasian line.

It should be noted that at that time, the eastern part of the South Caucasus, along the lower reaches of the Mtkvari River, was occupied by Turkmen tribes.

In my opinion, it was planned to create two main defensive lines in the South Caucasus against the Seljuks. In particular, the first line should go along the lines of Khornabuji, Samshvilde, Dmanisi, Akhalkalaki, Ani, and Dvin. The second line was supposed to start from Kakheti (Khornabuji) and pass Tbilisi, through the Mtkvari valley, to Tao-Klarjeti, where it would join the defensive line organized by Byzantium (Map 2). I think two defense lines would significantly strengthen the defense capability of the region. The main task of the first line likely was to isolate Tbilisi and protect the South Caucasus as a whole; however, if the enemy could break through the first line, he would have to overcome the second one. In this case, the Seljuks would have to regroup and replenish their resources, giving the Georgians time to raise reserves and request help from their allies. In addition, the delay in the northern direction would significantly affect the actions of the Seljuks in other directions, which would give the Allies the necessary time to organize a counterattack.

I think that Liparit's actions served to create a northern defensive line in the South Caucasus, and the king of Kakheti supported him in achieving this goal.

If we follow in order the actions of Liparit after the unsuccessful siege of Tbilisi in 1032, we will see how he occupied strategically essential fortresses in the Mtkvari valley. Presumably, the strip controlled by Liparit should have started from the outskirts of Tbilisi and went in the western direction, along the Mtkvari valley, to Tao-Klarjeti. The kings of Kakheti and Tashir-Dzorageti were loyal allies of Liparit, and in the case of the seizure of the defensive fortresses of Tbilisi, the city was almost entirely isolated. The kingdom of Kakheti blocked the Tbilisi Emirate from the East, and the Armenian kingdom of Tashir-Dzorageti blocked the roads from the south. In the hands of the king of Kakheti were such essential points as Ujarma, Khornabuji, Pankisi, Kvetera, Zedazeni, etc. Tashir-Dzorageti kingdom included Samshvilde, Dmanisi, Lore, and other important sites. Saeristavo of the Baghvashi family, Trialeti, directly bordered Tashir in the Gomareti area. It must be mentioned here that the kings of Kakheti and Tashir-Dzorageti were close relatives.

Despite failing to capture Tbilisi in 1032, Liparit occupied the fortress of Birtvisi. In 1037-1038, the Georgians took from the Amir of Tbilisi Partskhisi and Orbeti castles; however, it is unclear whether Bagrat or Liparit controlled these castles. In 1043, Liparit openly rose against King Bagrat and brought his half-brother Demetre from Byzantium to Georgia. Part of the Georgian nobles supported the rebellion. However, Baghvashi's campaign was defeated, he failed to take the fortress of Ateni, and Demetre returned to Byzantium. Nevertheless, King Bagrat appointed him as the Eristavi of Kartli. It seems that at that time, Uplistsikhe and other important sites in Kartli were under the control of Liparit. In 1045, the bishop of Atskuri also supported Liparit. Thus, Atskuri Castle was also at the disposal of Liparit. In 1046, Liparit won two battles against the Georgian king. First, he defeated Bagrat in Sasireti Chala and finally strengthened his position in Kartli. Soon, the castles near Akhaltsikhe passed into his hands, and most importantly, Liparit took the castle of Artanuj from the captured Grigol Abuser's son. Thus, the geographical strip Liparit had to control personally, and the territories that were controlled by Baghvashi's allies, the kings of Kakheti and Tashir-Dzorageti, clearly appeared. Probably, the campaigns of Ani and Dvin were also conducted to strengthen this line. In 1044, the Byzantine emperor Constantine Monomachos recalled the Ani king Gagik II to Constantinople and did not allow him to return. The local nobles gave the kingdom of Ani to Bagrat IV, and the king of Georgians appointed Eristavi of Artanuj, Abuser, as the city's governor. In the autumn of the following year, Liparit tricked the ruling Georgian nobles of Ani out of the town and captured them. After that, he marched toward Georgia with a large Byzantine army. It seems that Liparit intended to implement his plan to unify Georgia. At the same time, in the autumn of 1045, the Byzantines attacked Dvin but were severely defeated. In the winter of 1046-47, the Byzantines finally decided to solve the Dvin issue but could not achieve their final goal. Liparit helped them in this battle. However, in September 1047, a revolt broke out in Byzantium, which halted Dvin's campaign.

After the interrupted campaign on the Dvin, Liparit immediately returned to Georgia. In 1048, Byzantium again needed the help of Liparit. This time against a far more dangerous enemy than Amir of

Dvin, Byzantium was attacked by the Seljuks. Liparit assembled an army and marched to Basiani (Kapetron), where the Byzantine generals Katakalon Kekaumenos and Aaron Vestes were waiting for him. While the Byzantines were waiting for the arrival of Liparit, the Seljuks burned the town of Ardze. Kekaumenos offered Aaron to attack the enemy before the arrival of Liparit, but Aaron refused because he had received the emperor's order not to start the battle without Liparit (Kedrenos 1963, 75). When Liparit joined the Byzantines, they advised the Georgian nobleman to start an attack immediately, but Liparit refused. As John Skylitzes tells us, Liparit was quite superstitious, and for this reason, he postponed the start of the battle for one day:

...Liparites was reluctant because of the day. It was a Saturday, the eighteenth of September, the second year of the indictment, and for Liparites, Saturday was reckoned among the inauspicious days, which is why he shunned it and refused to fight (Skylitzes 2010, 425).

The Seljuks took advantage of this, immediately prepared for battle, and attacked the Byzantines. The Byzantines and Liparit decided to fight and designed to meet the Turks. The right-wing was led by Kekaumenos, the left by Aaron, and the center was entrusted to Liparit. Kekaumenos and Aaron won, but Liparit was defeated and captured (Skylitzes 2010, 423-425).

Skylitzes and Ibn al-Athir tell us that Constantine Monomachos sent a mediator to Toghril Beg and brought valuable gifts to ransom Liparit. According to Skylitzes, this mediator was the secretary of Dukas Aaron of Vaspurakan, Giorgi Drosos (Kedrenos 1963, 78; Skylitzes 2010, 426), and according to Ibn al-Athir, the emperor asked the Marwanid governor of Diyarbakir, Nasir ad-Dawla, for mediations and he sent Sheikh al-Islam to the sultan for negotiations (Ibn al-Athir 1987, 289; Japaridze 2012, 132). Of course, these data are not mutually exclusive, and possibly the Byzantine emperor turned to two mediators simultaneously to release Liparit. This fact proves that the emperor paid great importance to the release of the Georgian nobleman from captivity. The fact that many chroniclers described Liparit's imprisonment and release indicates the distinctive political role of the Georgian Eristavt-Eristavi. However, it is possible to assume that Byzantium considered Liparit Bagvash as its main ally in the South Caucasus long before the meeting in Cairo in 1047 since Liparit headed almost all Byzantine military campaigns in this region. In addition, at the meeting held in Cairo, the Baghvashi House presented itself with the claim of membership of the international coalition. However, this does not exclude the arrival of the heir to the Bagrationi throne in the capital of the Fatimids because maybe the Fatimids and Byzantium considered cooperation with the Bagratians as a backup option. Moreover, today it is not easy to talk about the long-term plans of Byzantium for the Kingdom of Georgia. In particular, Byzantium considered the South Caucasus only as a buffer zone or as its direct satellite in the fight against the Seljuks. We are probably dealing with a double game here. If the royal government won in Georgia, Georgia would only be a good neighbor and a buffer in case of war. If the Liparit opposition forces won, Byzantium would not be satisfied with the status of "good neighbor." Considering the enormous resources Byzantium spent on Liparit Baghvashi, the empire should have claimed complete control over Georgia.

Based on the processes described above, it is possible to assume that the negotiations held in Cairo in 1047 yielded results, and an anti-Seljuk coalition was formed. Liparit Baghvashi was likely appointed as the commander of the northern defense zone. However, after the Battle of Basiani, weaknesses appeared in the front line, and the capture of the commander caused significant political changes. The capture of Liparit thwarted the original plans of Byzantium; after his release from Seljuk captivity, Baghvashi lost the emperor's trust, and Byzantium pledged its support to Bagrat IV.

Soon, the alliance of Byzantium and the Fatimids also broke up. Nothing and no one stood in front of the Seljuks. The reason for the deterioration of relations between the countries was the refusal of Caliph al-Mustansir to the request of the Byzantine ruler, Theodora, when she asked al-Mustansir for military assistance in exchange for sending wheat to Egypt (Thomson 2008, 58; Hamdani 1998, 175; Surūr 1995, 216; Al-'Aydarūs 2010, 779). Enraged by Al-Mustansir's refusal, Theodora declared that the caliph had violated the terms of the truce. After that, relations between the countries became tense again. The internal situation was also confusing. Egypt of the Fatimids was engulfed in civil war, and Byzantium could not withstand the attacks of the Seljuks. The military alliance and the common, agreed defense have passed into history. The results were disastrous for both countries, and great Seljuk invasions began in the Caucasus. However, if this disaster turned out to be the beginning of the end for Byzantium, Georgia soon returned to the development path.

In my opinion, this era became a turning point in the process of establishing Georgia as a united state. It is during this period that our country became a full-fledged member of the international military coalition, the coalition that was created despite the political and religious differences between the countries that have been in sharp conflict with each other for decades. The main goal of making the coalition was to defend against common global threats and to establish a joint security architecture. Although the goal set at that stage could not be achieved, Georgia once again proved its importance and political readiness in shaping the global security system of that period.

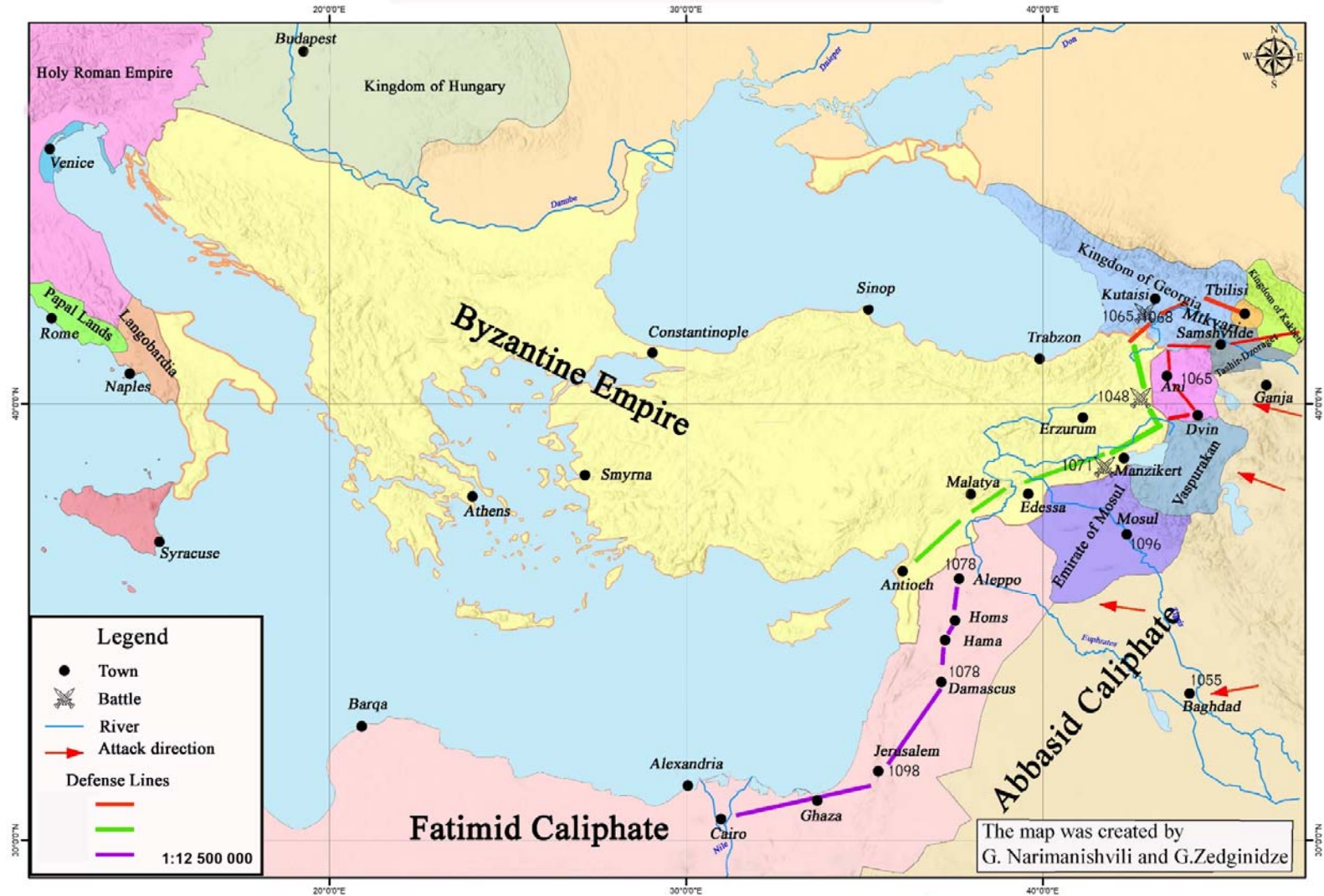
Thus, the historical processes made it clear that joining international coalitions and alliances during the formation of the global security system played an essential role in ensuring the security of our country, which can only be achieved by conducting an active foreign policy.

References:

- Al-‘Aydārūs, M. Ḥ. 2010. *Ad-dawla al-islāmyya al-khāmisa*. Al-Qāhira: dār al-kitāb al-ḥadīth.
- Al-Maqrīzī. 1996. *Itti‘āz al-hunafā’ bi akhbar al-a‘imma al-fāṭimīn al-khulafā’*. Al-juz’ al-awwal, taḥqīq al-duktūr Muḥammad Ḥulmī Muḥammad Aḥmad. Al-Qāhira.
- Berdzenishvili, N. 1931. “Mtskhetis sabuti XI saukunisa.” *Saqartvelos muzeumis moambe* VI: 229-296 (in Georgian).
- Gabashvili, V. 1968. “Saqartvelo – egvptis urtiertobis istoriidan (XI - XII ss.)” *Tbilis sakhelmts’ ipho universitetis shromebi*, t. 125: 55-81 (in Georgian).
- Hamdani, A. 1998. “Examples of Fatimid Realpolitik.” *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 4 (Fall 1998): 1-12.
- Ibn al-Athīr. 1987. *Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*. M., IX, taḥqīq Abi al-Fiḍa’ ‘Abd Allah al-Qaḍi. Bayrūt: dar al-kutub al-‘imiyya.
- Japaridze, G. 2012. “Liparit IV Baghvashi bizantiisa da turk-selchukta diplomatiur urtiertobebshi.” *Dziebani saqartvelosa da akhlo aghmosavletis istoriashi*, tomi I, 112-134. Tbilisi: “Mkhedari” (in Georgian).
- Kedrenos, George. 1963. “Qronographia.” In *Georgika – bizantieli mts’erlebis tsnobebi saqartvelos shesakheb*, t. V, teqstebi qartuli targmaniturt gamotsa da ganmartebebi daurot Simon Q’aukhchishvilma, 7-82. Tbilisi: saqartvelos ssr metsnierebata akademiis gamomtsemloba (in Georgian).
- “Matiane Qartlisa”. 1955. In *Qartlis tskhovreba*, t. I, teqsti dadgenilia q’vela dziritadi khelnats’eris mikhedvit S. Q’aukhchishvilis mier, 249-317. Tbilisi: “Sakhelgami” (in Georgian).
- Paghava, I. 2016. “Saqartvelos gaertianeba da numizmatikuri evolutsiis veqtorebi (X saukunis dasasruli – XII saukunis dasats’q’isi.” *Akhlo aghmosavleti da saqartvelo*, IX: 247-270 (in Georgian).
- Nāṣer-e Khosraw. 1986. *Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*. Translated from Persian with Introduction and Annotation by W. M. Thackstone, Jr. Albany, N.Y.: Published by The Persian Heritage Foundation under the Imprint of Bibliotheca Persica.
- Shihāb ad-Dīn. 2003. *Al-mustatraf fī kull fann mustazraf*. Taḥqīq ad-duktūr Aḥmad Aḥmad ash-Shutaywyi. Al-Manṣūra: dār al-ghad al-jadīd.
- Skylitzes, John. 2010. *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811 – 1057*. Translated by John Wortley. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Surūr, M. J. 1995. *Tārīkh al-dawla al-fāṭimiyya*. Al-Qāhira: dār al-fikr al-‘arabī.
- Ṭaqqush, M. S. 2002. *Tārīkh as-salājiqa fī bilād ash-shām*. Bayrūt: dār an-nafā’is.
- Thomson K. E. F. 2008. “Relations Between the Fatimid and Byzantine Empires During the Reign of the Caliph al-Mustansir bi’llah, 1036-1094/427-487.” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 32, No 1: 50-62.
- Treadgold W. 1997. *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Map 1.

Middle East in the First Half of The 11th Century



Map 2.

